

MAKING HISTORIES AND NARRATING THINGS: HISTORIES OF HANDMADE OBJECTS IN TWO
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Building on and deepening my existing community-engaged research relationships with community members in Sliammon, B.C. and Ile-a-la-Crosse, SK, this dissertation is, as I described it to community members, a history of handmade items. At the intersection of economic change, changing colonialist policy, ideas about tradition, and Indigenous political interests that has taken place in Indigenous communities in the latter half of the twentieth century, seemingly local or domestic objects in fact highlight complexities within and beyond communities over time. The role of objects was shaped – in conflicting or paradoxical ways – by newcomer institutions that sought to define Indigenous people and their activities in constrained ways. Yet for community members, the processes and products of making things became ways to define and historicize tradition itself. These two themes – objects in families and communities, and objects in newcomer institutions – provide the overarching structure for this dissertation.

People in both communities have shared in parallel processes of using and co-opting colonizing influences not only to make a living for themselves within those contexts, but also, through their involvement in “making things,” to make explicit statements about the significance of histories and historical interpretation in community changes. This dissertation, and the individual and collective experiences of making things portrayed within it, are a means of discussing how labour, gender, and tradition have been mobilized in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon in the twentieth century, and especially from the 1930s and onwards to respond to contemporary realities. Because the communities I have worked with are very different places from each other – a small, west coast First Nation and a predominantly Metis municipality in northwestern Saskatchewan – this work is intentionally not comparative. Rather, I use these two case studies to follow how community members have interpreted their histories through processes of making tangible “things,” depending on local historical circumstances. I consider the changing ways that community members have responded to and worked within colonial intervention. First and foremost, though, by making things, they sought to address their own economic, social, and political concerns. Changes in processes of making and interpreting handmade items help to illuminate how community members envisioned objects in their communities, not only as practical items or symbols of cultures or histories, but also as ways to describe the shifting significance of tradition for making sociopolitical arguments illustrated by the objects themselves.

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Introduction

Histories of Making Things in Sliammon and Ile-a-la-Crosse

When Charlie Bob was a child in the 1940s, he became intrigued by an elderly acquaintance's pastime of sitting outside on the doorstep and carving. Noting the boy's interest, after a few days, the older man handed him a knife and a piece of cedar and suggested he try the process himself. Charlie¹ was uncertain, and wondered what he should carve, but his mentor encouraged him to simply make whatever came into his mind, without worrying about what others were working on. On that first attempt, Charlie carved the image of an eagle, a motif that has resonated with him ever since, and frequently appears in the carvings that he sells out of his living room to buyers close to home and around the world.

Home, for Charlie, is Sliammon, B.C., the Tla'amin First Nation, on the Sunshine Coast north of Vancouver, near the town of Powell River. Historically, Sliammon was one village of several throughout Tla'amin² territory, which bordered and was sometimes shared with the closely-related Klahoose and Homalco³ peoples, and was part of larger network among Salish communities all along the coast and into the interior of what is now British Columbia. In the nineteenth century, the alienation of lands to corporate and individual settler interests, coupled with the creation of the reserve system in B.C.,⁴ began to restrict Sliammon people's movements and access to resources. Shortly after the turn of the century, the establishment of a paper mill at Powell River sparked an influx of non-Indigenous inhabitants to the region, and reinforced a shift in the region – begun by the nineteenth-century presence of Hudson's Bay Company posts along the coast and on Vancouver Island – from a predominantly Indigenous space⁵ to one where the settler colonial and provincial

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I use first names to refer to people I interviewed and came to know personally, since these are the names by which community members referred to each other to me, and how community members and I came to know each other. Using first names also helps to make clear the relationship between me and the community member, in contrast to those whose remarks I cite from interviews conducted by others, as part of separate projects.

² Typically, Sliammon refers to the place name of the village on the reserve, while Tla'amin is the more accurate rendering of the people's name for themselves and their language. In this dissertation, I aim to follow this distinction when referring to the place and the people who live there.

³ While the Tla'amin language has sometimes been called "Mainland Comox," suggesting close linguistic and kinship ties with the Comox people on Vancouver Island (which community members acknowledge, especially as part of pan-Salish histories), the three communities of Sliammon, Klahoose, and Homalco describe their relationship as uniquely intertwined – sometimes, depending on the account, even as three components of the same community.

⁴ See for instance Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia*, Brenda and David McLean Canadian Studies Series (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002).

⁵ Cole Harris has referred to this process as the "resettlement" of the region. See Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

aims of British Columbia and Canada sought to limit Indigenous people's political, social, spatial, and economic activities.

In Sliammon specifically, at the same time that the mill in Powell River and the reserve system curtailed access to resource harvesting activities, the federal government began to enforce schooling for Sliammon children, sometimes at a poorly-staffed day school on reserve, and sometimes at residential schools in other parts of B.C., until the 1960s when Sliammon residents organized to insist that their children be educated at public schools in Powell River. Meanwhile, Sliammon people experienced unofficial discrimination in Powell River, with stories about segregation or banning from public establishments being commonplace until the 1970s, but with experiences of racism lasting until the present day. As Sliammon people's relationships with Powell River began to shift from overall exclusion to increased everyday interaction, community members' economic needs changed as well, as participation in wage labour – rather than trade and subsistence activities – became more crucial for survival.

But at the same time, moving away from those historical activities caused community members to compare their contemporary experiences with those of previous generations. From these reflections came diverse responses to the lasting effects of colonialism: educational programming about traditional practices and skills, building (and rebuilding) intentional connections with other Coast Salish communities, and a twenty-year-long process of treaty research and negotiation that resulted in a treaty agreement in 2012, albeit amid significant controversy in the community about the appropriateness or usefulness of the agreement. These responses to colonialism became more public and visible over time, but Sliammon people had always adapted existing skills and knowledge to work within and against restrictions on their activities. Throughout these shifts in economic and social relationships in the latter half of the twentieth century, Sliammon people's processes of making handmade items revealed the complex ways that they responded to change and challenges, but also used those tangible items to create and state their ongoing legitimacy and belonging in that space. Making things, then, has been a process of defining and mobilizing changing ideas of tradition in ways that supported individual, family, and community needs.

Around the same time that Charlie Bob was first becoming interested in carving, Eliza Aubichon watched her much older sister-in-law, Sarazine Ratt, prepare moose hides to make beaded outerwear for northwestern Saskatchewan winters. Being only about twelve years old, Eliza's role in the process at first was to assist with fetching the necessary supplies and stoking the fire, while her sister-in-law did the bulk of the difficult labour. Within a few years, though, she had developed the

skill, knowledge, and physical strength to complete the preparation of a hide herself, then design, cut, sew, and decorate the clothing pieces for which it was destined.

Eliza has lived essentially full-time since the 1950s in the community of Ile-a-la-Crosse, a place that has been described by academics and community members alike as historically Metis, but, as this dissertation will elaborate, has been home to many family and geographical connections with Cree and Dene communities and histories as well. Most historiographical attention to Ile-a-la-Crosse has been based on its role as a fur trade hub (established in 1776), and later the site of a Roman Catholic mission (from 1846 until the 1970s). A federal scrip and treaty commission travelled through the region in 1906, helping to define to some extent who was Metis and who was First Nations. These contexts have helped to inform many aspects of contemporary community histories in Ile-a-la-Crosse, but Sakitawak, as it is known in Cree, also has a much longer history than these settler colonial visitations of being a gathering place “where the rivers meet.”

The middle decades of the twentieth century were thus a time of rapid community change. A combination of factors led to the eventual consolidation of seasonal residences in the area into a more permanent, sedentary, larger town. Previously, many people had inhabited family settlements at various points around the lake, using the town as a central meeting place at the ends of seasons.⁶ Beginning in the 1940s, the provincial government introduced regulations on the trapping and selling of furs, assigning and restricting individual trappers to specific geographical areas. A result was that trapping became less viable, and lifestyles became more sedentary in the community.⁷ Then, in 1973, with earlier economic changes still significant, the people of Ile-a-la-Crosse moved successfully to take control of their school from the Roman Catholic mission. The result was a locally run school, but as the mission school closed, so did its dormitories. Families who lived across the lake therefore had little choice but to move to town if they wished to send their children to school. Furthermore, with transportation changes from waterways to roads, and the concurrent decline of the fur trade, Ile-a-la-Crosse simultaneously became more connected to southern parts of the province, while becoming more geographically isolated from a southern perspective, particularly before electricity and sewer hookup in the 1970s and 1980s. These connections and increased ease of living conditions helped some community members to focus their resources on political and social action rather than subsistence and survival in challenging economic conditions.

These individual and community narratives point out the relationships between making

⁶ Victor F. Valentine, *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan* (Ottawa: Dept. of Natural Resources, 1955), 10–13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

things and making historical interpretations. Eliza Aubichon and Charlie Bob are contemporaries from two communities with very different histories, and these introductory narratives about their skill in making things barely nod towards the nuances and complexities in these two elders' life histories. Their experiences, and the ways in which their communities have changed over time, are quite separate from each other, which is why this dissertation intentionally avoids taking a comparative approach to the two communities. Yet people in both communities have shared in parallel processes of using and co-opting colonizing influences not only to make a living for themselves within those contexts, but also, through their involvement in "making things," to make explicit statements about the significance of histories and historical interpretation in community changes. This dissertation, and the individual and collective experiences of making things portrayed within it, are a means of discussing how labour, gender, and tradition have been mobilized in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon in the twentieth century, and especially from the 1930s and onwards to respond to contemporary realities.

Of course, making histories and making things have been connected long before the time period on which this dissertation focuses, but the mid-twentieth century was pivotal for Indigenous makers and communities in Canada. Both Indigenous histories and made goods came into the public eye as commodified collectors' items, as objects of social concern, and as responses to real or perceived change and its effects within and beyond communities. The mid-twentieth century was also an era in which makers and interpreters of histories and made goods, driven by political, economic, and personal motivations, began to reflect on the experiences of previous generations, and define for themselves the significance of the idea of tradition. They realized that making things was also a process of making histories.

In connecting processes of making things and making histories, I respond to several key bodies of scholarship. This dissertation is firstly a means of complicating the history of the related ideas of tradition and authenticity; while historians like Terrence Ranger and Paige Raibmon have explored how these ideas do not emerge in a vacuum, but are responses to contemporary needs, I expand these discussions to discuss how tradition is also constructed by class and gender differences. Thus, my work is also a history of labour and gender, responding to calls from Indigenous scholars and scholars of colour like Mary Jane Logan McCallum and Rita Dhamoon to consider particularly women's work as labour history, and to pay attention to the diversity of perspectives within communities, not only among them. I also expand on McCallum's discussion of women's labour in workplaces to look at the ways that cottage industries or domestic work also

helped to shape differing uses for tradition within communities. Since my work is based in two communities very distinct from each other, it also provides a methodological example of how to discuss histories of ideas that have been common to many communities, while continuing to emphasize the significance of local perspectives. Discussing these larger ideas from more specific perspectives also enables me to complicate existing scholarship that is specific to individual communities (mainly Raibmon in Sliammon, and historians David Quiring and Brenda Macdougall in Ile-a-la-Crosse), by exploring how local histories are not isolated from larger historical phenomena. By drawing together these historiographical discussions that have been isolated from each other or within a specific region, I emphasize that tradition, as it has been represented by handmade items, is an idea with its own histories that have been defined and debated through processes of making things.

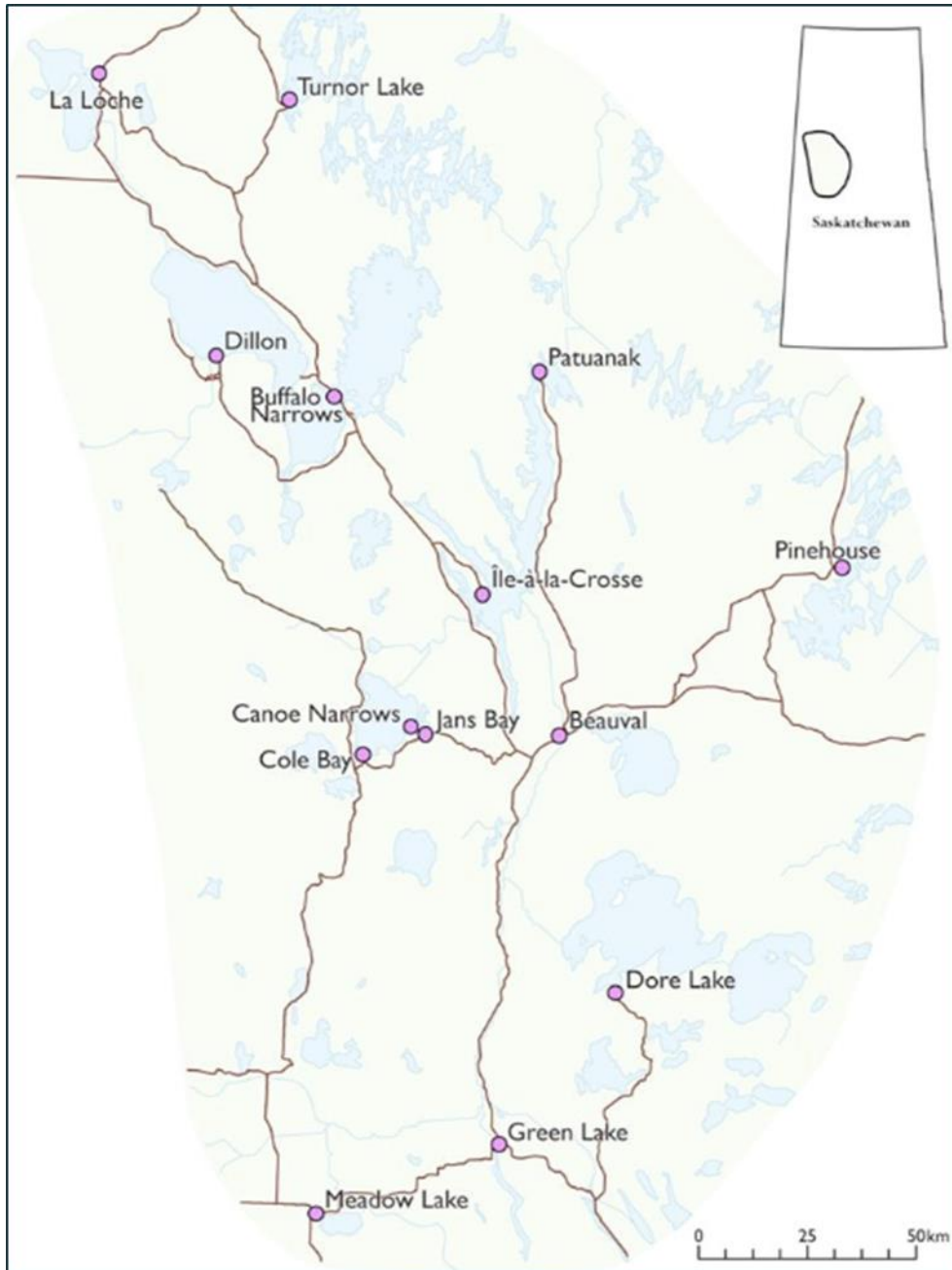
Overall, then, I show that tradition is not only a philosophical or theoretical idea; it has also been closely linked to social, political, and economic realities. As a result, community members' individual perspectives and experiences have been crucial in shaping their own and responding to others' expectations of what tradition has looked like since the 1930s. A focus on processes of making things allows the processes of making histories to become explicit as well. Much of the historiographical work I discuss here has emphasized the results of historical interpretation within communities, but not always the reasons for it. But Indigenous communities and individual makers of objects have engaged directly with tangible histories, and they have done so to address the needs of their families and communities. While my work has focused on two specific communities, many Indigenous communities have encountered these factors at work. Making things offered ways to respond to colonialism and to reassert belonging and agency, not only by producing symbols of identities, but also by providing economic opportunities, and serving as a tool for interpreting past experiences.

These histories of resistance through making things have not always been readily visible in the public eye or in academic historical scholarship. To highlight the broad range of motivations for (and outcomes of) processes of making handmade items, I have drawn together several methodological approaches. At their core, these approaches move towards scholarship that puts Indigenous people's perspectives at the fore, and I have worked to craft analysis that makes space for diverse experiences within the racial, class, and gender dynamics of each single community. While this dissertation is based on my extended community-engaged research work in two communities, I also read earlier interview transcripts and archival sources to deepen the nuance of

my analysis and ensure that it is faithful to the experiences of those who have shared their stories. Crucially, though, I would have been unable to illuminate the gender and labour histories of making things, traditions, and histories without the relationships I formed with community members. The conversations that I had with each person reinforced the complexity of community histories and emphasized the need for me to make space for, rather than speak on behalf of, those individual and collective experiences.

There is therefore a close relationship between my research methodologies and the arguments that I outline. When I introduced my topic to community members, I was often asked what type of handmade items interested me. My response was that we could converse about any items they wished. I have sought to ensure that community members had the space to define which histories were most significant, which in turn helped to ensure that my own expectations or preconceptions, as a relative newcomer to these communities, did not shape my dissertation into something that would not resonate with community members. As a settler scholar working with these Indigenous communities, my methods and my arguments alike have worked to show Indigenous perspectives in their own words, and to put individual remarks into the context of statements made by others past and present. This dissertation has therefore been a process of contextualization of individual experiences within larger colonial processes.

It has also been a process of contextualizing my research relationships. As a settler person doing this oral history work, I had several people make gently corrective remarks to me in which they explained about family members who were recording stories, or planning a community museum, or had university training in writing and research. I took these remarks as cautions for my academic methodologies. They did not necessarily mind that I was doing this work -- some did encourage my efforts, not because I was salvaging things, but because they felt it would foster better understanding among non-Indigenous people -- but ultimately, the work of preserving cultures and histories was a job that should be led by community members, and my work should not overshadow those efforts. Therefore, through my extended consultations with community members, I have worked to be specific about not only the cultural influences shaping histories of handmade items, but also about how this knowledge was gained, how I undertook my processes of interpretation, and how I have worked to ensure that these analyses remain faithful to the perspectives shared with me. It is this ongoing collaboration that has enabled me to show how making things has also been a gender and labour history of making traditions that could respond to colonial intrusion.



Map 1: Ile-a-la-Crosse and northwestern Saskatchewan. Map produced by Community-University Research Alliance study “*Otipimsuak*—the Free People: Métis Land and Society in Northwest Saskatchewan,” 2005.



Map 2: Sliammon and its surrounding coastal region. Map produced by the Sliammon First Nation, www.sliammonfirstnation.com/devcorp/sliammon_profile.pdf.

Introductions and Methodologies

My work with the communities and oral histories of Sliammon and Ile-a-la-Crosse fits under the umbrella of “community-engaged research” methodologies, but I use that term not as an shorthand explanation of my approaches, but as a launching point for explicit and self-reflective discussion of what that process entails, whom it has involved, and how those involvements have shaped my interpretations. In and of itself, community-engaged scholarship does not suggest or imply the use of any particular approaches or methodologies, so it is important that I am explicit about how I have come to my knowledge and interpretations. Most significantly, within that knowledge, I also seek to clarify that this dissertation is not intended as a comprehensive survey of perspectives in the two communities I have worked with, and I recognize that the ways I first met

these communities has determined the range of perspectives considered here, and that my presence as an academic researcher is not politically or socially neutral.

Within this dissertation, I specifically discuss the perspectives of a total of twenty-two community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon whom I have interviewed (in addition to oral histories with these and other community members undertaken by others and archived in community repositories). However, I have learned the most about an individual, community, or perspective outside of my formal interviews, not because the community members I spoke with were uninformative – on the contrary, I am immensely grateful for the knowledge shared with me in those conversations – but rather because the interviews themselves could not exist without their larger contexts. By spending time assisting with community projects and events, and interacting with many different community members on more informal levels, I have been able to learn about the relationships and individual histories that shaped the perspectives that the individuals cited here shared with me in “official” settings like interviews. Indeed, in a 2016 poster presentation at the Canadian Historical Association annual meeting, I estimated, based on my notes from a sample three-day research trip, that interviews themselves have comprised only about five percent of the time I have spent working within communities. Thus, while in this dissertation I have tended to express insights from community members in quotations from interviews, my analyses and larger perspectives have been shaped by the broader understandings of families and connections that spending time in communities has afforded me.

I first visited Sliammon in 2012, as a “field instructor” – working to support and facilitate students’ research – at the first Tla’amin/University of Saskatchewan/Simon Fraser University combined ethnohistory and archaeology field school. My role grew out of my experience undertaking community-engaged oral history research in other communities (including Ile-a-la-Crosse) rather than my familiarity with Sliammon itself: like the students I worked with, it was my first visit to the community. During that month, the students’ research projects took precedence within the condensed time frame; I began to speak with community members about my work on subsequent visits.

However, my time as a field instructor helped me to refine my larger research values and approaches. Because my role during my first visit was primarily that of a facilitator, my time in Sliammon reinforced the ways in which my presence and research have local political or social determinants and connections. Kirin Narayan has noted that everyone is part of “multiple planes of

identification,”⁸ within cultural, personal, and, I would argue, scholarly identities. Navigating a new community both as an instructor and as a prospective doctoral student researcher, I was highly and at times uncomfortably aware of how these multiple planes of authority intersected and even conflicted.

During my first visit to Sliammon as a field instructor, the community was partially immobilized by a highly contentious vote on whether to ratify the final agreement on a treaty that had been under negotiation for over twenty years through the British Columbia Treaty process. In an effort to help students deal with disruptions to the compressed time frame in which to complete their research (and establish my own more independent role as a historical researcher), I sought to triangulate my own experience and trusted community members’ advice on how to proceed. At the same time, though, there remained a conflict between my and the students’ efforts to seek out diverse community perspectives, while acknowledging that although our work was not specifically intended to be pro-treaty, we were ultimately brought there by pro-treaty interests. We wondered whether high community tensions make this affiliation inconvenient or even risky for researchers. In such a situation, while advice from trusted community members was valuable and encouraging for everyone, it also reflected and reinforced existing power dynamics within and beyond the community.

This explicitly political introduction to the community highlighted to me the way that I became an arbiter of community opinion and knowledge almost immediately due to my affiliation with the treaty office, and the subsequent contacts with other community members that were based mainly on those initial introductions. Although I have endeavoured since then to speak with community members with a variety of perspectives, ultimately, the people I know best have been connected to a specific side of that divisive issue, and therefore have had at least some similar interpretations of Tla’amin histories that may not cover the scope of historical interpretation in Sliammon as a whole.

Sliammon is a day’s travel time by air from my home base in Saskatoon, a journey dependent on careful negotiation of ferry and flight schedules, or an ability to pay for flights directly to the neighbouring town of Powell River, which is unconnected by road to the more accessible Vancouver airport. By necessity, then, my trips to Sliammon have tended to be relatively infrequent (averaging two visits per year since 2012), for one-to-three-week stretches at a time. These travel considerations have allowed me several concerted stretches of immersion in whatever daily rhythms

⁸ Kirin Narayan, “How Native Is the Native Anthropologist?,” *American Anthropologist* 95 (1993): 676.

are taking place in the community, but have also meant a certain rigidity in my schedule that has not always been able to accommodate local people's availability to the extent that they and I would have preferred, or to allow me to be present for more than a couple of larger-scale community events. As a result, I have met community members mainly through personal introductions, or recommendations from those community members I met during my first stay in Sliammon. Spending time at community events, workshops, or gatherings has allowed me to meet a wider range of people than those most closely connected to treaty office projects and interests.

The contentiousness of the 2012 treaty vote clearly revealed the complexity of historical and contemporary perspectives in Sliammon, some of which were categorized by political opinion, but also by historical relationships among families, colonial administrations both locally and further afield, and encounters with the largely non-Indigenous population in Powell River. These are relationships and networks among local people that, I suspect, would have been easier to understand had I been able to visit Sliammon more frequently. Thus, my understandings of Sliammon histories and local relationships are based largely on relationships and conversations on an individual rather than pan-community level.

While my research has been predicated on ideas of reciprocity and community relevance that are tenets of community-engaged research, it was not appropriate for me to make large-scale generalizations about the community as a collective entity. Reflecting on my early work as an undergraduate and early graduate student, I extrapolated from conversations with individuals to make arguments about singular cultural identities in Ile-a-la-Crosse and in Coast Salish communities:⁹ a phenomenon that I have noticed, in my subsequent work with students, is not uncommon. The individuals with whom I have interacted have shared their interpretations of their community as well as their individual experiences with me, and I seek to bring these perspectives into conversation with each other in an effort to depict both the commonality and diversity of Sliammon people's historical understandings.

My relationship with Ile-a-la-Crosse has looked quite different from my relationship with Sliammon, which is a significant basis for why this dissertation is intentionally not comparative. The research background that predicated my first visit to Sliammon had its beginnings in Ile-a-la-Crosse. I first travelled there in 2006 as a part of a team of summer undergraduate researchers hired to work

⁹ See for example Katya MacDonald, "Crossing Paths: Knowing and Navigating Paths of Access to Stó:lō Fishing Sites," *University of the Fraser Valley Research Review* 2, no. 2 (2009). This is an article that I have since revised for republication, and as part of the process, I have included additional clarification of the specific contexts in which my assertions would be most relevant, and where further conversations with community members would add nuance.

on a series of small oral history projects with a primarily social history focus, under the umbrella of a larger, multidisciplinary community-university research alliance. I was new to community-engaged research (and indeed to most primary source research of any kind), having read a number of methodological and historiographical texts in preparation, but not yet having had the opportunity to experience the contrasts between methodological ideals and their local iterations, limitations, and complexities. Not unlike my introduction to Sliammon, we first met political leaders and affiliated people of similar perspectives on the social and political characteristics of the community. Unlike in Sliammon, though, I was largely naïve that such political distinctions existed and would influence community members' interest or willingness to participate in our research. Over time, then, my work in Ile-a-la-Crosse has evolved into an exercise in bringing diversity and complexity to what I had previously understood as common, generalizable histories or understandings in the community: a process working somewhat in the opposite direction to my approaches in Sliammon, where I have needed to seek out connections or comparisons among individuals.

Furthermore, I have worked with people in Ile-a-la-Crosse for several years longer and in more depth – over the course of community-based projects that elaborated on my first work there, as well as a component of my MA thesis – than in Sliammon, and while I continue to build mutually trusting relationships in Sliammon, its distance and its (relative) newness to me simply means that my conversations there have had a different, perhaps more formal, tone than in Ile-a-la-Crosse. At the same time, although I have spent more time in Ile-a-la-Crosse, I have had fewer conversations specifically related to my dissertation topic than I have had in Sliammon, largely for reasons of timing and funds.

While the roles of some of the politically-affiliated people I met during my first visits to Ile-a-la-Crosse have changed over time, with some falling out of power, some taking on new roles, and some passing away, my familiarity and affiliation with them has endured. While I have continued to meet and interact with an increasingly diverse set of community members, these relationships have usually built outwards from those initial connections. As I have come to know the community better over time, I have encountered more opportunities to meet people further afield from my initially strongly political connections, but it remains the case that those whom I have come to know the best have usually been involved with projects affiliated with municipal or local educational interests.

Ile-a-la-Crosse is about a five-hour drive from Saskatoon, somewhat more accessible than Sliammon for shorter visits that can be more easily timed to coincide with community events at which to volunteer, or to take on smaller-scale involvements supporting community members?

projects in addition to my own research. My previous work in Ile-a-la-Crosse (my initial undergraduate research assignment, my MA thesis on local spatial histories, a project with a colleague on histories of fiddle music and dancing, and attending elders' meetings as a scribe for a study on historical place names spearheaded by high school principal Vince Ahenakew) has pushed me to evaluate my approaches to history in Ile-a-la-Crosse with the benefit of considerable time to reflect on my experiences and assumptions. It has also allowed me to see relationships from multiple angles and contexts, against the backdrop of recent shifts in legal and political realities for Metis people. Federal Bill C-3, which came into effect in 2011, enabled some Metis people whose grandmothers had lost their Indian status by marrying non-Indian men to retroactively claim Indian status. While these people often continue to identify as culturally Metis, their legal status with the federal government has changed. These complexities have reinforced the need to consider community members' histories and narratives in the context of their individual experiences and interpretations, rather than categorizing them as part of a specific ethnic, cultural, or legal identity.

It is also significant to note that in Ile-a-la-Crosse, more than in Sliammon, community members tended to focus more on lifestyles associated with processes of making things, than on the specific finished items themselves, as tended to be the case in my conversations with community members in Sliammon. As a result, the range of made goods that Ile-a-la-Crosse community members mentioned to me was much broader than in Sliammon, and included clothing, food, transportation items, music, trapping equipment, and household goods in addition to the kinds of "display" pieces that Sliammon community members tended to focus on. The views of community people led me to focus on processes of making things, rather than solely on specific items or types of items. While this dissertation is not intended to be a comparison of the two communities, in this case the differences between these two specific places offer insight into the distinct ways that community members spoke about "histories of handmade items." Whereas for most of its twentieth-century history, Sliammon has existed in close proximity and relationship to urban areas, Ile-a-la-Crosse has been further removed. Thus, lifestyles that community members have come to describe as traditional continue to be closer at hand, both geographically and temporally, for community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Whereas in B.C. Indigenous people's movements were restricted by the creation of the reserve system, in northern Saskatchewan, community members experienced colonialism through restrictions on their economies and their access to making a living. As a result, processes of making things were connected to a broad range of activities and values that

community members have come to define as traditional, because tradition has come to be so closely linked to specific historical lifestyles and economies.



Image 1 (above): A view of the Snob Hill area of Ile-a-la-Crosse.



Image 2 (above): Handmade skiffs on the lakeshore, made by Ile-a-la-Crosse community members.



Image 3 (above): Totem pole, carved by Tla'amin community member Jackie Timothy, at the Sliammon beach front.



Image 4(above): Sliammon village beach front.

My first introductions to community-engaged research more generally came in the form of methodological texts from diverse disciplines, and over time, my readings of these texts have shifted from viewing them as introductory guides to research ethics and protocols, to tools for raising ongoing questions about the ways that my research relationships interact with scholarly and community members' expectations and assumptions about what research processes should entail. Like most academics, my introduction to community-based and community-engaged research was a theoretical one, informed by texts assigned to us by mentors sharing their own experience, or gleaned from library shelves and word-of-mouth recommendations. As I have delved deeper into my work, and engaged on a longer term with people and histories, these introductory texts at times became models for my own approaches. Yet as these theoretical works have come to form a deepening relationship with my individual scholarship, the way I have linked authors to my approaches risks becoming increasingly individualized, to the point that their influence on me becomes a sort of "private knowledge," to borrow Wayne Suttles' depiction of Coast Salish social and historical relationships. The ideas I have taken from these formative readings have shaped my approaches to

research in highly individualized ways: ways that require ongoing reflection to ensure that my understandings of communities and histories do not remain static or subject to my early assumptions.

As a student new to community-engaged research reading the work of Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, perhaps best known for her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, I was struck by the way that she drew such a clear link between research and long histories of colonization. In depicting the activities and challenges of Indigenous scholars, she also caused me, as a newcomer, to consider how my own work, and the scholarly traditions from which it grew, might be changed to more closely align with the interests of community members I encountered. I internalized these questions, which consciously and unconsciously shaped my research approaches. Tuhiwai-Smith has described the space in the midst of researchers, scholarly conventions, and Indigenous people and communities as “tricky ground,”¹⁰ which, she notes, this is a challenging space because it is at once a space of institutional and individual concern. In the context of my oral history research with Indigenous communities, I have tended to cast myself as a learner about the community, in addition to my existing role as a university student. This approach has been demonstrated frequently even by those who have come to know a community over the course of several decades. Keith Basso, for instance, has described misunderstandings as well as insights that he gained in forty years’ research with Apache communities.¹¹ There exists, then, a tension between the way I portray myself to community members, and the way that historians’ writing conventions ask me to construct cohesive arguments about the pasts that community members have interpreted for a learner, not for an authoritative speaker.

Though the precise questions I ask may differ, when I compare my own field notes from my first, undergraduate, forays into community-based research and the field notes I have made over the course of my dissertation work, fundamentally I have always introduced myself as a student, and I am seeking insight from those who live there. This effort at humility, deference to local knowledge, and openness to correction is a theme that has run throughout Indigenous and non-Indigenous people’s methodological and ethical discussions. Yet at the same time, I recognize that I may also be an arbiter of institutional authority. Even while seeking a relationship with a community that, in its ideal form, offers members input into all stages of research and teaching processes, I make decisions about interpretation, argumentation, and portrayal that some community members do not see, because a dissertation is not a readily-accessible format for sharing these decisions, because we lose touch with each other, or because they see the academic world as separate

¹⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London; New York: Dunedin, N.Z.: Zed Books; University of Otago Press, 1999), 86.

¹¹ See Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

from their own community and historical interests. In such instances, I simultaneously occupy, in sometimes conflicting ways, the role of a newcomer as well as a scholarly authority.

As a result of these complications, while researching and writing are part of the same continuum, they also conflict with each other, and I have had to be cautious that these conflicts do not bleed across the continuum. As a PhD candidate researcher, I have become an “insider” to the research process. Yet it can at times be easy to conflate this kind of “insider-ness” with perceived insider access to community histories and knowledge as well. Kirin Narayan has considered the extent to which categories of “insider” and “outsider” are concrete ones, and argues that researchers are engaged in overlapping layers of communities and power relations.¹² My work has created and highlighted diverse layers of power and knowledge through my introductions to Sliammon and Ile-a-la-Crosse, the diverging ways I have come to know individuals and historical networks in the two places, and the diverse roles I have taken on.¹³ My research, then, can be framed as a history of shifting power dynamics or mobilizations of individual experience. Particularly poignant is Narayan’s caution against “hit-and-run anthropology,”¹⁴ yet the longer I have remained engaged with communities, the trickier – to borrow Tuhiwai-Smith’s term – my research experience has become. I am cognizant that this dissertation does not represent a culmination of knowledge, nor necessarily a precise outline of what my community engagement will look like going forward, but rather, in terms of my methodologies, it exists as a snapshot and a personal historiography of my research ethics and approaches.

Ethnographers have explored the identifiable outcomes of approaches that prioritize listening and contextualizing. In particular, some have argued for a practice that does not hasten to seek defined answers to a question, but instead looks for ways to bring diverse or marginalized perspectives into the scholarly conversation, and leaves room for reconsidering existing assumptions that have been reinforced through scholarly writing.¹⁵ While like all PhD students I entered my research with the outline of a research focus, after spending time with community members, and, in the case of Ile-a-la-Crosse, considering their comments on my most recent research, my questions shifted from being ones about specific histories of things, to include conversations about the historical contexts in which making activities had taken place. When community members spoke about histories of making, they also spoke implicitly about the economic, political, social, and personal motivations for making, often calling into question scholarly distinctions

¹² Narayan, “How Native Is the Native Anthropologist?” 671.

¹³ Among other things, I have been a researcher, learner, interviewer, educator, conversationalist, fiddle player, chauffeur, event assistant, babysitter, and historian: each of which requires framing my knowledge, experience, and relationships in a different way.

¹⁴ Narayan, “How Native Is the Native Anthropologist?” 676.

¹⁵ Stacy Leigh Pigg, “On Sitting and Doing: Ethnography as Action in Global Health,” *Social Science and Medicine* 99 (2013): 127.

between items made for tradition or profit, familial or public, or personal or political uses. Complicating these distinctions became an important focus of my ongoing research activities, so by bringing the contexts that shaped my understandings to the fore, I seek to go beyond simply distilling community members' perspectives, and bring my and their shifting historical interpretations into conversation with one another.

While my questions I have asked of community members have been broad, simply explaining my interest in learning about "histories of handmade things in this community," I have also not usually sought to push community members to define made things in ways that would, at first glance, make for a more nuanced scholarly argument. Most (though certainly not all) people I spoke with gravitated towards discussing made things that are seen as traditional, or that were embedded in lifestyles they defined as traditional. In such instances, community members centred our conversations on their interests in the idea of tradition and its role in their community, but also interpreted what they expected my interests to be. In such exchanges, the relationships I have formed with communities and individuals become important interpretive tools for finding our footing on "tricky ground." These contextualizing relationships have highlighted potential gaps in our respective understanding of the histories under discussion, where in my efforts not to limit our conversations to "traditional" items, I risked disregarding or misrepresenting the changing mobilizations of tradition by community members over time.

As Indigenous studies scholars like Winona Wheeler have noted, community-engaged oral history work should not be evaluated solely on its outcomes; rather, the process of building relationships needs to be explicit and evident. Wheeler has used "chopping wood" as a metaphor for such processes, and has explained the necessity of relationships in oral history scholarship: "Maria [Campbell, in her role as researcher] chopped wood, carried water, drove Mrs. Peemee [the eventual interviewee] to town for shopping. In short, she was friend and apprentice. She not only received the full story...she and Mrs. Peemee collaboratively edited the story for publication."¹⁶ However, it may be overly simplistic to seek or expect the "full story;" when knowledge is co-created and the product of relationships, the kinds of conversations that take place are defined by many contextual details, including the less visible work of the researcher. In 1983, sociologist Arlie Hochschild coined the term "emotional labour" to describe the unpaid, often unrecognized activities that maintain positive interpersonal relationships in businesses, organizations, and service professions. But emotional labour is also embedded in historical research methodologies: in efforts to undertake reciprocal, decolonizing research, scholars have advocated relationship-building with

¹⁶ Winona Wheeler, "Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories," in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 201.

community members as a vital ethical undertaking.

The behind-the-scenes work necessary to foster trust and relationships is often coded as feminine; in my work, it has tended to take the form of making canned goods as gifts, preparing food for events or in community members' homes, cleaning, childcare, and grocery shopping. Such work is not always visible as a contribution to historical, methodological, and ethical questions. Because emotional labour puts community members' needs ahead of scholarly ones, the work does not necessarily translate directly into scholarly products, regardless of the time and energy that such tasks require of a researcher. Therefore, in the context of dissertation work, I seek to reconsider emotional labour not as optional compassion, nor as a means to a scholarly end, but rather as an under-recognized component of research processes that requires significant resources on the part of the researcher, and that shapes the character of historical arguments.

Emotional labour and its gendered components often determine the nature of historical arguments. It has related, but different, implications than “chopping wood,” the process of making one's reciprocal labour available and becoming familiar with cultural protocols. Emotional labour helps to clarify not only how knowledge is produced and shared in community contexts, but also to make explicit the researcher's positionality. Emotional labour is directly necessary work, not to be commodified, nor considered peripheral to an interview or to a scholarly project, but rather to be centred and framed *as* scholarly labour. In the realm of my dissertation, I have sought to provide at least brief context for the environments in which community members have spoken to me, not only to make the nature of the relationship more evident, but also to point to the kinds of emotional labour that allowed the conversation to progress to that point. Because emotional labour is a process of maintaining goodwill that is disproportionately placed on the researcher – given the limitations of a PhD program, my research will, unfortunately, be of more benefit to me than to the community members I worked with – each interview quotation in this dissertation is a product of a relationship, but also the product of labour to facilitate those relationships.

At times, community-engaged scholarship writes the labour out of emotional labour: researchers do not acknowledge their emotional labour as quantifiable work. Instead, they have framed it in terms of personal rewards rather than the result of the expenditure of resources, albeit well-meaning and with an eye towards ethical scholarship. Maureen G. Reed, H el ene Godmaire, Marc-Andr e Guertin, Dominique Potvin, and Paivi Abernethy have stated that “community-engaged

scholarship means inhabiting your research.”¹⁷ Maureen Reed elaborated, “I found the project fed me, professionally and personally, as we carried on....This made the experience truly joyful, despite the many bumps in the road we encountered.”¹⁸ Even as metaphors, these statements create particular challenges when they inform academic timelines and funding structures, especially those faced by graduate students and early career academics, since scholars tend not to evaluate the satisfaction or “nourishment” that is gained through community-engaged working relationship as a central task of the research process; the time and funds required to undertake it are framed as extraneous rather than necessary.

Despite its invisibility, then, often-gendered emotional labour shapes the nature of relationships we maintain, the scope of the questions we ask, and ultimately the arguments we make: it is emotional labour that has asked me to evaluate the forcefulness of my arguments, consider their reach, and gauge how far I can extrapolate from existing knowledge to maintain the integrity of relationships I have worked to build. The aspects of my work with community members that has not been specifically scholarly has magnified the importance of these questions.¹⁹ Emotional labour therefore *is* a workplace, not only a phenomenon that exists *in* the work place, as Hochschild suggests. While it is the context for relationships that form foundations of scholarly insights, these relationships are not defined by a single scholarly moment such as an interview. Emotional labour, then, can entail significant, often gendered tasks that appear to be “off topic” to a research question, but that are formative in building trust and a sense of context. If a participant has other more immediate interests than a scholarly question, then the emotional labour of maintaining good relationships entails foregoing the scholarly goal at that moment, in favour of making coffee or cleaning the kitchen.

Histories of both creating and interpreting things are social undertakings that are situational in racial, class-based, gendered, and historical ways. Exploring the creation and use of material things can be a way to complicate historical themes that at times have been considered largely as one-

¹⁷ Maureen G. Reed et al., “Engaged Scholarship: Reflections from a Multi-Talented, National Partnership Seeking to Strengthen Capacity for Sustainability,” *Engaged Scholar Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 176.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁹ Since I have considerable experience working with teams of student researchers at field schools and in other community-university research partnerships, I have often had the opportunity to observe gendered differences in expectations for researchers’ labour. Some of these expectations come from my and other researchers’ socialization and learned behaviour for visiting and interacting with primarily older people; other expectations stem from community members themselves. Regardless, though, I have observed that men’s and women’s community engagement can take on separate forms, supporting the idea that emotional labour is gendered labour. Just as Carlson and Lutz, among others (see following footnote) have called for historical analysis that considers race, class, and gender, I discuss emotional labour in order to depict how our research methodologies are also based on our own positionality.

dimensional. Drawing on work by scholars like Keith Thor Carlson²⁰ and John Sutton Lutz,²¹ who have called for increased attention to social historical themes of race, class, and gender in scholarship addressing Indigenous peoples and histories, a historical study of “making things” -- that is, creating material objects or tangible concepts -- seeks to track and interpret the changing ways that racial, class, and gendered dimensions of tradition and authenticity have existed within communities and in community members’ interactions with one another.

Since I first began to envision this dissertation, I have also encountered ideas and scholarship that have shifted the ways that I have evaluated my role in communities and the points that community members have raised in our conversations. In much of my earlier community-based work, I did not explicitly situate myself within my research and analyses, and I did not consider the role of my own systemic privilege when undertaking my work. Recently, scholars from Indigenous and settler backgrounds alike, as well as people of colour, have commented on the ways that, sometimes intentionally and sometimes implicitly, academic institutional structures have served to marginalize some people’s voices, when white or otherwise privileged scholars have failed to acknowledge their institutional privilege or to speak candidly about the ethical and practical limits of their research. In various ways, these scholars, discussed below, have called attention to scholarly conventions that have created incomplete representations of marginalized or colonized people’s experiences.

Political scientist Rita Dhamoon has argued that the related ideas of multiculturalism and identity politics have tended to ignore issues of race and power dynamics because they have been discussed in terms of culture, without acknowledging the complications or essentialism inherent in that concept.²² Indeed, she notes that multiculturalism, including as a Canadian value, has in fact served to regulate non-white society, because it ignores questions of power and racism that affect minority populations.²³ This kind of discourse has been evident in discussions of handmade items like the ones my dissertation discusses; the items themselves come to represent a multicultural celebration, while glossing over the more complex contexts from which the objects originated. Looking not only at things, but the processes of making them as well, helps to counter essentialism – the idea that identities are inherent or static – by showing how makers responded to colonial

²⁰ Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

²¹ John S Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

²² Rita Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics: How Difference Is Produced, and Why It Matters* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, xi.

contexts that created new meanings or expectations for the objects they produced.

Indeed, Dhamoon argues that “the problem with ‘culture’” is that it is a fluid category of belonging, even though it is often mobilized to create binaries of “us and them”²⁴ and risks becoming “a proxy for race.”²⁵ As a result, it becomes possible to discuss culture without paying attention to racism and colonialism that has been perpetuated on the basis of assumptions about a culture.²⁶ Highlighting historical processes of making things draws attention to the ways that community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon have defined culture for themselves, to give it meaning both locally and in broader markets for their handmade work, and to highlight the effects of racism and colonialism that had been masked by other definitions of culture. Although Dhamoon’s work calls for greater attention to these challenges, overall it serves largely as a theoretical discussion of concepts rather than the exploration of lived experiences that my dissertation undertakes. These more concrete illustrations help to show how, although the ideas of culture and multiculturalism have similar flaws in their community contexts that Dhamoon describes, these examples have also become more complex in those places, since community members and makers have sometimes adopted liberal multicultural viewpoints or language as a means of arguing for their own survival as Indigenous peoples. The objects that they have made and discussed provide examples of how that language has changed over the course of the twentieth century and beyond.

Historian Paige Raibmon, in her work with Sliammon elder Elsie Paul, has also called for approaches to scholarship that make space for marginalized voices. She has advocated for scholars to practice “transformational listening... listening in ways and to voices that have the power to unearth sociopolitical assumptions and intellectual foundations.”²⁷ What is less clear in this call, though, is whom is transformed by such methodologies, and whether the person who is speaking has agency in how their words are interpreted. Undoubtedly, my research has been shaped by my own academic and institutional requirements, which has meant that I have listened to community members’ perspectives with those needs in mind.

In such contexts, even while seeking out respectful research methods, my listening has not necessarily been transformational in terms of power dynamics or in terms of institutions’ roles in

²⁴ Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*, 20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

²⁷ Paige Raibmon, “Introduction: Listening to *ms ta aw*,” in *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (ms ta aw) From the Life of a Sliammon Elder* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 4.

communities. As community members have sometimes reminded me, even if I try to centre community members' stories in my dissertation analysis, their stories are not always intended to benefit me; instead, their conversations with me are explanations of the action that they hope their words will inspire other community or family members to take. Furthermore, in the context of my dissertation, which is also informed by the stories told two to three decades ago in traditional land use studies and other community-driven research projects, the narratives that Raibmon describes as "an important gift" for listeners²⁸ were not necessarily intended as such by the people who originally told the stories. In other words, I have access to the words, but not their motivations; I was never the intended audience of those older narratives. In an effort to avoid removing such stories from their original contexts, I have used them as background for the ways that contemporary community members' perspectives developed, but in general I do not seek to comment on the speakers' motivations unless they have stated them explicitly.

The contextual nature of stories has informed my analysis in other ways as well. Although I take seriously Dhamoon's argument that the idea of culture has sometimes created one-dimensional analysis of complex histories, it is also noteworthy that community members have often commented on the value of their own definition of culture and its relevance for historical and contemporary life. Culturally-specific histories have helped to create culturally-specific ways of interpreting narratives, as Cree scholar Neal McLeod has argued for "Cree narrative memory" specifically. I do not read McLeod's work with the expectation that it would, for example, explain all aspects of Ile-a-la-Crosse community members' conversations with me. Rather, his work raises larger methodological questions about the extent to which it is possible to make larger generalizations about communities from individual narratives. McLeod notes that a collective memory of Cree history, maintained through oral histories, serves as a repository for Cree identity, but that narrative memory is also not self-contained; understandings and connections are always changing, and may be incomplete.²⁹ For this reason, and for the reasons that Dhamoon has also outlined, I am cautious about characterizing communities or cultures based on a series of individuals' stories; instead, I focus on how the stories and ideas have been discussed over time, and to highlight diverse perspectives within communities wherever possible.

McLeod notes that Cree narrative memory helps to maintain stability and reliability of histories in the face of change, but remains a "shifting organism," pulling together narratives from

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon, Sask: Purich Pub, 2007), 8.

many different accounts.³⁰ In this way, even though what McLeod describes is a culturally-specific means of understanding, recording, and interpreting the past, it does not fall victim to the oversimplified uses of culture that Dhamoon critiques, and is in fact a counterpoint to essentialism. Considered in terms of research methodologies, McLeod's work also serves as a reminder that complexities and contradictions are important parts of stories and cultures, even if they do not easily answer historians' questions.

This is particularly significant when considering McLeod's point that when asked directly about their knowledge, many Cree people would respond with humility, stating, "I do not know very much," and not considering themselves to have power over a story,³¹ which reminds us that the environments and circumstances in which people shared their perspectives have shaped the eventual narrative as much as its actual content. As McLeod argues, narrative memory is formed by and within relationships, which in turn offer solidarity against hegemonic forces.³² Beyond oral narratives, though, the objects that community members have made, along with their processes of making those things, have been sites where community members have experienced and responded to hegemony, especially in the rapidly-shifting contexts of the last sixty years.

While this dissertation has been shaped by the perspectives of individuals from Indigenous communities, it is also deeply influenced by my own positionality. In particular, I am a settler affiliated with an academic institution, undertaking work in Indigenous communities and with Indigenous people. In a conversation at the University of Victoria, scholars Corey Snelgrove, Rita Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel noted that paradoxically, the solidarity or allyship of non-Indigenous peoples with Indigenous concerns can create or reinforce hegemonies.³³ My efforts at community-engaged oral historical work have helped me to become aware of what the authors call the "colonial status quo," but this is also recreated in scholarly institutions and processes. Although I seek to undertake scholarship that questions and complicates histories of colonialism by prioritizing the input of community members, I also acknowledge that as I have learned about communities and their diversity, I may also have inadvertently reinforced an approach to scholarly work in which my scholarly questions, rather than community members' priorities, were the focal point. At some points within this dissertation, I have tried to comment when I or community members have

³⁰ Ibid., 15–16.

³¹ Ibid., 16.

³² Ibid., 18.

³³ Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 6.

observed such processes taking place in my own work, though an absence of commentary does not necessarily signal an absence of the status quo that Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel critique.

Being mindful of Mary Jane Logan McCallum's critique of Indigenous history as a discipline that has sometimes marginalized Indigenous historians³⁴ (McCallum speaks specifically about academic historians, but as Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel have noted, non-Indigenous academics' work can also sometimes overshadow similar work being done by community members), I have also sought to depict the contexts of community members' perspectives as well as their content. Anthropologist Ruth Behar has commented that academics have tended to shy away from their role as personal listeners in a story, and instead have hidden behind a "wall" of observation without taking into account the participatory aspect of participant-observation.³⁵ Behar's argument reinforces the significance of centering emotional labour as scholarly labour; I recognize that my efforts at transparency and openness to discussion of my methodologies are not a wholesale solution to critiques of existing scholarship, and I aim to bring these conversations to the fore as ongoing, in-progress ones, to allow for flexibility as community and scholarly needs change over the course of a project. As ethnographer James Clifford has noted, academics often experience diverse and even contradictory perspectives with community members, but tend to downplay this complexity by creating a single, cohesive narrative.³⁶ In an effort to recognize the diversity that exists within communities, when I historicize individuals' comments or perspectives, my discussions are intended to offer analysis and broader historical context, rather than to make statements about Indigenous histories more authoritatively than community members themselves.

My dissertation is therefore a discussion of representation, not only because handmade items have often become symbols for peoples or cultures, but also because I necessarily seek to translate conversations from their original contexts into the larger themes of this dissertation, without overstating or overgeneralizing comments of individual community members. In addition to historical analysis, this dissertation also represents processes of negotiating authority. Clifford has critiqued modes of writing about fieldwork experiences in which the author claims authority by being the sole translator of their experiences or knowledge: "You are there, because I was there."³⁷

³⁴ See Mary Jane McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940-1980*, Critical Studies in Native History 16 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014).

³⁵ Cited in Adele Perry, "Historiography That Breaks Your Heart: Van Kirk and the Writing of Feminist History," in *Finding a Way to the Heart: Feminist Writing and the Canadian West*, ed. Dawn Downie and Valerie J. Korinek (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 81.

³⁶ James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 1, no. 2 (1983): 132.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

Clifford observes that the need to problematize representation has its roots in the mid-twentieth century, when colonial power underwent a “redistribution,” and the resistance to oppression and growth of cultural theory that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s,³⁸ the same era in which the community members I spoke to had their roots in making things. Thus, their stories are also part of a larger historiographical conversation. Their handmade work entered into a context of questioning colonialism not only in the political realm, but also in the social contexts that existed for the objects and their economic and community environments.

Historiography

Making things in Indigenous communities has been a process of negotiating the related but not interchangeable ideas of authenticity and tradition. Scholars have discussed both of these ideas in diverse contexts, but separately and without considering their relationship to each other. My conversations with community members about their processes and contexts for making things have demonstrated that although the idea of a specific, tangible past has often been meaningful to those seeking to respond to detrimental change in their communities, the specific characteristics of the past that community members have highlighted have changed over time. Neither tradition nor authenticity have been static or timeless concepts; rather, community members have defined them based on their memories of elders, and those elders’ oral histories.

Economic, social, and institutional change in communities over the twentieth century has meant that some stories have come to prominence in narratives communicated with the intention to affect change or directly counter colonial intrusions. These definitions have been the most consistent depictions of tradition: activities and things that have symbolized an era when colonialism had not become so all-encompassing, so that the tangible items or skills that originated in that era became the most authentic. Community members felt that items and skills from a past before omnipresent colonialism held the most authority when highlighting the political or social significance of tradition. But despite public definitions of tradition and authenticity that have referred to specific things and practices that would be recognizable to community members and newcomers alike as traditional, Indigenous people who were most deeply affected by the economic consequences of colonial policies also found ways to define and maintain tradition in ways that other community members also saw as authentic.

Perhaps the most iconic discussion of tradition is Terence Ranger’s commentary on

³⁸ Ibid., 118-119.

“invented traditions.” He argues that practices that appear to retain a link to time immemorial “are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented,”³⁹ and that these practices establish and maintain behavioural norms within a community. It is unclear in Ranger’s discussion precisely who “invents” traditions, or for what purposes; in his analysis, traditional people, whom he contrasts with modern ones, lack agency to mobilize the idea of tradition for specific political or social purposes. Nor does Ranger’s analysis consider complexities and power dynamics within communities; in the twentieth-century histories of Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon, public figures sometimes invoked a definition of tradition that was different from the lived experiences of other community members, particularly those in more precarious economic positions.

But those community members engaged with other, less visible aspects of tradition that emerged over time as they earned reputations for their skill in making things defined more publicly as traditional. In the process of making things, Indigenous makers ensconced particular interpretations of the past through their work: interpretations that simultaneously drew attention to local experiences of the past, and at times rendered these pasts ahistorical by equating tradition with a specific image of a static pre-contact era. My seeking to add nuance to these interpretations is not an effort to question the meaningfulness of these definitions of tradition. Rather, bringing histories of making into conversation with each other is a way to demonstrate the role of making things in responding to colonialism whose lasting impacts are felt most strongly at the local level.⁴⁰

Thus, I do not intend to suggest that the entire idea of tradition — regardless of whether it is, objectively speaking, invented or not — is meaningless. Particularly for the community members I spoke with, quite the opposite is true. The “attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past”⁴¹ that Ranger describes resonates deeply with some community members, who call on tradition as a tool for creating distinctions between themselves and larger settler-colonial society. Ranger draws a false dichotomy between tradition and custom “which dominates so-called ‘traditional’ societies”⁴² by assuming that some societies are more “evolved” than others, and implying that such societies do not change or interpret the past. But in both Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon, community members have expressed, especially since the mid-twentieth century, that they see tradition as a positive attribute, and do not equate it with a lack of competence in contemporary settings. In fact,

³⁹ Terrence Ranger, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

⁴⁰ Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*, Brenda and David McLean Canadian Studies Series (Vancouver: Seattle: UBC Press; University of Washington Press, 2005), 9.

⁴¹ Ranger, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

tracing histories of handmade items offers examples of ways that community members capitalized on the image and idea of tradition to find a footing in colonial societies that sought to exclude them. As a result, I seek to historicize the idea of tradition in the communities I work with, to emphasize its ongoing but not static significance for histories and individuals.

As Dakota scholar Philip Deloria has noted, expectations for Indigenous people have been created and re-created through discourses: processes and conversations that have reinforced categories to which non-Indigenous people have expected Indigenous people to belong.⁴³ The “unexpected places” where Indigenous people in Deloria’s study have existed have been places where ideas of tradition and authenticity have intersected and sometimes conflicted: places where non-Indigenous perspectives have historically dominated. Historical processes of making things have sometimes offered inroads into these places, allowing makers and consumers alike to point out where expectations existed. Makers have then been able to either choose to meet those expectations to cater to demand for their items, or challenge expectations to highlight the more specific needs of their families or communities.

Historian Paige Raibmon has discussed the ways that Indigenous people in British Columbia mobilized ideas of authenticity for their own purposes during the nineteenth century. She explains that although settlers imagined and created expectations of what an authentic Indigenous person would do or look like, Indigenous people also proactively engaged with those definitions of authenticity to shape circumstances for their own needs.⁴⁴ Raibmon contextualizes these processes within the era of anthropological study that sought specific, static traits that would define authenticity for Indigenous cultures,⁴⁵ and my dissertation builds on this idea by considering how those definitions persisted and continued to shape processes of making things well into the twentieth century and beyond, even though those disciplinary aims of anthropology had long since changed. The authenticity that non-Indigenous people created and sought for Indigenous people in the nineteenth century also had its roots in antimodernist movements like the Arts and Crafts movement,⁴⁶ and was a phenomenon that took place in many contexts, as Ian McKay, for instance, has described of rural Nova Scotia during the same time period,⁴⁷ but that had racialized

⁴³ Philip Joseph Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Culture America (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 4.

⁴⁴ Paige Sylvia Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁷ See Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal:

underpinnings for Indigenous people.⁴⁸ In the context of handmade items, consumers of Indigenous made goods were not neutral; both making and buying were acts that had specific meaning, just as more recently, Indigenous consumers have purchased similar items or encouraged their ongoing production as a direct response to colonialism.

Raibmon argues that nineteenth-century settlers' expectation of a single, easily-identifiable Indigenous culture "held Aboriginal people to impossible standards of ahistorical purity."⁴⁹ While such expectations sometimes remain even today, for Indigenous makers in the twentieth century, those same assumptions also created opportunities: by making things that matched consumers' tastes for authenticity, they could market their work more effectively, especially in contexts when few other economic opportunities existed for Indigenous people. As Raibmon notes, to assume that Indigenous people did not strategically use authenticity is to assume that they only *reacted* to colonialism, rather than proactively work to fulfil their own needs.⁵⁰ Beyond that, though, I am also careful not to assume that the images of authenticity that Indigenous people adapted and used for their own purposes were not also meaningful to them. Especially in the latter part of the twentieth century, teaching traditional skills and creating specific, tangible items to symbolize a connection with the past became important parts of Indigenous community activities as well: authenticity had value as a tool for building common community values in addition to resistance to colonialism, especially outside of urban areas (which are Raibmon's main focus), where the public aspect of authenticity was more minimal.

Considering traditions and processes of creation as contributors (even if not always intentional ones) to conversations about objects, histories, and identities can help to complicate the interpretive themes raised in these conversations. Stó:lō knowledge keeper Albert (Sonny) McHalsie has described how some Indigenous people are engaged in processes of re-establishing physical and ceremonial connections to their histories, which they feel are at risk of being lost after centuries of colonialism.⁵¹ These processes of reclaiming point to moments where commodities have come to represent and refer to significant historical interactions, and objects' diverse roles can help to challenge the argument that "invented" traditions have been carried out too consciously to be authentic. Mark Salber Phillips has suggested that when understanding traditions in this way, it is

McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

⁴⁸ Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵¹ Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us," in *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, ed. Bruce Granville Miller (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 85.

difficult to analyze them outside of the precise “circumstances of their origins.”⁵² Yet at the same time, while the essays in Phillips’ collection discuss aspects of race, class, and gender in reference to tradition, they do not consider what happens at the juncture of all of these factors, which become relevant in various ways depending on who is engaging with the idea. Thus, definitions of ideas like tradition and indigeneity have histories that can be illuminated by the ways that people enact them physically – by making things. By placing material things at the centre of these historical inquiries, it is possible to move these apparent markers of tradition into a wider circle of events, ideas, and interactions, becoming particularly significant in these roles when considered in the context of colonial and inter-cultural relationships.

Because making things was an economic venture for some Indigenous people as well as a symbolic gesture, histories of handmade items are sometimes also labour histories. For many Indigenous people, especially in the latter part of the twentieth century, labour, too, was a site where non-Indigenous people’s expectations for Indigenous people were negotiated. As historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum has noted, in settler society and in historiographical discussions, there has often been a tension between the ideas of “declining” and “persisting” Indigenous communities,⁵³ where these two categories have tended to be the only discussions of change over time.⁵⁴ McCallum argues that such categories mask the complexity that existed in Indigenous women’s work, in particular.⁵⁵ Such complexity risks being even more hidden when considering handmade items as labour; as scholars of Indigenous art Kathy M’Closkey and Sherry Farrell-Racette have both commented, historians have tended to view objects as a subject or artifact in and of themselves, rather than evidence of the maker’s labour.⁵⁶ Considering histories and processes of making things allows the social, historical, and economic experiences of the maker to become visible alongside those of the consumer or observer.

Because histories of handmade items are labour histories, I seek to expand on existing discussions of Indigenous labour that highlight specific occupations (and, in the case of Rolf Knight’s work, predominantly masculine occupations⁵⁷) to pick up on M’Closkey’s and Farrell-

⁵² Mark Salber Phillips, “Introduction: What Is Tradition When It Is Not ‘Invented’? A Historiographical Introduction,” in *Questions of Tradition*, ed. Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon J Schochet (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 7.

⁵³ McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940-1980*, 256.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁶ Cited in McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940-1980*, 6.

⁵⁷ See Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia 1858-1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978).

Racette's call to view objects as part of labour relationships. Examining these histories through things also helps to complicate outward impressions of gendered labour in Indigenous households and communities; as markets and consumer tastes evolved, items that had once been primarily part of the domestic or private sphere became objects of public consumer interest, and concurrently, work that was associated with men's labour beyond the context of the household also became popular as decorative items that interested Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and households alike.

The historiographical discussions with which this dissertation connects have generally stemmed from themes that community members raised in our conversations. When introducing and summarizing my research questions to community members, I have described my work as "histories of handmade items," and the resulting conversations covered questions of tradition, material culture, indigeneity, and community. I have therefore sought out bodies of scholarship that help to contextualize the links between making things and making histories. I also focus on how these authors engage with material things, and whether these analyses provide more nuanced ways of examining histories and communities.

Anthropologist of material culture Arjun Appadurai has argued that material culture itself can be a bridge between perspectives from cultural anthropology and archaeology.⁵⁸ In Appadurai's analysis, though, the idea of culture exists without historical context, either for the concept of culture itself or for the objects in question. His discussion of objects therefore remains largely separate from makers' own perspectives on the objects under their control. Because, as Appadurai notes, objects rarely remain isolated from larger economic or interpersonal contexts, knowledge about the making or production of objects also necessarily includes knowledge about users or consumers of those objects. Yet for Appadurai, knowledge of markets does not necessarily denote broad economic knowledge or experience. He argues that "in small-scale, traditional societies, such knowledge [of consumer markets] is relatively direct and complete as regards internal consumption, but more erratic and incomplete as regards external demand."⁵⁹ The seemingly clear distinction that Appadurai draws between so-called "tradition" and "modernity" becomes blurred once makers' own perspectives on these market relationships are brought into the discussion. Local interactions and local histories of exchange in both Sliammon and Ile-a-la-Crosse reveal diverse and locally- and temporally-specific complexities both within communities and beyond them. These local histories of

⁵⁸ Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

making and knowledge exchange are by no means isolated, and whether the objects in question saw usage in communities or outside of them, their origins suggest histories of navigating family, community, school, municipal, colonial, class, and many other differences. The objects' place of origin did not determine its significance; instead, the dialogues surrounding the objects did.

Studies of making in contexts not directly tied to histories of colonialism have helped to raise questions about the ways that making things has entered into historical and historiographical discourse. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to elaborate on global contexts shaping local environments of making, I do aim to demonstrate that the specific communities I work with both responded to and worked proactively with outside forces. In a cultural history and sociological study of knitting hobbyists since 1970, Jo Turney cites the advent of cultural studies, feminist theory, and wide-reaching historical events like the Vietnam War as catalysts for challenging of historical norms by reinterpreting processes of making.⁶⁰ The cultural meanings of knitting since 1970 have been, she argues, a deliberate effort to move away from historical accounts of knitting in response to rapidly-shifting global and local relationships. This broad lens on recent histories of making helps to position the histories and makers of objects in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon within contexts that were not directly tied to the local or cultural identities that often form the rationale for studying Indigenous histories. These broader contexts have also shaped the environment in which makers and objects interacted, but they have been overlooked at times, out of the assumption that Indigenous communities were isolated from events that did not affect them directly.

Turney's work helps to strengthen the rationale for focusing on mid-to-late-twentieth-century iterations of made goods. Considering this later time period than most existing histories of these communities and historical themes surrounding material culture helps to move the analysis away from a dichotomy of past and present. Turney's temporal and theoretical focus emphasize that practice and tradition change over time, sometimes deliberately. But Turney's argument for the 1970s as a turning point in knitting culture, as she terms it, is based on an equation of home and women's work with static histories placed in direct opposition to the "cultural capital" it attained after the 1960s. By extension, then, Turney seems to imply that activity or visibility create culture: an assumption with particularly significant implications for Indigenous histories. In popular discourse, in the courtroom, and in government policy, Indigenous histories have been evaluated on the basis of their perceived authenticity or viability, based on which tangible elements are visible to outside observers. As a result, a nuanced and historically-contextualized discussion of Indigenous makers'

⁶⁰ Jo Turney, *The Culture of Knitting* (Berg Publishers, 2009), 6.

own intentions over time must expand Turney's discussion of culture to include historical context for the concept of culture itself.

A similar approach is useful in other contexts as well. Historicizing the development of material culture as a field of academic study, Victor Buchli uses the origins of the field as a backdrop, but not always a context, for material culture studies as they exist today. To preface a tightly-framed collection of essays by members of the Material Culture Group at University College London, Buchli notes that the first uses of the term "material culture" emerged in mid-nineteenth-century ethnographic and travel writing;⁶¹ given that Indigenous cultures were portrayed largely as static or essentialized during this period, the term material culture risks perpetuating these ideas if not defined or contextualized with more nuance. While, like many scholarly disciplines, more recent studies of material culture (like those published in Buchli's collection) have acknowledged the need for interpretations to change over time, at its core, the term material culture requires generalization about what constitutes the culture from which the material item originates. As Buchli notes, material culture studies originally had a social reform agenda, to educate European observers about "primitive" peoples with the aim of drawing these peoples under the umbrella of European civilization: it was a "materialization" of nationhood and of colonial and imperial aims.⁶² In this way, the study of material culture has been a narrative and interpretive process, but not only from the scholarly side of the equation: colonized peoples as well have employed the same narrative process — engaging with making material things — to critique colonial practices, both in individual and collective ways. For these reasons, I largely avoid the term "material culture" in this dissertation, as a tool for avoiding generalizations or assumptions about the intentions of objects and the people who have made them. While at times the term is a useful shorthand for made objects and their pasts, in general I aim to contextualize and historicize the relationships that have given objects their significance, so that no single shorthand term is necessary.

The idea that objects do not represent a single time period or narrative operates in parallel to the process of bringing historical voices into conversation to complicate existing understandings of communities or issues. Whether interpreting objects as sources or as representations of histories, questions of voice and representation remain central. Considering the relationships between personal experience and historical evidence, Joan Sangster has noted in the case of women's history that it is important to draw on women's experiences to make historical arguments with relevance in

⁶¹ Victor Buchli, "Introduction," in *The Material Culture Reader*, ed. Victor Buchli (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002), 2–3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 3.

the present, yet to do so without being essentialist or deterministic.⁶³ Historians of Indigenous communities are similarly charged with the responsibility of ensuring that a single narrative does not speak for an entire culture, community, or time period, but instead considers dialogue rather than the authoritativeness of a single perspective. Even when sources or individuals do not speak directly to each other, power, gender, economic status, and other dynamics complicate and contextualize individuals' narratives of their experiences.

These contexts are particularly significant when considering histories of colonialism or what appear at first to be oppositional relationships between insiders and outsiders. Historians Saul Schwartz and William Green have argued that spaces where Indigenous and colonial interests meet have tended to be portrayed as either Indigenous space or a middle ground where Indigenous action sat in opposition to colonial goals. Framing spaces in this way also reinforced diametric opposition between continuity (depicted as Indigenous strength) and change (depicted as Indigenous weakness).⁶⁴ Schwartz and Green construct their analysis in the context of the eighteenth-century fort at Iowaville in what is now the USA, but the implications constructed around Indigenous people's instigation of change have continued into later historical contexts. In twentieth-century contexts of making things within colonial power structures, Indigenous people's agency has often been evaluated in terms of the extent to which Indigenous people participated in dominant economic and social structures. Little consideration has been given to the ways that Indigenous people took part in dominant economies or cultural expectations — for instance, by making things to sell within that economy — to facilitate their own resistance or to distance themselves from colonialism in other ways. Schwartz and Green comment that middle grounds arise when there is a “mutual need for power”⁶⁵ on imperial or national levels.

While Schwartz and Green have argued that because relationships between Europeans and Indigenous people were not as polarized as has often been assumed, and that as a result it is not always useful for historians to seek out a distinction between “European” and “Indian” historical goods,⁶⁶ in the twentieth century this did become a more meaningful distinction as makers and consumers of objects depicted their value based on their cultural associations. Objects, then, gain meaning as tools for historical study from their makers as well as their users and their subsequent

⁶³ Joan Sangster, “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” *Canadian Historical Review* 92, no. 1 (March 2011): 142.

⁶⁴ Saul Schwartz and William Green, “Middle Ground or Native Ground? Material Culture at Iowaville,” *Ethnohistory* 60, no. 4 (21 September 2013): 537, doi:10.1215/00141801-2313831.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 544.

interpreters. Whether interpreting objects, as Schwartz and Green do, or narratives of experience, as Sangster does, adhering to binaries can limit our ability to interpret histories in ways that are meaningful to the people who have shared their experiences. Determining authenticity or the direct relevance of individual's historical narratives offers fewer opportunities to complicate existing interpretations than exploring the ways that Indigenous people have both changed and responded to change over time through their processes of making things.

The interpretive questions that histories of handmade and material items have raised have implications for historical scholarship in diverse contexts, but crucially, they also grew out of the specific community contexts where I learned about them. For both Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon, scholarly attention has tended until recently to stem from anthropological or sociological perspectives carrying varying weight and meaningfulness for the communities themselves. In both instances, historical scholarship in the last few years has sought to contextualize contemporary community interests within these earlier accounts, and it is historical studies on which this dissertation builds. As a whole, though, these bodies of work have also highlighted questions of historical interpretation and local belonging that at times are complicated by larger regional studies and by a focus on individual experience in addition to more collective narratives. Significantly, most scholarship that addresses these regions specifically focuses on an earlier period than this dissertation, often examining early encounters between Indigenous people and Euro-Canadian colonial intrusion.

Particularly in the two decades following the economic and community changes that began after the Great Depression, Ile-a-la-Crosse's history came under scrutiny by sociological and anthropological studies seeking to explain cultural reasons for the community's or region's economic and social challenges, especially in the face of the declining viability of traditional occupations. The first of these studies were undertaken by Victor F. Valentine, employed by the provincial CCF government, who made several trips to Ile-a-la-Crosse and the region in the 1950s, primarily to study the efficacy and local response to the fur regulation system that had been implemented a few years earlier. It is unclear whether Valentine himself argued, or was tasked with arguing, that essential "Metis" social characteristics made them resistant to institutions, modelled on cooperative principles, that the CCF had introduced, but in any case, his research set the stage for other scholars' efforts to depict Metis people in the north in terms of their "deficiencies."⁶⁷ A few years later,

⁶⁷ Valentine was by no means the only proponent of these ideas; they had been discussed by historians and sociologists for more than a decade before he undertook his work. Marcel Giraud's and G. F. Stanley's works are some of the most

Western Washington University anthropology PhD student Philip Taft Spaulding undertook fieldwork in Ile-a-la-Crosse, depicting his informants in his dissertation as one-dimensional, plagued by social ills that he linked directly to their racial makeup.⁶⁸

However, despite their obvious limitations (though, of course, these studies were not unusual in their time), Valentine's and Spaulding's publications were perhaps the first to consider Ile-a-la-Crosse beyond its role as a fur trade hub in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a few instances, these studies have been cited by some as authoritative commentary on Ile-a-la-Crosse or Metis experiences, and while the interviews conducted with community members at the time help to show how experiences and oral histories have changed, some recent historical scholarship has largely glossed over the colonial underpinnings and tone of Spaulding's and Valentine's work. In their recent work on a comprehensive Metis history, historians Gerhard Ens and Joe Sawchuk seek to offer a general narrative overview, using sociological work, including Valentine's and Spaulding's, as a tool for constructing general timelines, without explaining in detail the ongoing local effects of the colonial environments in which such work was undertaken, nor the racialized language of the reports themselves.⁶⁹ By citing these reports with minimal context, Ens and Sawchuk gloss over the colonial contexts to which Metis people and histories now respond.

More directly relevant to the local experiences of the Ile-a-la-Crosse region is David M. Quiring's study of CCF colonialism in northern Saskatchewan, which also relies on Valentine's assessment of the north, but as a tool for explaining the impacts of government policy. It was not until fifty years after Valentine's and Spaulding's work that academic historians began to look at Ile-a-la-Crosse and northwestern Saskatchewan as places where economic and social change was sparked by colonialism and not simply market fluctuations, as Valentine had argued, and Quiring's work was among the first to examine these questions. Responding in part to arguments like Valentine's that resistance to CCF initiatives in the north during that party's tenure in government (1944-1964) was a result of a definable "Metis character," Quiring has argued that the CCF's lack of consultation with community members hindered their own goals for development in the north and reinforced the party's role as a colonizer in the region. Quiring's work focuses largely on the policies

notable examples of the racialized and not particularly nuanced argument that Metis people were caught "in between," unable to adapt to either First Nations or Euro-Canadian society. See Marcel Giraud, *Le Métis Canadien* (Saint-Boniface, Manitoba: Editions du Blé, 1984, 1945). and George Francis Gillman Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1936).

⁶⁸ See Philip Taft Spaulding, "The Metis of Ile-a-La-Crosse" (University of Washington, 1970).

⁶⁹ Gerhard John Ens and Joe Sawchuk, *From New Peoples to New Nations: Aspects of Métis History and Identity from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Centuries* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 307–8.

themselves, along with the processes of implementing them, to show how paternalistic and colonial approaches reinforced the north's lack of political power.⁷⁰ What is less clear in Quiring's analysis, though, aside from comments published in Valentine's studies, is how northerners themselves responded or operated within these contexts.

In response, my work examines how people, specifically in Ile-a-la-Crosse, made agency for themselves within larger power structures. Without discounting the obvious challenges and detrimental legacies of colonialism, through community members' histories of making things, it is also possible to see that local people undertook strategies to respond to colonial impositions, in public political and social commentary that evolved as the significance and definition of tradition changed, but also by prioritizing their families' needs in times of economic hardship. Thus, although Quiring's statement that the north held little political power was true particularly in a legislative sense, community members have continually developed strategies within these structures to address community, family, and individual needs. Processes of making things have often been at the centre of those actions, either as symbols or as practical means of addressing the immediate impacts of colonialism.

By focusing on the policies and processes of the CCF government, Quiring's work considers northerners' actions in terms of the expectations of the provincial government, rather than considering community members' experiences on their own terms. Quiring notes that the CCF sought a contradictory system: modernizing the north, while reinforcing traditional economies and activities under the assumption that northern Indigenous people were incapable of much else.⁷¹ In the context of made items, though, these tangible things were individual responses to larger governmental effects; economies and employment did not only operate on the large scale that the CCF envisioned, but also operated on familial or individual levels that are not visible in larger analyses of policy.

Although the CCF's tenure in government ended in the 1960s, it was by no means the only agent of colonialism in the north over the course of the twentieth century. As my conversations with community members have indicated, Ile-a-la-Crosse's social, political, and economic needs have continued to evolve, seeking new uses for tradition and making things to counteract "the aftermaths of colonialism" that Julie Cruikshank has described. At the same time, though, as community members' observations about access to residential school redress, public services (or even fresh

⁷⁰ David M. Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), xv.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

foods) suggest, “aftermaths” implies that colonialism has an end point, not that it is ongoing in people’s lived experiences.

Focusing on an earlier time period, University of Ottawa Indigenous Studies scholar Brenda Macdougall has focused on the idea of family — or more precisely, the Cree concept of *wahkootowin*, which she describes as the interrelatedness of people, land, and history⁷² — to depict the development of a distinct Metis identity in and around Ile-a-la-Crosse in the nineteenth century. These connections, she argues, were what helped descendants of fur traders and Indigenous women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to develop a collective sense of Metis identity; she argues that “[Metis] identity [in northwestern Saskatchewan] ...is inseparable from land, home, community, or family.”⁷³ This statement suggests that all of these categories, for the purposes of defining identity or belonging, are not only interconnected but interchangeable.

However, my own oral history and archival work in northwestern Saskatchewan suggests that family connections in the region have not, in and of themselves, created a specifically Metis identity. Rather, as community members and newcomers alike have observed for more than a century, individuals who identify as Metis today often have family connections to neighbouring Cree and Dene communities, and may even be eligible to take treaty retroactively through recent legal and legislative changes. Nevertheless, the idea of being Metis has been significant in publicly political arguments for rights, especially as the community was changing rapidly in the 1970s and onward. Often, these arguments built on the idea of tradition, as symbolized by specific tangible things, or processes of making traditional items. Conversations with community members about these processes have revealed ways that objects as well as the narratives surrounding them may refer to the specific histories of identity that Macdougall explores, even while simultaneously serving diverse individual, household, and political purposes at once, shaped by the contemporary economic conditions of their time.

The most recent⁷⁴ historical and methodological discussion of northwestern Saskatchewan has also assumed a specifically Metis, rather than complicated and overlapping set of identities in the

⁷² Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴ In the last decade, a handful of graduate students have also undertaken historical work in Ile-a-la-Crosse. This work is represented collectively in a special issue of *Saskatchewan History* 61:2, 2009. While I and these other students — McKinley Darlington, Amanda Fehr, Kevin Gambell, and Liam Haggarty — have worked together on some interviews and projects, my dissertation work has become somewhat separate from this earlier work, as I began to work more independently on my own doctoral research and had the opportunity to reflect on the ways that my methodologies have changed and responded to the knowledge I gained over time.

region. Discussing work undertaken as a parallel project with the spatial and oral history work that introduced me to Ile-a-la-Crosse in 2006, Nathalie Kermoal and Kathy L. Hodgson-Smith focus specifically on Metis women's land use, and the largely invisible impact that such work has had in negotiating Metis rights. Kermoal and Hodgson-Smith begin their discussion with a description of the region in terms of the fur trade, as Macdougall's work does: a framework that risks glossing over the complexities of the region, particularly because, as the authors note, they conducted interviews with people who considered themselves Metis in Michif, Cree, Dene, and English.⁷⁵ This diversity reinforces the idea that identities in the north involve many cross-cultural family connections that are not easily categorized or identified by specific, tangible traits or features that have sometimes come to symbolize Metis people. Kermoal notes that in traditional use studies (which have, at least tangentially, informed my interpretations of both Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon histories), most research has tended to be framed by men's activities.⁷⁶ She argues that Metis women have contributed to "cultural continuity" by undertaking practices that their female ancestors did, but are also contributors to new knowledge, indicating that tradition need not be static.⁷⁷ But beyond that, tradition and continuity need not even be entirely synonymous: a central goal of this dissertation is to elaborate on ways that makers subverted categories, or found inclusion in ways that benefitted their aims, whether those aims were individual or more collective, depending on changing local economic and political circumstances.

By contrast, Hodgson-Smith's and Kermoal's work depicts traditional activities as being outside of economic, political, social, or historical contexts. By looking at the processes as well as the outcomes of making things, objects help to explain how women's labour in the north not only supported the visibly lucrative activities of trapping, fishing, and hunting; it also helped to create expectations for authenticity and definitions of tradition that would inform arguments for political power, rights, and access to services that have become the focus of recent decades' arguments about the past. The authors state that "stewardship of the land is central to the women's [participants in the traditional use study] worldview."⁷⁸ This perspective is also evident in the conversations I have

⁷⁵ Kathy L. Hodgson-Smith and Nathalie Kermoal, "Community-Based Research and Metis Women's Knowledge in Northwestern Saskatchewan," in *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Land*, ed. Kathy L. Hodgson-Smith and Isabel Altamirano-Jiminez (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2016), 147.

⁷⁶ Nathalie Kermoal, "Metis Women's Environmental Knowledge and the Recognition of Metis Rights," in *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Land*, ed. Kathy L. Hodgson-Smith and Isabel Altamirano-Jiminez (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2016), 109.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁷⁸ Hodgson-Smith and Kermoal, "Community-Based Research and Metis Women's Knowledge in Northwestern Saskatchewan," 155.

had with community members, and the authors' assertion relies on the idea of women as maintainers of culture: something that would likely resonate with many makers and community members. But at the same time, the statement does not reveal how women adapted and responded to challenging conditions to meet their immediate family needs. That is, women's knowledge has become more varied than solely the skills required to live on the land. As the community itself changed, women also incorporated their existing skills into new economic contexts, showing that living on the land has not been the only way to be traditional or to practice traditional skills; women whose economic circumstances required them to leave traditional occupations were able, over time, to gain authority as knowledgeable and traditional members of their community.

In contrast to Ile-a-la-Crosse, Sliammon has experienced more varied scholarly attention during the latter half of the twentieth century. Unlike the primarily policy-driven anthropological study that focused on Metis people, on the west coast, a series of anthropologists built on the more specifically academic foundations established by earlier ethnographers like Franz Boas. Homer Barnett, who published his 1930s fieldwork in *The Coast Salish of British Columbia*⁷⁹ in 1955, was one of the only to comment on Sliammon as a distinct cultural group rather than as a subgroup of neighbouring peoples. Barnett's work employed methods common in the field at that time: a reliance on key informants (one of these was Chief Tom, the last hereditary Sliammon chief), an emphasis on observable pre-contact traits depicted as static, and a quest for a cultural "core" free of "infiltration" (as Barnett described it) of traits from other cultures.⁸⁰ But although all of these methods and their essentialism have undergone extensive critique and revision since the 1950s, Sliammon community members also continue to find value in some of Barnett's work. His detailed descriptions of Tla'amin territory, spiritual and cultural practices, and processes of making things have continued to inform some community members' efforts to learn or reclaim that knowledge, and even underpinned some aspects of treaty negotiations. Barnett's informants' descriptions and illustrations of items like tools, clothing, and canoe and paddle styles have helped to guide more recent depictions and definitions of tradition in Sliammon.

As some community members themselves have also pointed out, though, processes of making things have never operated outside of social contexts, and, as later parts of this dissertation discuss, understandings of the "cultural traits" that Barnett described varied according to gender, social position, and time period. Woven cedar root baskets, for instance, have typically been the

⁷⁹ H. G. Barnett, *The Coast Salish of British Columbia*, University of Oregon Monographs. Studies in Anthropology, no. 4 (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1955).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

purview of women, but because Barnett did not have a female informant in Sliammon (though he did in the neighbouring and closely-related communities of Klahoose and Homalco), discussion of Sliammon basket patterns and construction was minimal as compared to other handmade items he described. Yet in my conversations with community members, baskets were one of the first items that were mentioned as valuable ones to consider when I asked about histories of handmade items. Barnett's work serves as a reminder that the idea of tradition is based in part on who depicts it, and when.

About twenty years after Barnett's 1955 work, anthropologists Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard began fieldwork in Sliammon, which would eventually be published as *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands*.⁸¹ The book included perspectives from a broad range of community members — including many of those who would later be interviewed for a traditional use study (TUS) intended to inform treaty negotiations — on many of the same topics that Barnett had discussed. Most of the elders involved in this project have died only within the last decade or so. Community members I have spoken with have sometimes expressed regret that those people were no longer here to serve as models of traditional skills that community members identified as valuable. Many of the elders depicted in *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands* were themselves instrumental in developing community programs and educational initiatives during the years that Kennedy and Bouchard were undertaking their research. In TUS interviews, community publications, and Powell River newspaper articles, several of the elders commented publicly on their motivations for establishing these programs. The practical skills of making traditional things were intended to counter the colonialism and racism that had been present for much of the twentieth century in Sliammon, by giving community members opportunities to direct their attention towards reinforcing their history and belonging in that place. Kennedy and Bouchard, however, did not comment on the contemporary contexts in which community members made and documented tangible things. Although their work captured aspects of the past that community members both at the time and today have deemed important, it overlooked the full motivations and significance of the knowledge that elders shared with them.

More recently, scholars have sought to bridge this gap in academic work between historical practices and contemporary needs and experiences.⁸² In her preface to Sliammon elder Elsie Paul's

⁸¹ Dorothy I. D. Kennedy and Randy Bouchard, *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1983).

⁸² In addition to Raibmon's published work, unpublished graduate work has recently addressed specific historical questions about Sliammon. Jonathan Clapperton, Omeasoo Wahpasuw, and Colin Osmond have engaged with community members' perspectives on environmental protection, colonial impositions on housing, and Indigenous masculinities in the logging industry, respectively. See Jonathan Clapperton, "Stewards of the Earth: Aboriginal Peoples, Environmentalists, and Historical Representation" (PhD dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2013); Omeasoo

life and community history, historian Paige Raibmon describes her work with Elsie as a process of collaboration, rather than a “told-to project”⁸³ in which the scholar, rather than the speaker themselves, would be the arbiter of the way the story was shared and interpreted. Practically speaking, Raibmon was able to spend the time necessary to collaborate on a book project with Elsie because the work dealt solely with Elsie’s individual history. Working with multiple parallel perspectives within communities requires the writer or interpreter to rely on community members’ own historical work to help explain how authority had been negotiated among community members. Elsie Paul, for instance, discusses the ways that her grandparents evaluated the prestige and legitimacy of other families, based on their economic resources.⁸⁴ Her narratives do not only serve as descriptive records for community members and other readers, they also carry implications for historians who seek to interpret Elsie’s knowledge in academic contexts. Thus, the work and stories are primary sources, but they also provide interpretation of histories and relationships, making Elsie’s book a historiographical contribution as well.

Outline

This dissertation consists of two main parts: “Objects in Family and Community Histories,” and “Objects in Newcomer Institutions.” Each part consists of four chapters: two exploring these broad themes in Sliammon, and two in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Chapter 2, “Depicting Objects in Sliammon’s Family and Community Histories,” introduces twentieth-century historical change in Sliammon, and explores how community members have outlined their own histories of making things. By explaining the kinds of objects that have featured in Sliammon narratives about the past hundred years, community members have provided a timeline and arguments about significant events or issues that shaped the ways that objects and their social and political contexts changed over time. Building on those local and familial histories, Chapter 3, “Negotiating Intercultural Histories of Tradition and Things in Sliammon,” examines how relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities around Sliammon prompted Sliammon people themselves to define what processes of making things were distinctively their own. These definitions of tradition became

Wahpasiw, “Tla’amin Housing Architecture and Home Territories in the Twentieth Century: Invisible Spaces Shaping Historical Indigenous Education” (PhD dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2017); Colin Murray Osmond, “Giant Trees, Iron Men: Masculinity and Colonialism in Coast Salish Loggers’ Identity” (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2016).

⁸³ Raibmon, “Introduction: Listening to *ms ta aw*,” 3.

⁸⁴ Elsie Paul, *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (ms ta aw) From the Life of a Sliammon Elder*, Women and Indigenous Studies Series (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 90.

particularly significant as community members invoked them to make arguments about social and political needs in the face of colonizing policy province- and nation-wide and casual racism closer to home.

Chapter 4, “Objects and Tradition in in Ile-a-la-Crosse Family and Community Histories,” depicts how the postwar period in Ile-a-la-Crosse ushered in an era of rapid change for the community, in which new local social, economic, and geographical climates interacted with the legacies of provincial and federal policies towards the largely Metis population of the region. Community members began to look to specific historical moments or practices to provide a basis for comparison with contemporary circumstances. They sought to define and mobilize the idea of tradition — as evidenced by processes of making things — to address specific questions or concerns that had come to prominence in the community. With these historical contexts in place, Chapter 5, “Interpreting Tradition Through Making Things in Ile-a-la-Crosse,” focuses on the overlapping and sometimes contradictory ways that tradition has been defined in Ile-a-la-Crosse to make political and social arguments. I discuss how tradition itself has changed over time alongside other changes in Ile-a-la-Crosse; tradition has been a concept that has consistently been present, but one that has been expressed in terms of changing arguments about the past and present. By extension, then, histories of making things are not only histories of material culture, they are community-based methods for interpreting histories as well.

In Part II, I discuss how although Ile-a-la-Crosse and its inhabitants have asserted aspects of Metis identities for much of the community’s recent history, relationships with handmade objects in the community have often been based on regional conditions more than (or in addition to) a specific, locally-depicted cultural identity. Meanwhile, governments’ engagements with these items have also attributed their relevance to a generalized assumption about the overall “indigenouness” of the community, rather than the local or individual specificity that community members have discussed in Part I. These chapters discuss objects’ travels beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse, through channels created and maintained by outside, institutional commodification of Indigenous people’s work. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, these channels developed alongside institutions that sought to regulate local people’s lives in other ways: through residential schools, government employment and handicraft marketing programs, scholarly research and archives, as well as more informal or individual relationships with newcomers carrying their own expectations for the histories of the objects and people they encountered. Chapter 6, “Institutions and Making Things in Ile-a-la-Crosse,” discusses the impacts of specific institutions: the HBC, the Roman Catholic mission and residential school, and the

Department of Northern Saskatchewan. Chapter 7, “Adapting Ethnographic Narratives to Local Histories of Things,” discusses ethnographers’ and researchers’ interpretations of tradition and objects in the community, and discuss how community members have formulated ideas about tradition that have responded to and adapted diverse narratives to suit community needs.

In Chapters 8 and 9, I continue discussion of the themes raised in the Ile-a-la-Crosse chapters of Part II, to demonstrate how the idea of “material culture” is not (or not only) constructed by communities themselves, but also by the relationships of others to the material items that people in the communities produce for all of the diverse reasons discussed in Part I. For Sliammon in particular, the proximity of the community to Powell River created more locally-specific institutional relationships than existed in more remote communities like Ile-a-la-Crosse. Although these seemingly closer ties produced more personal relationships among objects, their makers, and their institutional consumers, they did not create equal or even dialogic interactions between “Natives and newcomers.” Rather, whether local or larger, colonizing institutions’ interest in handmade items was directly linked to colonizers’ expectations for Indigenous people’s behaviour and historical understandings.

Chapter 8, “Institutions and Making Things in Sliammon,” discusses how the Western art market, museums, and ethnographic study created broad expectations for what tradition and authenticity in the twentieth century should look like for Indigenous peoples, especially on the west coast. I then examine how makers of objects in Sliammon sometimes complicated and sometimes embraced these definitions to highlight their resilience and autonomy within colonizing institutions. Finally, Chapter 9, “Making Things and Making Economies,” discusses the experiences of individuals and families in twentieth-century Sliammon as they encountered the expanding wage labour economy. I show how handmade items offered inroads to economic connections that other forms of labour could not, especially for women, and I explore how the wage labour economy alternately restricted and expanded opportunities for makers seeking to support their families or their own reputations. Taken together, the relationships among community members’ historical and contemporary perspectives; institutional responses to community members’ processes of making things; and the interpretive nature of tradition reveal the close connections between making things and making histories.

Part I: Objects in Family and Community Histories

Chapter 2: Depicting Objects in Sliammon's Family and Community Histories

In February of 2014, the remains of several Tla'amin ancestors returned to Sliammon from Simon Fraser University, where they had been housed for archaeological research purposes. Community members representing various branches of governance and leadership organized a repatriation ceremony to welcome the remains home, and to bury them according to traditional practices, informed by elders past and present. The goal was to arrange a ceremony that the ancestors themselves would recognize, while also resonating with contemporary community members. At the heart of this plan were objects made by community members, intended to reinforce the significance of all those involved in the repatriation process. In a recording of the public gathering that took place prior to the burial, Denise Smith of the treaty research office commented:

I want to thank Melvin [Mitchell] for a couple of things. Melvin was really man of the hour; we had a couple of problems with the size of the boxes, and he was able to just jump in and take care of that and make sure things were okay when we got here. So you know, he really went above and beyond to take care of that, and we're really grateful to you for that. He also, we gave one of his canoes as a gift to SFU. We happened to have some that were hanging in our office, and we chose one that was an unfinished canoe that had some paddles in it. We thought that was really appropriate because it was their journey home, and we thought that was a nice gift to give to SFU and thank them for taking care of our ancestors while they were there.¹

These remarks encapsulated many of the connections among objects, histories, and conceptions of tradition that underpin conversations I have had with community members about "histories of handmade items," the phrase I used to introduce my dissertation questions to community members I was meeting for the first time. This event was not only a repatriation of remains, buried in handmade burial boxes, and with journeys acknowledged with a handmade canoe; it was also a repatriation of historical agency, with objects playing a significant supporting role.

¹ *Sliammon Repatriation Ceremony*, video recording, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISHq1Q-HHho>.

As Denise Smith's remarks indicate, objects are not easily confined to specific histories, locations, or purposes, and my conversations with community members have reinforced this idea. Alongside objects we find arguments about the nature of authenticity and tradition in Sliammon over time. In this chapter, I use these questions and analyses, raised by community members I have met as well as by those who have recorded their interpretations in other media, to provide an introduction to the ways that people in Sliammon have considered objects and defined ideas of tradition over the course of recent generations that have seen significant change. In Sliammon, community members have used, discussed, and interpreted handmade items in diverse and often changing ways over time. They have been tangible or philosophical reminders of kinship connections and obligations, opportunities for defining the nature of what is traditional in Sliammon, and a means of demonstrating twentieth-century changes to community members' relationships to objects and processes of making them.

I first place the objects that community members have discussed into their contexts within relationships, both within Sliammon and with neighbouring Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. By identifying how these relationships have changed over the course of the twentieth century, I link processes of making things to processes of addressing the impacts of colonialism. Specifically, I discuss how these processes have played out for individuals, in families, and finally for community needs more broadly. The complex, shifting uses of traditional skills have allowed community members to adapt tradition to individual, family, and community needs. This complexity of tradition, then, has become a means of asserting Sliammon narratives against colonialism and the ways that community members have experienced it in the latter half of the twentieth century.

When introducing my research topic to Sliammon community members, many people I spoke with gravitated to talking about either carving or basket-weaving: activities that they considered traditional, with long histories in the community, as well as nostalgic familial appeal. While these are certainly not the only "making" activities that people in the community engage in, they are nevertheless ones that many community members feel provide valuable introductions to community histories and values. The community members I came to know in Sliammon often spoke about specific objects, or specific types of objects in our conversations. In particular, when, upon first meeting someone, I explained that my dissertation research focused on histories of handmade items, community members typically asked if I meant "traditional items" like carvings or baskets. I would usually try to clarify that they should speak about whatever processes of making things they liked or were most comfortable with, whether that was carving or weaving, or more recent

introductions like trade carpentry, knitting, or cross-stitch.

Nonetheless, community members focused primarily on items they regarded as traditional, and usually recommended other people for me to speak with based on those other people's traditional knowledge. It was not always clear to me whether they brought up these items because they assumed that that was my interest, or because they felt that such items deserved broader attention, but regardless, the direction that our conversations generally took highlighted the fact that ideas about tradition were as significant as the objects themselves. Definitions and invocations of tradition became significant in this chapter of histories of community dialogue around objects: these were not necessarily histories of objects, but rather were historiographies of objects in Sliammon conversations in the twentieth century. Changes in interpretations of objects and tradition over time became evident in the ways that people remembered the past in older interviews, and in comparing those interviews with my own conversations with community members

Activities like carving and weaving that community members defined as traditional were ways of demarcating historical and physical space and arguments. They helped to reinforce the significance of the *idea* of tradition for those community members with whom I spoke. For the most part they had been closely involved with research that began in the mid-1990s towards a Sliammon treaty with the federal government that would eventually be approved, by a slim margin in the community, in 2012. The early perspectives that I heard were part of a long-standing narrative of community space, autonomy, and history, but these had also been contested perspectives at times. My interviewees had similar outlooks on community needs and resources both past and present, and have worked closely with or had access to specific body of research conducted for treaty purposes. I made an effort to speak with people from other viewpoints, but was only partly successful, perhaps because of who I had formed relationships with early in my research, and those community members who were most willing to speak with researchers tended to be those who supported the treaty development or who had been interviewed as part of that process. Although the treaty has now been ratified and is in the process of being implemented, the tensions that surrounded its negotiations linger. The concerns of nearly half of all community members (at the time of voting) regarding the treaty are significant, and it is not my intention here to write an explicitly pro-treaty history. However, because of the nature of my relationships with specific community members and institutions, my perspectives have necessarily been informed by the same bodies of information and interpretation that informed processes of treaty research, negotiation, and implementation.

I had gotten to know Melvin Mitchell through several conversations both before and after

the repatriation ceremony. A carpenter, mechanic, carving and cultural educator in local schools, as well as a volunteer emergency services first responder, Melvin's schedule was often busy, and we met on various occasions in his friend's store where he was working, with his mother in her home, in his front yard workshop, and in his living room. These meetings were ones in which Melvin had a pre-conceived series of ideas, with specific lessons to be articulated, to share with me, perhaps not unlike Melvin's work with school-aged students. In these conversations — heavily weighted towards Melvin's explanations and my listening — he detailed for me the historical and contemporary connections forged by handmade objects. Some of these themes were repeated from conversation to conversation; in particular Melvin highlighted the role of knowledge as personal or family wealth. He described how he had been kept home from residential school, which gave him a stronger connection to elders than most of his peers: connections, he said, that gave him the knowledge of carving, carpentry, mechanics, and general tool repair that he has and shares today.² He explained how this knowledge could be created and shared, in part, by the making of objects and the sharing of skills. These interconnections, he argued, were historically at the core of relationships in Sliammon, and so he framed stories about objects in terms of local histories. Stories based on community members' memories and interpretations of objects in their own local histories form the basis of this chapter. These stories show how objects have become significant in historical contexts far beyond the local.

Melvin was one of the first community members I met in Sliammon, and perhaps because he works in educational roles, he has consistently made himself available to discuss themes pertaining to my dissertation. But as I got to know more community members, I also began to discover that Melvin's interpretations of objects and their histories differed from others. Themes of family status gained through objects and gifts of personal (nonmonetary) wealth were relevant to others with whom I spoke. Yet whereas Melvin had emphasized the importance of being able to access the knowledge of elders by creating and sustaining relationships through the making and exchange of objects, some community members sought to define the importance of objects through lenses of tradition, authenticity, or a comparison between past and present involvement of community members in making objects.

This diversity of interpretations did not emerge in a vacuum. In the mid-1990s, Sliammon began work with the B.C. Treaty Commission to assemble research and assess interest in negotiating a treaty with the provincial and federal governments. Since, like most of British Columbia and unlike

² Melvin Mitchell, interview by Katya MacDonald, 16 July 2013.

in most areas of the prairies, Sliammon had never signed a treaty to cede territory to the Crown, many wished to take this opportunity for community members to define traditional resources and territories in a legal document. One of the first major steps in the process was to undertake a Traditional Use Study in two parts, beginning in 1996 and concluding in 1998, to document the uses of Tla'amin territory in the past and present, along with stories that supported those histories of occupancy. Chapter 6 considers in more detail the implications of this study for historical interpretation, but on another level, the study also helped to reinforce worldviews and uses of objects as traditional — and helped to define tradition for community members. In the first phase of the project, elder Bertha Treakle offered a distinct contrast between past and present:

Kerri Timothy (interviewer): There's other traditional concepts they want us to ask about, like who owned the land?

Bertha Treakle: There's many ways to answer that. Nobody, nobody owns the land here originally. We're all here, we're just borrowing it, what we are staying on now. It belongs to our children and it belongs to their children as they come along. The white man came along and they turned everything around. Who bought this land? It's ours, after they kicked us out and put us on reserves, they said they owned the land but they don't. Our people, Kay miXw, they call us Indians but in any language, up and down the coast, you say Kay miXw, it means people and in any other language, they say it their way it still means people.³

Such definitions of tradition as spurred by the questions of the TUS were intended to be collective, to draw a distinction between pre-contact and post-contact lifestyles, and to be based on tangible markers. It is therefore significant that even when participants were not specifically asked to speak about handmade items — although such questions were standard in the interview process — their remarks helped to create and shape contexts in which objects would be discussed, both at the time and by community members I spoke with.

Indeed, the contrast between past and present (as of the 1990s TUS) helped to create a timeline into which interviewees inserted their observations of objects, their makers, and their shifting significance over time. By asking participants about their memories of older relatives'

³ Bertha Treakle, interview by Karen Galligos and Kerri Timothy, transcript, 1996, TUS 3.4.5, Sliammon Treaty Society.

activities, the TUS ensconced an image of a tangibly historical Sliammon that included or excluded activities. These activities, in turn, helped to define what community members considered to be traditional for Sliammon, and what activities were more relevant as traditional in places further afield. As an interview with elder Peter Galligos indicated:

Peter Galligos: Digging roots [for making baskets]?

Connie Wilson (interviewer): Yeah.

PG: Just my mother used to go out.

CW: Your mom?

PG: Yeah, my brother used to go with her, help her digging roots.

Karen Galligos (interviewer): Where?

PG: Just back here [likely on the slopes and mountains backing the community] somewhere. She was making baskets in them days, Indian baskets, the ladies make that.

CW: What about canoes or totem poles? Did anybody make that?

PG: No, not here.⁴

Outlining activities and makers, and assigning them to specific temporal periods or geographic locations, were ways of defining the nature of tradition for Tla'amin objects. In Peter Galligos' recollection, making handmade things was a process of creating household goods: items that may not have had the public or iconic visibility of west coast Indigenous canoes and totem poles. Including or excluding objects under the umbrella of tradition helped to reinforce contexts for discussing objects in which authenticity was temporally-defined. In other words, the authenticity of making objects was determined by the time period in which those objects were made in Sliammon, and in turn by the ways that subsequent community members evaluated the significance of specific objects in their community histories. Indeed, to mark the opening of the Tla'amin Governance House in 2016, the community raised several totem poles outside the building, an event that reinforced the ways that tradition and its meanings change over time in response to noteworthy moments, questions, and interests.

From the perspective of the TUS making objects in Sliammon was tied not only to notions

⁴ Peter Galligos, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 17 May 1996, TUS 25, Sliammon Treaty Society.

of tradition, but also to the claiming of space. Agnes McGee, who like most women of her generation was a basket-maker, described the necessary connections between the accessibility of materials and the process of completing finished objects. Making these items was also a cause to interact with traditional territories, and to discuss these interactions within the context of the TUS was also to link objects with territorial negotiation:

Karen Galligos: Can we talk about baskets?

Agnes: We cry over roots, we can't get any.

Karen: So where did you dig for roots?

Agnes: Savary Island was my mom's favorite place for digging roots and Denman Island, Hernando? And this place called Mary Island, they used to get really nice roots from all these places. They used to go camping, stay for three or four days and then they'd come back. Not on an outboard but rowing.

...

Karen: Did you get roots at Harwood?

Agnes: Yeah, but not that good.

Karen: How about behind Sliammon?

Agnes: Up on Wild Road, Moses Dominick was telling me that there's real nice roots up there. You don't have to walk too far. He said there's some real nice roots there.

I never did try it.⁵

Studies of material culture have at times focused on the characteristics or uses of finished items. Yet as Agnes McGee's remarks indicate, the finished items are necessarily part of space and interactions. Objects, then, have become linked to political arguments, particularly in the last two decades. The distinct dividing line between past and present that community members have drawn is therefore not only a line between authenticity and inauthenticity; rather, the increasing Euro-Canadian intervention in Tla'amin lives also signified an increase in ideological or political arguments attached to objects and their creation.

In a subsequent interview, Agnes McGee, along with fellow renowned basket-maker Mary George and her daughter Margaret Vivier elaborated on the relationships among objects and

⁵ Agnes McGee, interview by Connie Wilson and Karen Galligos, transcript, 21 July 1998, MIS 48.49.50.51, Sliammon Treaty Society.

territories, explaining how temporally speaking, their relationships with non-Indigenous neighbours were relatively new. Seemingly stream-of-consciousness, these reflections were interspersed with specific details of basket-making, suggesting that the TUS interviews, while intended to address a prescribed set of questions, were also shaped by interviewees' specific expertise and interpretations of what tradition entailed. The interview among the TUS interviewers and the three women exemplified the ways that such interpretations were constructed out of objects and spaces in tandem:

AM: I hear there was some Indians lived there [Finn Bay] too but I don't know who they were but there was supposed to be shacks there.

Karen Galligos (interviewer): Yeah, because there is a camp there, a cannery.

MG: In the olden days, people were always there. Like I was saying the younger people remember this. Like us, we went back there again.

MV: It is a very sheltered place there.

MG: Yes, but these new white man things, they came late. We, the native people were first. Then they made the road and made the store at Lund, and they made everything else. The road to Lund was a trail, all the way to Stillwater, it was all trail. Then they logged it and made the road. The road was rough at first. Our people walked to wherever they were going, trapping, that was before the white man came.

KG: So you call that grass for the baskets, Tii yum?

MG: Tla qem.

KG: Oh, I wonder who told me this one, tiy um, for baskets.

MG: T'ii yam. That's for basket too.

MV: That's the design.

AM: [Made of] wild cherry bark.⁶

It is also noteworthy that Mary and Agnes considered themselves in 1996 to be the "younger ones." By the time I met Margaret Vivier for my own dissertation work, her late mother's reputation had become that of a knowledgeable elder. These shifts in individuals' positions in the community offer a reminder that even when ideas of tradition or authenticity have been divided into pre- and post-contact, or traditional and modern eras, those categories have always shifted. What is significant is

⁶ Mary George, Agnes McGee, and Margaret Vivier, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 17 October 1996, TUS 59, Sliammon Treaty Society.

not necessarily that these classifications exist in community members' narrations of history, but rather that even when arguing for the value of specific pasts and worldviews, the pasts in mind are not static or ahistorical. Arguing for a resurgence of values or activities described as traditional is not necessarily an ahistorical venture, but rather a process of ongoing negotiation about the past.

I met with Margaret Vivier early on in my work in Sliammon, at the recommendation of cultural coordinator David (Bud) Louie. He suggested this meeting because of Margaret's connections to her late mother's basket-making expertise and position as a respected elder, as well as Margaret's own work in Tla'amin language teaching and preservation. While I had hoped to follow up with her in subsequent visits to the community, she was generally out of town, too busy to meet, or I was unable to get a hold of her. I was therefore only able to contextualize her analyses of objects and their historical significance through earlier interviews in which she had participated. Nevertheless, my conversation with her suggested ways that discussions in Sliammon regarding handmade items had changed since she spoke to the TUS interviewers nearly two decades earlier. Margaret noted these changes herself, commenting particularly on the diminishing interest in the Tla'amin language. She suggested that it was because neither she nor her mother had attended residential school that she has been able to speak the language well, and to be passionate about language education and preservation: an uncommon educational circumstance among Sliammon community members. Originally, it was Mary George who had been closely involved in teaching baskets and language, but as she got older, the work became too much for her, and David Louie suggested that she pass off one of the tasks to her daughter.⁷ This diminishing availability of people able to sustain tasks, like basket-making, that had been identified and broadly understood as traditional, was a common theme in my conversations with community members, but a discussion that seemed less urgent to elders interviewed by the 1990s TUS project, perhaps because they themselves sustained a community of makers of objects discussed by the TUS and by other community members with an interest in cultural education.

While concerns about decreasing knowledge of traditional tasks or activities have been significant in Sliammon since at least the 1970s,⁸ in the twenty years since the TUS, those concerns about loss have come to the fore of many community members' discussions of objects' historical

⁷ Margaret Vivier, interview by Katya MacDonald, 18 July 2013.

⁸ Such dialogues were beginning to reach mainstream conversation; then-chief Leslie Adams discussed with the *Powell River News* the necessity of maintaining what he saw as traditional crafts while also being able to work within the larger economy and workforce in and around the town of Powell River. "Another View: All-Indian Reserve School a "Retrograde Step";" *Powell River News*, 15 January 1971, sec. A8, Powell River Museum and Archives.

and contemporary significance. While previous generations remembered processes of making items as practical household tasks, contemporary community members often speak about them in contexts of cultural education or spreading awareness of Tla'amin historical lifestyles.

At the same time, TUS participants' reflections on past processes of making objects reinforces the fact that although objects in community members' conversations have at times been used as illustrations of a gulf between past and present, traditional and contemporary, they have been equally significant in conveying twentieth-century histories of Sliammon. Some of these histories were processes of interpreting diverse narratives about tradition. Anthropologist Wilson Duff was instrumental in the 1960s and 1970s in creating a market among art enthusiasts for Haida and Tsimshian carving in particular, by arguing for the preservation of Indigenous crafts. Duff's fieldnotes reveal that carvers themselves had varying opinions on the commercial popularity of their work, and the consumer motivations behind it – of one community visit, Duff wrote: “I tried to explain the importance of these things [totem poles] as ART by talking of books, shows etc on NWC art. They seemed unable to divorce the concept of art from its social context” -- but one result of Duff's work was nonetheless that the image of traditional northwest coast Indigenous art became quite clearly ensconced.⁹

When prompted to reflect on other seemingly traditional activities (that is, activities that had gained reputations in other northwest coast Indigenous communities as traditional), some Sliammon community members qualified their remarks by noting which activities had been commonplace in Sliammon, and which were introduced from elsewhere. Margaret Vivier, along with carvers Charlie Bob and David George, reflected on how carved items and designs had changed in their lifetimes:

Karen Galligos (interviewer): What about carving? Has anyone down here ever carve any masks, painting, besides making dug-outs and paddles?

DG: I knew any myself.

MV: Just canoes, dug-out canoes.

KG: Did it have designs on it?

MV: No, plain.

DG: I think this new carving thing was adopted by our own people just recently. Far back as I can remember, I have never seen any totem poles in Sliammon, never seen

⁹ See Wilson Duff, “Site Visits: Kitsquala 3-5,” n.d., Wilson Duff fonds, Box 3, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

designs on our boat.

KG: Yeah, Willie Mac always had one outside his house, right?

DG: I think its adapted that too, copied from another place.

...

KG: We were talking somebody about Frank George from Church House, he carved a lot of masks. I guess before he died somebody borrowed it and now they're in a museum. I don't know if they'll ever get it back.

...

DG: You're supposed to be able to. The ones they sent back to England, all that was taken during, well not on this reserve, the reserves up there, it was taken away when the potlatch was outlawed.

CW: I wonder why they did that? Outlaw potlatches.

DG: There's some kind of a reason the white people thought it was, people were using their beliefs in the wrong way or something like that.

KG: Like for evil or something like that?

DG: Yeah, and people, when they give potlatches, people were wasting all the money, the resources and all that, going overboard.

MV: That's when the Catholic Church came in and --

DG: They outlawed it so all the peoples stuff ended up in England, in the museum. And those people up there found out, around Alert Bay. They found out their masks and robes and everything were in England in a museum. They found out, bring it back.

KG: Did they give it back?

DG: Yeah, they gave it back.

KG: Oh.

DG: There's the odd one left, even the Queen had one. King George must have got it from over here.¹⁰

A history of twentieth-century making and objects therefore highlights a period in which

¹⁰ Margaret Vivier, Charlie Bob, and David George, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 28 May 1996, TUS 29.30.31.32, Sliammon Treaty Society.

understandings of tradition and authenticity were under constant negotiation and redefinition. The conversation among the three makers suggests larger underpinning challenges to knowledge and interpretation of making objects; my dissertation focuses primarily on a period beginning around the lifting of the potlatch ban in 1951,¹¹ an event that was both a cause and a symptom of the colonial structures that shaped and limited Tla'amin people's engagements with the histories and significances of objects for individuals and communities. While these larger contexts help to explain why community members have defined tradition in specific temporal terms, it is also important to note that throughout this period, community members have also held these conversations in reference to their own individual, family, local, and regional histories that do not always cite colonialism as the primary instigator of change. A history of shifting notions of tradition that centres on processes of making objects helps to illuminate the relationships among people and places that were defined by kinship, trade, diplomacy, and geography.

A result of these connections was that they helped to forge local distinctiveness as well as commonalities; while community members in the 1990s were at times keen to describe which objects had traditionally been made in Sliammon, and which had been introduced from elsewhere, the objects that elders cited from their own pasts were ones that highlighted local social histories, not only histories forged in reaction to colonial pressures. Discussions about canoes, for instance, illuminated how daily life in the earlier part of the twentieth century would subsequently create arguments for the contemporary, late-twentieth-century and beyond maintenance of historical practices of making things. A TUS interview with elders Johnnie George, Willie Bob, Henry Bob, Charlie Charlie, and Charlie Bob exemplified the relationships among objects as daily tools, and their later uses as bearers of tradition:

Karen Galligos (interviewer): So how did you guys get to Sliammon from Willingdon Beach [in the town of Powell River]? How did our people used to get there?

HB: Row boats.

JG: Row boats. They used to go all over with row boats, Victoria, Fraser River.

CW: Did they make their own row boats?

JG: Yeah, big ones, good ones.

HB: Dugouts.

¹¹ Under an amendment to the *Indian Act*, potlatch ceremonies were banned between 1884 and 1951. The legislation disrupted means of knowledge transfer, social and political organization, and relationships across communities and families.

JG: Me and Willie, we used to make dugouts. I got my last one in my back yard.

KG: Can you find any trees that are big enough so you can make dugouts anymore?

JG: No more.

KG: What happened to the trees?

JG: All logged out. Can't even find a decent one on Harwood Island, never, it's all gone, same up here. There's nothing up here. Of course I can't make dugouts anymore because my arm right here, have arthritis.¹²

While the men cited ecological change as a reason that canoes were no longer being made frequently, these ecological factors supported arguments for the treaty negotiation process and its eventual terms. In this instance, too, objects had shifted from being primarily household items to the basis of arguments for social or political change in Sliammon.

Other subsequent discussions of the differences between practical and collectible items suggested shifts in community histories in which objects sometimes did come to have value as artistic items rather than as reminders of past people and lifestyles, or as tangible definitions of tradition. But like conversations stemming from older generations of makers and users of objects, no single argument for the significance of objects prevailed, nor did changing arguments signal wholesale shift away from the memories of objects that came to light in the 1990s TUS interviews. Perhaps the most pronounced contrast is in the level of closeness that TUS interviewees had to skilled makers, in comparison to contemporary community members, some of whom, particularly those middle-aged and younger, have had to rely on childhood memories of elders' skills to teach themselves, or have sought help from makers beyond Sliammon. I draw this comparison not to highlight a narrative of linear cultural decline, even though some community members rightfully and understandably are concerned about losses of previous generations' knowledge and experience. Rather, community members' changing engagements with objects and skills in the past twenty to thirty years reveal mechanisms on community, family, and individual levels that community members have used to reinforce the significance of local histories to address contemporary needs. In 1996, community member Margaret Wilson described details of the basket-making process that, while vivid, were not necessarily helpful in teaching or learning the skill itself:

¹² Johnnie George et al., interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 19 June 1996, TUS 36, Sliammon Treaty Society.

Connie Wilson (interviewer): How long did it take your granny to make a basket?

One day?

MW: Yeah, depending how big. And if she made all that designs and some were wide, those strips were wide and some were thin, she would get that all done up first and then work on it all day. All those tools, I should have kept them. I think Maggie's got all those, she used to have a little box, you don't dare touch it...and she used to make those baskets, it looked so easy, I tried it once.

CW: Me too.

MW: Remember those baskets for picking clams? YaXiy.

CW: Yeah.

MW: It's got the holes in it to wash, that's the one I tried, it was lop sided every which way, all different sizes, it looked so easy when they were doing it.

CW: Yeah, Johnny was saying his granny wanted to pick berries one time, he went and grabbed a container, a basket, it was like that.

MW: They just grabbed it. They used to use their teeth, I remember my granny doing that, pulling it, wrapped around your toe.¹³

For Margaret Wilson, working at particular skills herself demonstrated the depth of knowledge required to implement them effectively. This recognition of historical skills has remained at the forefront of some community members' relationships with local histories. John Louie, who has been closely involved in seeking to renew Tla'amin rituals (such as individual physical and spiritual cleansing), particularly as part of his work as a men's support worker, has argued that to learn a culture, it is important to use it, not unlike the way that he learned to use a computer when he began his new job.¹⁴ This process of engaging tangibly with collectively- and individually-defined traditions has created informal institutions in Sliammon through which knowledge is transmitted. In other words, physical experiences of making things have reinforced local narratives of the past.

A small, informal group devoted to learning and practicing basket-weaving has existed in Sliammon for about thirty-five years, with group membership fluctuating around a fairly consistent core membership that grew out of the first weaving classes offered by Mary George. This group was

¹³ Margaret Wilson, interview by Connie Wilson, transcript, 11 October 1996, TUS 56, Sliammon Treaty Society.

¹⁴ John Louie, interview by Katya MacDonald, 19 July 2013.

the first formal one that today's weavers remember, but they also recalled how old women worked together informally in similar ways, first thing in the mornings.¹⁵ The group today meets as close to weekly as possible to motivate one another to work on basket projects, to catch up on local events and one another's lives, and, probably particularly when I — as someone who had introduced herself as interested in histories of items like baskets — was present, to reminisce about older relatives who used to make baskets. During my first visit with the weaving group, members framed baskets within contexts of everyday life in the past. Dorothy Louie, the daughter of two elders (Dave and Annie Dominick) who were interviewed several times for TUS research and remained well-respected resources on Tla'amin language and histories, remembered the way that her older relatives enjoyed the “singing” sound the cedar bark made when it was pulled through the structural slats. The group also discussed how their relatives of older generations frequently gathered to play games, visit, and sing songs while undertaking activities like fishing or weaving.¹⁶ Underpinning the weaving group, then, was a motivation to experience the practical and tangible histories of their families, not merely for nostalgic purposes, but also as a way of reinforcing the persistence of activities that community members had defined over the past several decades as traditional. In other words, weaving group members were adapting historical practices to address contemporary concerns.

Like many crafting groups, the weaving group did not and does not meet out of strictly philosophical or community development motivations. It is also a group of hobbyists who appreciate a connection to elements of a shared history, but whose individual experiences shape their reasons for joining the group in specific ways, often based on individual relationships to histories. Sandy Point, for instance, was, along with several other family members, vocal in protesting the treaty process in the years prior to its implementation. For this reason, and because he was the only man in the typically all-female weaving group (I discuss gender and processes of making more thoroughly in Chapter 9), Sandy's perspectives help to complicate the histories otherwise implicitly or explicitly reinforced by most of the other community members I had the opportunity to speak with. When we met, Sandy came to the elders' lodge, a large house formerly designated for large foster families, and now home to small community meetings or groups, as well as visiting graduate students. He brought his most recent basket project, a shallow container to hold his keys, phone, and other small objects by his front door.

He explained that he had originally learned to make baskets from elder Elizabeth Harry

¹⁵ Dorothy Louie, Betty Wilson, and Gail Blaney, interview by Katya MacDonald, 19 February 2015.

¹⁶ Dorothy Louie, Betty Wilson, and Sandy Point, interview by Katya MacDonald, 20 March 2014.

about thirty years ago, as she had been encouraging people at that time to take up basket-making before the skill was lost. But until he decided to quit drinking around 2011, Sandy had not taken the craft seriously. At that point, he needed an activity to occupy him, and he began to appreciate the way that basket-weaving connected him to his culture, his history, and to people in the past and “what they thought about.”¹⁷ Like other makers who conversed with me or with TUS interviewers, Sandy used the tangible experience of weaving as a means of highlighting a specific past, and responding to older generations’ calls for such knowledge to be reinforced. But these histories were not deterministic. Although all the members of the weaving group remembered similar practices and “historiographies” of elders, they translated these histories into contemporary community and individual action, at times in divergent or even contentious ways. These iterations of historical interpretation reinforce that material histories and processes of making objects are not representations of static identities, but rather, they are active participants in shaping the contemporary uses of histories.

Gail Blaney, a long-time member of the weekly weaving group, further explained that making activities have changed over time, even while endeavours to connect to traditions have remained relatively constant.¹⁸ The interest in making notions of tradition easily and broadly accessible has sparked engagement with materials and activities that, as some TUS participants had described, were not historically familiar in Sliammon, but all the same had grown out of increasing endeavours from the mid-twentieth century and beyond to facilitate intergenerational communication, familiarity with local and traditional materials, and senses of community beyond the local. One answer to these needs was cedar bark-weaving, previously used mainly for boat bailers, and now widely employed in making hats, roses, and other accessories and decorations. While baskets like the ones the weaving group makes are made from cedar roots, cedar bark, Gail noted, had become popular because it is faster and easier than roots to make finished items, especially when teaching children or large classes.¹⁹ Whereas Gail had learned to make baskets from older relatives, she learned to work with cedar bark by taking a class on Granville Island in Vancouver. This class provided an opportunity to connect with skills originating in other Indigenous communities, within a pan-Salish network of broader historical experience. By facilitating a more accessible mode of engagement with cedar — a resource that Indigenous peoples across Coast Salish territory have highlighted as a cornerstone of spiritual and occupational activities — teachers

¹⁷ Sandy Point, interview by Katya MacDonald, 3 August 2014.

¹⁸ Gail Blaney, interview by Katya MacDonald, 19 February 2015.

¹⁹ Ibid.

and students of all ages in Sliammon have been able to experience historical materials within contemporary hobby and recreational modes.

The accessibility of cedar bark work sits in contrast to the travels and uses of baskets that Gail's grandmother made: she noted that she does not have any of her grandmother's designs, because her grandmother had been widowed young, and needed to trade her baskets for food and clothing for the family. Today, Gail commented, there is great demand for such baskets, and people both in Sliammon and in neighbouring (primarily non-Indigenous) communities talk about the basket collections inherited from family members who had either made or traded for them in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰ The conditions that sparked the creation of those baskets were part of an economy of making objects: Sliammon women were particularly dependent on selling baskets if they did not have a husband in the work force or able to provide for the family in other ways. Today, by contrast, the commodity is in the collection of baskets, and more broadly, in the ability to make or own items grown out of tradition. As these meanings of tradition have changed over time, so too have activities considered traditional. As evidenced by the growth in popularity in Sliammon of cedar bark work, traditions have not been limited by strict delineations of what "belongs" or does not to Sliammon, which is a shift from the discussions that took place in TUS interviews.

Building on community members' growing interest in cedar bark weaving, various community members in Sliammon have instituted workshops and other informal and formal opportunities for those who are interested in learning about ways to engage with traditional materials. In 2015 Maureen Adams organized such an event held at the adult education centre in Sliammon, Ahms Ta Ow (which roughly translated means "teachings"). Maureen's motivation for organizing the event was to "create more material culture because that's how we identify ourselves."²¹ For those in the class, this visual expression of local connections has grown out of motivations that referred not only to historical antecedents, but also more recent history in which those traditions have come under threat from colonial institutions.

While the first day of the cedar hat workshop was quiet and focused as participants — some who had made hats before, and others who were new to the process — worked to fall into a comfortable weaving groove. On the second day, as the hats neared completion, the atmosphere was more relaxed. Participants began to accuse each other jokingly of stealing their materials or aesthetic

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Maureen Adams, February 21, 2015.

ideas, and Maureen Adams quipped, in wry reference to social problems that have characterized portrayals of Indigenous communities in the mainstream media, that these thefts and accusations represented “the real twentieth-century community.”²² This comment was met with general laughter, as participants noted the utter lack of real tension in the room. Conversations also turned to questions among the group of whether they remembered previous generations working with cedar in this way. Many, perhaps most of the participants were or had been employed by the First Nation, often on cultural, historical, or linguistic advocacy and research, and had considerable knowledge and interest in the historical processes behind the hats that they were making. None, however, could recall the Tla’amin word for “cedar hat,” nor were they certain if such a word existed at all, given the newness of the craft to Sliammon. Later in the day, one of the oldest elders in the community, Dave Dominick, stopped by on his daily walk, and he was able to teach the group the word. This exchange, while conversational in nature and driven mainly by casual curiosity, offered temporal depth to the activity taking place, helping to fulfil a goal of the workshop to demonstrate continuity of knowledge and resource usage within a century or more of profound change.

These conversations also helped to give a sense of ways that such knowledge travels among community members and beyond: it relies, as community members often acknowledge, on elders and the willingness and ability of others to listen. But at the same time, in this instance, this piece of linguistic and historical knowledge was dependent on being part of the particular network of involvement in community events and official mechanisms for sharing knowledge. The hat-making workshop was not an exclusive space: the band office covered participation fees, and organizers and participants invited any passers-by or visitors to join in. But at its core, those who participated were largely those who already had access to research and cultural resources in Sliammon through other means. The hat workshop was illustrative of the fact that my knowledge, like that of community members, is defined largely by the people I was able to meet; it is not necessarily universally understood in the same ways, and some perspectives and voices are more prominent than others.

While many of the community members I spoke with cited the needs or interests of their community as a broad entity, I sought to make individualized or diverging histories as explicit as possible, given that the most prominent voices shaping my understandings of Tla’amin histories were those supporting the treaty. Those who spoke about histories of made things in less “orthodox” ways also contribute to the conversations I consider in this dissertation. When I began to approach people in Sliammon to discuss my dissertation questions, my advisors and contacts such

²² Maureen Adams, February 22, 2015.

as Betty Wilson and David Louie suggested approaching Don Wilson, as he had spent time learning about Tla'amin traditions. Over the last two decades, Don had taken classes both in Sliammon and at postsecondary institutions on Vancouver Island to gain familiarity with traditional crafts and values, initially with the intention to sell the items. As he learned more, though, he found that the processes of making things were spiritual endeavours, and he felt that they should be separate from commercial aims.

Don also described his learning process as a direct response to the ways that he had experienced colonialism, and how others' responses to colonialism had shifted over time. He explained that in the early stages of research towards treaty in the 1990s, he had become involved as he saw a need for more autonomous governance and jurisdiction over resources. But as the process evolved, his critiques of it expanded. He explained that what he called the "spiritual revival" he had undergone in his 40s in the early 1990s, just before the treaty negotiation process began, had profoundly shaped his perspective on all things related to Sliammon, its history, and his place within historical knowledge. One of the first points of negotiation, both within the community and with the other treaty-making entities, was the role of traditional governance: what traditional governance had entailed, and when, and how those structures might be applied to present-day governance needs. Treaty researcher Siemthlut (Michelle Washington) argued that "those fundamental concepts of our culture are still relevant in modern society, and...we have a moral obligation to include them in our everyday lives and in our plans for the future."²³ This report on contemporary iterations of traditional governance encouraged the adaptation, rather than the wholesale reproduction, of traditional leadership to Sliammon's current needs, as a means of extracting the community from a legacy of colonialism. This question became complicated: because the *Indian Act* had superimposed new ways of reckoning heredity, the connections of some Sliammon people to hereditary chiefs were called in to question, or were difficult to discern. Furthermore, in a 1999 survey of eligible treaty voters, only 30.3% felt that Sliammon was ready for self-governance.²⁴

Self-governance, then, was an uncertain question. Having been involved in this preliminary research and as discussions increased in Sliammon, seeking to learn and interpret how elements of traditional governance could be incorporated into contemporary self-governance agreements, Don Wilson came to realize that the references to God that he had heard in church and residential school prayers were one and the same as references to Hegus (meaning chief or respected leader): they all

²³ Siemthlut Michelle Washington, "Bringing Traditional Teachings to Leadership," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (1 July 2004): 583–603.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 595-6.

meant “chief” in the fatherly sense. He extrapolated from this realization to conclude that traditional spirituality was the right path for him to follow, and that hereditary leadership and chieftdom should forefront treaty discussions.²⁵ The precise details of heredity and title were contested among some families, however, and it was because of these conflicts that Don decided that treaty negotiations, particularly because these discussions about tradition were placed in a context where they would be critiqued by provincial and federal governments, would only serve to reinforce strife and disunity, and risked setting the community up for failure, and so he became hesitant about supporting them.²⁶ His processes of learning to make traditional things, then, were also political critiques that were embedded in histories and their roles in contemporary concerns. While objects themselves did not become part of these discussions directly, their presence in Tla’amin histories gave them political significance, and enabled them to become tools for interpreting the contemporary relevance of particular histories.

While objects and histories of making things have offered direct commentary on community interests, and have helped to pinpoint significant individual and community historical moments, community members have also outlined moments that indicate that it is not practical or appropriate to place objects in any single category. Even though TUS interviewees and community initiatives like band-funded carving and weaving classes have defined specific types of objects as traditional and therefore important to share with future generations, the histories of the objects themselves indicate that these distinctions do not tell the whole story. When I visited Betty Wilson, a member of the weaving group, Tla’amin language advocate and researcher, and one of my most frequent conversation partners in Sliammon, she showed me a round item, like a potholder, woven from cedar. She had found it in the garbage, and after asking around, had found that it had belonged to Gail Blaney, another member of the weaving group, who had had the object in her household. Gail believed that the item had brought nothing but bad luck to her house, and felt that the best course of action was to get rid of it, even though it was an object at least a generation old. In her time owning the item, Betty had not had the same problem as Gail, but just in case had decided to wave it over a fire to appease any spirits that may have been involved with it.²⁷ In this instance, tradition — whether in the form of an old handmade item, or in the form of Tla’amin spirituality — did not define community members’ courses of action. Tradition, then, is not deterministic, even when it has been ensconced in official narratives as static or belonging to a specific historical era.

²⁵ Don Wilson, interview by Katya MacDonald, 17 July 2013.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Betty Wilson, interview by Katya MacDonald, 21 July 2013.

The interpretive nature of tradition means that objects made with it in mind can also be deployed for specifically didactic purposes, creating not only objects themselves but also narratives. Objects have inhabited Tla'amin historical narratives and community events as well as physical spaces. Melvin Mitchell, who is often keen to find the teaching and learning opportunities in objects close at hand, described a paddle he was working on for a friend's daughter. This girl had dropped out of school and moved far away at a young age, and her father had asked Melvin to make a paddle to remind her of where she comes from, and of her connections to her family back home. The design consisted of a fledgling eagle and a "granny eagle," with the granny in greyscale "because we don't know what the spirit world looks like," and because it reminded Melvin of a black and white TV to represent the past. The family also felt that the girl reminded them of her granny, and indeed carries her name. Further up the paddle was a whale to represent her coastal home, followed by a blank space for the girl to paint what she wants, to connect her family's and her own meaningful experiences.²⁸

Melvin saw the collaborative and consultative experience of completing the paddle as a way of seeking out communication. This communication was informed by the ways that Melvin invoked symbolic histories. In this case, unlike the histories he referred to were not from the past specifically defined — for instance by the TUS interviews — as traditional or retaining pre-contact "authenticity." Instead, Melvin's references to histories invoked the temporality of tradition. By referring to the spirit world, Melvin placed the paddle into that family's own historical timeline, and he added specificity by indicating that the particular time period he hoped the girl would think of was that of her granny's youth: the era of black-and-white television. The story of Melvin's paddle is therefore also a story about the ways that tradition has been re-interpreted and invoked to address the needs of community members that do not necessarily fit within larger band initiatives. It is also a history of changing applications of tradition: it was not only the act of carving the paddle that was significant, either to Melvin or to the girl and her family, but also the particular arguments that the paddle made about family histories that did not necessarily match larger community narratives about the temporality of culture and the past.

These community-wide narratives were often supported by treaty research, but not created by it; local political leaders and expert makers had been making similar arguments prior to entering into the BCTC negotiation process. Melvin Mitchell's grandfather, Bill Mitchell, for instance, spoke to the *Powell River News* in 1966 about what he saw as a direct link between skills like canoe-building

²⁸ Melvin Mitchell, interview by Katya MacDonald, 21 July 2013.

and the strength of a community or culture: “So many of the young people have no interest in the old crafts...and even less in the old legends and songs. I am afraid we as a people will lose our heritage.”²⁹ Nevertheless, the research that surrounded early discussions about the particulars of a possible future treaty created a body of archival documentation. As research towards a treaty agreement continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Sliammon began to amass a collection of historical, archaeological, and ecological reference materials, both collected from other institutions and created by community members. At times building out of the TUS interviews, and in other instances based on archival or secondary research sources, reports produced by community members on questions of material history and tradition further served to ensconce specific items, processes, and resources as traditional to Sliammon. They also helped to create an environment in which research regarding Tla’amin traditional lands, territories, and practices would be closely linked to the interests of treaty negotiations, at least for the duration of the negotiation process. In the treaty research office’s collections, research on handmade histories and objects exist mainly within very specific ways of discussing a pre-contact or traditional past.

Within quests for continuity, discussions about objects in Sliammon in the last several decades have held several common threads, as they have connected a series of histories concerning local affairs in Sliammon. Community or spiritual values, personal growth, access to resources, and local political questions have all been themes that arise from discussions of objects. Handmade items and their histories within Sliammon people’s lives have therefore not only reflected processes of making physical things themselves. As community members have made things, they have also engaged with changing spaces, environments, family connections, and narratives about tradition. In Sliammon’s twentieth-century relationships with handmade items, objects help to show how the community has changed over time, as access to materials and access to historical knowledge have changed as well. These objects have been key participants in community members’ discussions about Tla’amin values in the twentieth century, and in efforts to make local histories visible.

These histories have been significant not only for ethical reasons of increasing Indigenous people’s visibility. For community members who have conveyed narratives about handmade items, either within the context of larger political research, or in more direct response to my questions, these have also been conversations about changing community needs over time. In part through their engagements with processes of making things, community members have consistently reframed and re-evaluated the role of tradition in Sliammon. Rather than being a universal loss of

²⁹ “Indian Chief Keeps Ancient Skills Alive,” *Powell River News*, 16 June 1966, Powell River Museum and Archives.

culture, using tradition – as exemplified by handmade items – in new or changing ways has allowed community members to directly counteract the essentialism that has underpinned colonizing efforts. While intra- and inter-community relationships in Sliammon have shifted over the course of the twentieth century, sometimes in response to community members' material access to making things, these changes have led to new ways of addressing the impacts of colonialism. The complex, shifting uses of traditional skills have allowed community members to adapt tradition to individual, family, and community needs. This complexity of tradition, then, has become a means of asserting Sliammon narratives against colonialism and the ways that community members have experienced it in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 3: Negotiating Intercultural Histories of Tradition and Things in Sliammon

In 2014, Sliammon hosted a gathering of three communities, Sliammon, Klahoose (at Church House up the coast) and Homalco (across the strait on Vancouver Island) to celebrate their intertwined kinship and histories. The intention of the gathering was to create a new tradition of closer visits and communication, as had been common in previous generations. In their opening remarks, the chiefs of the three communities noted that these kinds of gatherings have, in recent years, tended to happen mainly for funerals, and that it was a special treat to have their coming together be a happy occasion. Their intention was to celebrate unity, family connections, and the fact that they all spoke the same language. The day consisted of a feast together, followed by a series of presentations by a high school Tla'amin drumming group, preschoolers singing Tla'amin songs, and solo musicians. The centerpiece of the gathering was a ceremony developed by a Vancouver Indigenous artist, honouring thirteen grandmothers in each of the communities across B.C. where the artist's specially-created regalia travelled. At the end of the day, leftovers were packed up to send home with visitors, and prayers and songs sent them on their way. Those who did not have ferries to catch remained behind for dancing and music with an oldies band from Sliammon. The gathering, and the shifting relationships among the communities offered examples of the ways that the geography of historical objects and their makers, as discussed by TUS participants, informants to anthropologists, and contemporary community members, has helped to define ideas and histories that were distinct to Sliammon, even despite that community's close family and cultural connections to neighbouring First Nations.

Objects have also helped to illuminate historical connections among Sliammon and other coastal Indigenous communities, between Sliammon and residents of the neighbouring mill town of Powell River, and within Sliammon families that helped in turn to forge the contexts in which I, as a newcomer researcher, was able to hear community members' discussions of histories of handmade items. The place of objects in a series of interviews conducted by Sliammon community members in the 1990s, alongside contemporary community members' oral histories, have created a shifting oral historiography around handmade items in Sliammon. Narratives about objects have also helped to show how the meanings and uses of tradition have not been static concepts, but instead have been reinterpreted by community members over time as the needs for tradition in Sliammon have changed as well.

Expanding on the discussions in the previous chapter of relationships within and beyond communities, in this chapter I explore how processes of making things in Sliammon have demonstrated how tradition has been defined in changing or overlapping ways. I look at how community members have depicted tradition within Sliammon itself, as well as constructed a collaborative notion of tradition with other Coast Salish and other Indigenous communities. Through these conversations, it becomes clear that objects, traditions, and histories have been closely intertwined. I therefore also discuss how the oral historiography identifies specific historical moments or issues that shaped definitions of tradition. I explore how community members have responded to changing experiences with colonialism and racism; motivations for revitalizing historical skills; and folding new practices into existing definitions of tradition, to evaluate the sociopolitical significance of tradition in Sliammon.

The inter-community gathering was underpinned by a collective sense that the three communities had had their historic connections undermined by colonialism. The fracturing of inter-community relationships was a story and a process that had existed for several generations in community members' memories and tellings, but the precise catalysts remain under discussion. In TUS interviews about the reaches of traditional Sliammon territory, several elders and interviewers compared versions of what had taken place; Connie Wilson explained that she had heard that a nineteenth-century Oblate priest had separated what had previously been one unified band into the three groups of Homalco, Klahoose, and Sliammon as they exist today.¹ Elder Andy Paul also stated that the three tribes had previously been one, but that competition over resources and land use had pushed them apart. While Andy Paul's story does not explicitly cite colonialism as a determining factor in these splits, the temporal scope of the TUS interviews as well as Paul's reference in his interview to the delineation of reserve land suggests that the fracturing of a larger community took place around the same time — 1913-1916 — that the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission was travelling throughout much of B.C. to map, allot, and at times systematically reduce reserve lands. The Commission reached Sliammon in 1915, and Chief Tom, Sliammon's last hereditary chief, met with the commissioners to explain the ways that his community members were using and intended to use reserve land. They requested tools and assistance in setting up small-scale agriculture in the form of orchards, livestock, and crops, assurance of ongoing access to fisheries, and at one point, worked to clarify what it meant to belong to Sliammon as a community. Chief Tom addressed the commissioners:

¹ Agnes McGee, interview by Connie Wilson, transcript, 9 May 1996, TUS 12, Sliammon Treaty Society.

There is one question I want to ask you - there is a man here by the name of Joe Gallagus [sic] who has got into trouble with my people - This man he wants to get a piece of land belonging to the Sliam-mon people - He is married to an Indian woman and he wants to get a piece of land on the reserve. The Sliam-mon people each have their own piece of land and there is no room for this man to get a piece of land on our reserve and we want to find out what Joe can do. I want to give him some land outside of the reserve, and I want to know if that would be all right.²

While there is no direct connection between Chief Tom's meeting with the McKenna-McBride Commission and the split into three communities, these discussions nevertheless help contextualize the events that Andy Paul described in his TUS interview, which likely referred to a similar time period. Concerns over space and resources were at the forefront of community members' minds, and when these concerns intersected with settler interests or with uncertainty about the future within colonial contexts, conflict sometimes resulted. As Andy Paul and Stella Timothy explained:

Kerri Timothy (interviewer): So how did you guys start interacting with Sliammon people. What did they go up there or you guys come here or how did it all combine?

Andy Paul: From Church House and Squirrel Cove used to live here before.

KT: Yes.

AP: And they used to live in Scuttle Bay. All over the place, they used to camp, they used to be together.

KT: They used to camp in Scuttle Bay?

AP: No. They built their own shack houses.

Stella Timothy: Shack.

AP: Shack houses.

KT: Who owned a shack?

AP: They build it themselves. It was a whole reserve almost to Lund all the ways from here.

KT: Like a family member and lived in Scuttle Bay? Who build their shacks out

² "Typescript of Testimony, Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of BC, New Westminster Agency" (Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, n.d.), p. 285, Sliammon Treaty Society.

there?

AP: They built it themselves?

KT: Who is 'they?'

AP: Who ever moves here, like my dad after he married come back this way.

KT: So he had a shack there and Francis Paul.

AP: Yeah. They used to go across [to] Texada [Island]. All over the place.

KT: Did he have a shack over there?

AP: No. They used to go there and log or beach comb and that's how come these people from Sliammon kicked them out. They didn't want them to live there. They had to leave to Squirrel Cove or Church House. They were supposed to be all in one.

ST: One tribe.

AP: Yeah. One tribe over here.

ST: But it was, they didn't want the people from Church House.

AP: And hunting and that, that's why they would get jealous and kicked, had to move out, that's why there is Squirrel Cove over here and Church House over there.

ST: And Sliammon over here.³

Hosting the 2014 unity event was, in light of the ongoing effects of histories of fragmentation, a way for Sliammon and the other communities to respond, reclaim, and reframe historical and contemporary relationships in their own image: an image of historical connection and desires for harmony. It is this image, both past and present, that has helped people in Sliammon to define their community's uniqueness within interconnectedness. In turn, the "local-ness" of Sliammon objects, makers, and practices of making things have helped to underpin the ways that these factors have created and shaped the idea of tradition in Sliammon.

Sliammon's place in a larger cultural, Coast Salish, and intercultural world has been a shifting context for the making activities that have taken place there, and so discussions of kinship, alliance, reputation, and racism have been closely tied to the resulting objects themselves. The significance of particular connections has also been subject to the same processes of interpretation that community members have used to interpret objects. Don Wilson, whose approach to learning traditional skills I discussed in the previous chapter, drew not only from traditions he understood from previous generations; he also cited long histories of Salish interconnectedness to strengthen the broader

³ Andy Paul and Stella Timothy, interview by Kerri Timothy, transcript, 13 May 1996, TUS 15, Sliammon Treaty Society.

legitimacy of his knowledge and experiences. Referring to his own family histories as well as to the work of anthropologists such as Homer Barnett in the 1960s and Kennedy and Bouchard in the 1970s and 1980s, Don depicted the interconnectedness of Salish groups through trade and kinship, from the interior to the coast. He also reinforced the importance of stories to maintaining those connections, by keeping track of who is related to whom, who holds obligations to whom, and what a homeland should entail.⁴

Stories about names and genealogies have been used to reinforce Sliammon's historical role as a self-contained community whose most tangible connections to other places and people had waned over the course of the twentieth century. John Louie, for instance, told a story about the geographical scope of the hereditary name, Qa7aXustalas, of current elder Elsie Paul, author of an autobiography, recipient of an honorary doctorate, and perhaps the elder most frequently consulted in Sliammon by community members, journalists, and academics. The owner of the hereditary name, from a more northerly community in the late nineteenth century, had wanted to pass his chieftainship on to his only son. Since his son was travelling, the chief sent a party of men to find him. After a long while, they discovered him in Nanaimo, scrubbing the deck of a ship. But when the search party explained why he should come home, he did not reply, and the men had no choice but to return home to the chief and hope that he would not be upset.

In response, however, the chief suggested that they arrange a marriage for his son, and thought immediately of a chief at Cape Mudge — a Lekwiltok community across the strait from Sliammon — who had four daughters. Once one of these daughters was selected, the party returned to Nanaimo to tell the son, but the ship he was working on had departed. They waited until it returned, and when the son was informed of the planned marriage, again he did not respond. The chief had lost faith that his son would ever come back. But after a long while, he spotted a canoe in the distance, and when the tide was out, it pulled up on shore. It was the son, and while he agreed to travel with the men to Cape Mudge, he chose a different daughter to marry. That daughter, known as Qa7aXustalas or Annie Assu, was the mother of Chief Tom, the brother of Elsie Paul's grandfather,⁵ Lahsa. Through those connections, John Louie explained, her family is related to members of the White family in Nanaimo and members of the Rice family in Victoria. Knowing those family networks, John continued, was an important component of knowing one's culture.⁶

Tracing the travels and ownership of the name became a matter of interest for descendants

⁴ Don Wilson, interview, 21 July 2013.

⁵ Indiannuity Productions, *Project: Historical Research on Basketweavers*, DVD (Sliammon, B.C., 2010).

⁶ John Louie, interview.

of Qa7aXustalas. Particularly because, in Elsie's case, several other cousins shared the Qa7aXustalas name, and because Elsie had found it difficult to research the meaning of the name due to its diffusion across coastal cultures and communities,⁷ claiming a space for Tla'amin culture in particular has been a goal of community members' discussions and making of objects in the latter part of the twentieth century. A version of Elsie's hereditary name is found in the title of the Kwagu'l Gixsam clan and Leslie Robertson's *Standing up with Ga'axsta'las: Jane Constance Cook and the politics of memory, church, and custom*, tracing this name holder's political involvements and encounters with colonizing institutions over the course of her life. This work reinforces the mobile history of this hereditary name, to the extent that the various families with connections to the name may not be able to follow the precise path that the name has followed, as Elsie has noted. Two years after Robertson's book was published, Elsie's own life history, written in collaboration with historian Paige Raibmon and Elsie's granddaughter Harmony Johnson, was published by the same publisher. Neither the academic nor the community member authors of either book directly addressed the recurrence or scope of the hereditary name, suggesting that while inter-community connections have shaped the ways that makers undertook their work (as exemplified, for instance, by the trade in materials that Elsie has described), the makers' relationships with their local communities carried more weight.

A community-produced video featured Elsie Paul around 2010 examining a collection of early- to mid-twentieth-century baskets made by family members of contemporary community members, in conversation with Sliammon language and culture researcher (and basket-maker) Betty Wilson and former Campbell River Museum director Linda Hogarth. In the video, Elsie commented on the basket's patterns and distinguishing features and who had made them, but she also explained the family histories and connections among those makers. As Betty pointed out, Elsie had grown up watching the basket makers whose work was being examined, whereas Betty had only known them at the end of their lives. Betty noted that their perspectives on the baskets and their significance were dictated by generational experiences.⁸ In particular, the baskets that Betty understood to be associated with Sliammon had also originated from earlier generations' inter-community connections like those that underpinned Elsie's name and its cultural and geographical reach.

Although the information contained by the baskets is, in Elsie's view, "a keepsake, our

⁷ Leslie A. Robertson, *Standing up with Ga'axsta'las: Jane Constance Cook and the Politics of Memory, Church, and Custom* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

⁸ Indiannuity Productions et al., *Project: Historical Research on Basketweavers*.

history,”⁹ this history also implicitly includes and excludes. Elsie noted that some weavers, like her grandmother, favoured canary grass over cornhusk for weaving patterns into the basket, and that some weavers used synthetic dyes, when they became available, to dye the grass bright colours. Linda Hogarth elaborated that it was mainly Homalco weavers who did so, creating a visual cue for the identity of those baskets.¹⁰ But beyond personal or local preference, the selection of materials was dictated by responses to European-introduced changes, as well as by trade relationships. Canary grass does not grow in the area around Sliammon; instead, those basket-makers who wished to use it would trade for it with people from Vancouver Island, particularly around Duncan and Cowichan.¹¹ Furthermore, once corn as a crop was readily available in Sliammon territory, although it was a cheap and easily-acquired substitute for canary grass, makers found that it was not as durable and did not yield as tidy a pattern.¹² Seeking out canary grass by exercising kinship and trade connections, even if not intended as an intentional response to changes wrought by colonialism, was nevertheless a commentary on the material value of being able to navigate back and forth between local and regional knowledge. Hereditary names and basket traits therefore reinforced each other’s statements on the nature of mid-century Tla’amin basket-makers’ navigation between the local and the regional, as well as later observers’ incorporation of those histories into statements about family, community, and ownership as they existed beyond the lifetimes of the basket-makers themselves.

The physical appearance of historical baskets has also been cited by contemporary basket-makers as evidence of detrimental changes that had taken place within the larger coastal Indigenous world. As Elsie noted, basket weavers today struggle with the lack of good-quality materials like that they or their elders had been able to access even as recently as thirty years ago. At that time, good roots — that is, long and straight ones — were easy to find locally. The result was baskets that were finely-wrought and smooth, with few joins.¹³ Elsie commented that “the work of the elders, the ancestors, [was] very intricate. They had so much patience.”¹⁴ She had noticed a shift even in the accessibility of materials for her grandmother, as compared to previous generations; Elsie’s great-grandmother’s work was finer than her grandmother’s, which was already noteworthy for its intricate details.¹⁵ By contrast, increased private land ownership in the territories where weavers had

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

previously harvested roots has meant that access to those materials is restricted, and some harvesters have even been threatened by property owners with guns.¹⁶ In a TUS interview, basket-maker Mary George described the changing relationships among Sliammon people and newcomers to the region, beginning in the nineteenth century:

They started down there, that is where they stayed. The white man made a trail from Westview, came to Powell River, to the bushes behind us, to Lund. That must have been the first place that they pointed out that they wanted to take, they were on horses, they made it and the trail went all the way over there. Our people stayed here close to the beach. It was just recently that our people stayed on Harwood Island, after the Indian Agents came, Indian Affairs and the Policeman. The first to come was the priest, the priest's name was Sheelowis. He was the one of the first to come here after our people got here. He taught our people how to pray, he wanted to bring the children to school. I guess that is when the residential schools started, our Indian people did not want our children to go away to school. I guess there was no school here long time ago. It was the priest that kept coming here, it was what they called the policeman used to come here, Indian Affairs found out, when Powell was growing and getting bigger. Indian Affairs came here, our people were not scared of the white man, not long after that, they finished whatever they were doing, I guess that is when they built the church. It was the priest that started everything, built the church, Indian Affairs came and looked after their food, I guess it was "relief."¹⁷

These were the colonial contexts to which basket-makers were adapting, and particularly noteworthy in community members' tellings is the scope and rapidity of those changes. For basket-makers, the availability of materials has been a litmus test for the invasiveness of colonial restrictions on their traditional activities. Yet at the same time, the inter-community connections that events like the inter-community gathering described above have also remained valuable opportunities for pursuing making activities. By following objects like baskets and the underlying processes of making them, the relationships among the local, the regional, and the changing nature of tradition become more complex, and more closely tied to specific historical changes.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mary George, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 4 August 1998, MIS 52.53.54, Sliammon Treaty Society.

These conversations about the place of Sliammon within larger histories, cultural groups, and spaces took place largely during my first visit to Sliammon to begin my dissertation research, and they shaped the direction of my research. While I acknowledge that a dissertation is unavoidably governed primarily by academic priorities, I also hoped that my work would be shaped by Tla'amin perspectives as far as possible. Histories of making things in Sliammon have also been histories of citing unique claims to territories or histories, so that making things is also a methodological discussion that underpins the histories themselves. For Tla'amin people, these connections to other coastal and interior communities were not only significant for what they could explain about family and community histories; there were also practical implications in questions of repatriation, documentation, or explanation of handmade items, especially when such questions were drawn into treaty research.

While I discuss objects in newcomer institutions more fully in Part II of this dissertation, the implications of changes in inter-community connections alongside changing experiences of colonialism have also shaped the way that community members have discussed and defined authenticity in Sliammon itself. Because many of the TUS participants had passed away by the time I first visited Sliammon, I am not able to elaborate on their relationships within the community to the extent that I am sometimes able to when writing with people I know personally. That said, the structured style of the TUS interviews meant that I have sometimes been able to compare the responses of various participants, to consider the diversity of experience and interpretation within the community. In general, participants in the TUS interviews were clear (though not necessarily in agreement) about whether particular practices or objects had been familiar in Sliammon in previous generations, or whether they had been introduced from elsewhere. Establishing these delineations not only provided a signpost for shifting understandings of tradition; the TUS conversations also articulated understandings of Sliammon as a distinct place, within a larger Coast Salish and coastal world that had, in some outsiders' descriptions, been linked unclearly or indiscriminately with other related but ultimately separate communities.¹⁸

For Sliammon people remembering the early parts of the twentieth century, one person stood as a contrast to what Sliammon people considered representative of home and tradition. Frank Paul, originally from Haida Gwaii, which gave him his nickname of "Hita," brought with him practices in the 1920s that were foreign to people in Sliammon, but that, as connections among

¹⁸ Until the late 1970s, Homer Barnett was the only ethnographer who depicted Sliammon as a community distinct from other communities within its language group. See Barnett, *The Coast Salish of British Columbia*.

communities were increasingly cited as counterpoints to the restrictions of colonialism, became incorporated into Sliammon understandings of tradition as well — indeed, another TUS elder, Pete Wilson, described Frank Paul as “a real Indian.”¹⁹ Frank Paul’s carving and his ceremonial uses of the finished products were closely intertwined, as Bertha Treakle’s and Vince Timothy’s recollections explain:

Kerri Timothy (interviewer: What about Indian dancing? We weren’t too much into that, were we? Our culture, like way back?

Vince Timothy: I don’t remember; I remember Frank Paul used to do that at the old that used to be back here.

Bertha Treakle: Hita.

VT: Yeah.

KT: That was Haida?

VT: Haida, yeah.

BT: Hita.

VT: He used to have these masks and he’d do dances on New Years.²⁰

At the time that this interview took place, Sliammon carvers like Charlie Bob were experimenting with mask-making, in part because potential customers from both within and beyond Sliammon had expressed interest in such items as aesthetic representations of tradition. Whereas elders ten to twenty years older than Charlie associated mask-making with unfamiliar practices, Charlie was enthusiastic about experimenting with new skills, as well as appealing to the wishes — and therefore definitions of tradition — of those learning about Sliammon carving:

But then the other [mask] I made, the first one I ever made, that was quite a while ago, there were three girls going to make it into [carving class]. So I just tried it anyway, and I carved it, and it turned out good. So I met up with this girl...and she was always talking about a mask. So I surprised her after and I got to the bingo hall and I put it in a box, and I put it on the table by where she sits at the bingo hall. And she came in and when she sits down, what’s this? And I didn’t say nothing there, so

¹⁹ Peter McGee, interview, 9 May 1996.

²⁰ Treakle, interview.

she takes it out, and she opens it, and she screamed. [laughs] And then she turned around, “Charlie! Did you put this here?” Yeah, you said you wanted a mask, I said. I said whatever you do, don’t sell that thing. That thing’s pretty valuable, I said, it’s real expensive, I said. It’s your birthday present, I said. She put it in a frame, a glass frame. She’s got it on top of her bed, the wild woman. [laughs] Yeah, she was real proud of it, and always wanted one of them, and finally she got it. I know her parents, though. Her parents are from Squamish, where my other grandfather is from.²¹

Though community members’ assessment of Hita’s work’s relevance to Sliammon differed from Charlie’s willingness to adapt designs from many places, carving served in both cases as an explanation of the way that tradition existed in Sliammon, and implicitly, in relation to understandings of tradition in other places. Whether drawing distinctions between what was traditional and what was introduced, or whether accommodating broader ideas of tradition to meet changing local ones, local understandings of authenticity and historical meaning were defined in part by relationships. Ironically, the absoluteness of authenticity that some TUS interviewees described would later help to reinforce the interpretive nature of tradition, when the TUS narratives contrasted with Charlie Bob’s incorporation of outside practices to appeal to a broader definition of culture or tradition.

Charlie Bob also cited his own and Sliammon’s expertise to create a distinction even between Sliammon and the knowledge or connection to tradition of the related community of Klahoose. Although he has been able to establish his status as a well-reputed carver and maker of other publicly-identifiably Indigenous items through appealing to practices that some have described as being introduced to Sliammon relatively recently, Charlie has also drawn connections between his work and knowledge and the knowledge that has been preserved or promoted in other communities:

Finally Squirrel Cove phoned me, the band office. I asked them if they heard about me in the Facebook. Yeah, and they wanted to know if I can go up there and teach them, teach them what they want to know. So they phone me, they want me up at Squirrel Cove, want me to teach them...So they came and picked me up and brought me to Lund, and then from Squirrel Cove they came with a boat to pick me

²¹ Charlie Bob, interview by Katya MacDonald, 20 January 2014.

up...And the ladies brought me out to do the digging for their roots, show them which ones to take. But the ones they were taking, they were taking everything. They didn't know which ones to take...So I showed them, and a certain way I split it, I split it all the way up...And I show them how to do that, I showed them how to make hats, and it's a certain way you have to do them, you know. They learned that one, and then they started doing baskets.²²

Charlie is keen to demonstrate and contextualize his knowledge within the experience of other makers who require his guidance to be able to do it in accordance with Charlie's personal and locally-based knowledge that, despite historical connections among the three communities, has nevertheless, in his view, been maintained more thoroughly in Sliammon. This narrative of tradition is therefore a narrative about historical status, not unlike Wayne Suttles' discussion of Coast Salish status in which those who, historically, were lower-class or slaves were described as "people who had lost their history."²³

Charlie's depiction of Sliammon as a place that had not lost its history — or, at least, was home to people who had not — sits somewhat in contrast to earlier narratives, as depicted in TUS interviews, that ascribed to other places the history that Charlie had claimed for himself or for Sliammon. Unlike those community members who had seen Frank Paul's carving and dancing as authentic to somewhere else, and more authentically Indigenous than Sliammon practices, Mary George argued that the first Sliammon people used to dance, but unlike other communities, had "lost their ways."²⁴ She speculated that smallpox spread by historical intercommunity connections was the cause of Sliammon's loss: the process of making and exchanging things was not automatically linked to the positive connections that community programs in the later twentieth century had described.

Whereas Charlie has highlighted that his knowledge came from many places and people, he has also depicted himself and Sliammon as local leaders in the field of historical knowledge transmission. Other community members, by contrast, specifically cited intercommunity and kinship connections as the mechanisms for knowledge of other community members from Sliammon to meet Sliammon community needs. These members included Charlie, but also many others,

²² Ibid.

²³ Wayne P. Suttles, "Affinal Ties, Subsistence, and Prestige among the Coast Salish," in *Coast Salish Essays* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 17.

²⁴ Mary George, interview by Connie Wilson, transcript, 4 August 1998, MIS 52.53.54, Sliammon Treaty Society.

particularly those who created, funded, and attended band-sponsored classes on making traditional things. Thomas Albert August described how his father had needed to access his connections beyond a geographically-static community of Sliammon to be able to make his canoes:

Yeah, my dad made a dug out, I never had a chance to help out because I was too young and they didn't like kids handling sharp axes like that. They were real nice eighteen foot dug outs. They used it for fishing, row to Harwood Island. They learned to use a sail too, they called it a "Yow up" [rag]. Just put it up front, just like this little bit of breeze, you really travel. When you wonder about it, how did our people get up to the Fraser River from here? It seems like a real long ways but they know the time and which way the tide is running and that sail can move you along pretty fast. I think mostly in this area it is all red cedar, the yellow cedar is way up high in the mountains.²⁵

In this case, making things, community connections, and transportation all had to work in tandem with one another, to create narratives of what was locally-specific, which objects and practices were introduced, and whether those introductions made them inauthentic to Sliammon. The narrations of making things, then, were also narratives of family and community histories: histories that, despite common experiences in Sliammon, have nevertheless been contracted and expanded to highlight particular aspects of community or individual knowledge.

Eugene Louie, who has been active in Sliammon political leadership, commented that carving for decorative or ceremonial purposes was recent in Sliammon, and that Charlie Bob's work was the result of learning from further afield that he had brought back to his teaching and selling in Sliammon:

Eugene Louie: [Charlie] is getting into paddles now, but years ago I don't remember seeing too many people carving other than doing canoes.

Karen Galligos (interviewer): I know Dad used to make paddles, dug-out, sling shots for the birds.

EL: I was always amazed that some of the people in Sechelt, guys that you never

²⁵ Thomas Albert August, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 12 August 1998, MIS 55.56, Sliammon Treaty Society.

suspect who would be a good carver, as I was growing up some of the work they used to do, beautiful work, that type of carving I've never seen here before. I have seen carving all over the Coast but never individuals do really fine art as they do.²⁶

The changing nature of authenticity, in response to community needs and questions, has been diversely embodied by the objects that community members have made, and the histories they invoke in describing those processes. The objects in question, then, have not simply symbolized histories; they have also been central in the creation, narration, and interpretation of those histories, as interpreted by geography and kinship connections.

According to some twentieth-century narratives, the need to create and define the material details of authenticity and belonging in Sliammon was perhaps informed by earlier histories of migration and the establishment of permanency in the place that is now the village and reserve of Sliammon. Elder Mary Jane Harry argued in 1998 that people and knowledge in Sliammon had been largely informed by other neighbouring communities — indeed, that Sliammon as a distinct entity had needed that outside input to attain its contemporary form. In describing her family history as it related to the formation of permanent settlements, Mary Jane Harry commented: “My grandfather Cheems came here, he was from Church House...and they are called “Ohp Qay'miXw” (Church House people). And Aupel, a real Church House Indian and Aupel didn't like Sliammon. There's hardly any Sliammon, they all come from Church House.”²⁷ Given this interpretation of late nineteenth-century Sliammon history, depictions of making things a generation or two later may also have been depictions of histories, spaces, and knowledges — since Mary Jane Harry also skeptical “if Sliammon knows” the names of places that her family had come from — that now had a distinct identity that makers could claim and propagate.

The relationships, and at times narrative tensions between local and regional discussions of making things have become more pronounced as community members in the last two decades. They have built on the sociopolitical arguments encouraged (but not created by) the TUS research process, have intentionally involved themselves in pan-Coast Salish movements and activities. Murray and Nancy Mitchell, who have offered guidance to several university programs that have worked with Sliammon, draw their expertise from Nancy's family in Sliammon, but also from

²⁶ Linda Louie and Eugene Louie, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 13 October 1998, 57.58.59, Sliammon Treaty Society.

²⁷ Mary Jane Harry, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 9 December 1998, MIS 65.66, Sliammon Treaty Society.

Murray's family in Washington state and other parts of Coast Salish territory. When I spoke with them about my work for the first time in 2013, Murray expressed an interest in building a standing loom, to learn to weave a blanket using store-bought yarn, with the long-term goal of sourcing mountain goat wool, making a spindle whorl, and learning to spin the raw wool.²⁸ In other conversations, both those that took place in the 1990s TUS interviews, and those that I had personally with other community members, weaving of clothing was a tangential topic if it was mentioned at all. Charlie Bob, for instance, remembered his granny spinning (sheep) wool for sweaters, but that no one since then had undertaken such work.²⁹ In some other Coast Salish communities of making, however, textile weaving has been a point of revival³⁰ in a similar way that baskets have been in Sliammon. Murray's interest in these practices originates from connections to other places, but has also established him in Sliammon as a cultural expert to be consulted. In such contexts, the precise origins of made goods has been less crucial than the processes of making them. While the larger Coast Salish world is sometimes implicit rather than explicit in these undertakings, the collective recognisability of Murray's work in Sliammon alludes to intentional efforts to establish and re-establish a Coast Salish world of communication.

Perhaps the most explicit reshaping of historical narratives of connection and difference (such as those explained by Mary Jane Harry or Charlie Bob) has been through involvement in the Canoe Journeys, a large, pan-Coast Salish canoe expedition that travels in traditional canoes, paddled by members from communities all along the coast, to visit and socialize in the host nation and in communities along the way. An explicit goal of the Canoe Journeys is similar to the intercommunity gathering that took place in Sliammon in 2014: to reassert historical connections that extended beyond reserve boundaries imposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Individual motivations for joining the journeys are often both personal and political, and community members cite the interpersonal connections that are forged as powerful responses to the aftermaths of ongoing colonialism. Corinne Mitchell, mother to Melvin and the widow of a long-time Sliammon chief, described the Canoe Journeys as a process "to heal hurts in individuals and communities."³¹ The effort that individual paddlers put forth is visible to others, so the group naturally encourages accountability and strength.

²⁸ Murray Mitchell, interview by Katya MacDonald, 21 July 2013.

²⁹ Charlie Bob, interview by Katya MacDonald, January 2014.

³⁰ See for instance Elizabeth Lominska Johnson and Kathryn Bernick, "Hands of Our Ancestors: The Revival of Salish Weaving at Musqueam," Museum Note (University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, 1986).

³¹ Corinne Mitchell, interview by Katya MacDonald, 21 July 2013.

To Corinne, the moments that were particularly powerful were when one canoe would stop and raise their paddles in acknowledgement of the creator or ancestors, and all other boats would follow suit.³² Because canoes and paddles are typically made by a community member specifically for the Canoe Journeys, the process of making things is a specific effort to create and recreate specific ideas about the past. After youth from Bella Bella, who had gotten to know Sliammon community members through the Canoe Journeys, visited Sliammon, Melvin Mitchell decided to build a large seafaring canoe for future journeys, based on a championship racing canoe that had helped a Sliammon team win many races in the 1940s. In particular, he hoped to have youth from Sliammon paddle to Bella Bella to complete the exchange the next summer (they were indeed successful in attaining this goal). While the canoe was under construction, it resided in his yard, covered with a tarp and filled with water and cedar boughs to prevent it from warping in hot weather, and it served as an object lesson for Melvin's reflections on the moral value of objects in addition to depictions of tradition based on community members' interpretations of the role of tradition in earlier decades' community activities.

In particular, Melvin noted that the canoe must be appreciated for the work that it does, and for the work that went into making it; if an item becomes a commodity, he noted, then that disregards the work, thought, and historically-transmitted knowledge that created it.³³ Considering that other carvers in the community, notably Charlie Bob, are comfortable with selling the items that they have made, Melvin's analysis is not and has not been a universal one; rather, it is a context-specific definition of tradition. The interpretive nature of tradition surrounding the canoe was magnified as the canoe took on new roles beyond Melvin's original intentions. Gail Blaney commented in 2015, when Sliammon's participation in that year's event was under discussion, that even if community members were willing to organize it, her son was taking the canoe for the summer regardless, to give canoe tours with a tourism company.³⁴ The canoe itself was a communal object, explicitly connected to Sliammon as a whole regardless of individual usage, and it was meant to translate specific histories to specific publics, depending on that usage: depicting histories of Sliammon's historical occupation of the territory to the tourist market, or, among Coast Salish communities, histories of collective Coast Salish experience.

The family origins of the canoe further reinforced these mobilizations of histories. The histories were a material argument for the ways that community members have argued for the

³² Ibid.

³³ Melvin Mitchell, interview by Katya MacDonald, 13 July 2013.

³⁴ Blaney, interview.

preservation or restoration of kinship and community connections, as framed by interpretations of oral histories. The Mitchell family has connections to Alert Bay through Corinne's family, and as an adult, she had been adopted into a family there and received a hereditary name. For the occasion, she made a button blanket, with over 2,200 buttons. Corinne spoke about the precision required in making such an item; since in some dances the blanket is inside out, the design must be tidy on both sides. With the ceremony, Corinne explained, came the name and the rights to pass it on, as well as the rights to stories and songs associated with that family, and of course the designs and symbolism of that family's blankets.³⁵ Restoring these mechanisms for knowledge transfer was a deliberate effort to refer to histories in the pre-colonial past, much like the Canoe Journeys have sought to do on a larger scale. However, the Mitchell family's experience mirrors that of the larger pan-Salish collectivity suggested by the Canoe Journeys.

The expanded coastal connections emphasized by events like the Canoe Journeys also created new definitions of tradition locally in Sliammon. As some of the TUS elders had expressed, for instance when discussing Frank Paul and his seemingly foreign carving and dancing activities, the most visible context for those activities — the potlatch — was an event that to some late-twentieth-century elders was either foreign or irrelevant. With the intercultural and intercommunity exchanges that have taken place more recently, particularly in the widespread, large-scale context of Canoe Journeys, some Sliammon people have embraced the conventions of potlatches as a part of the traditions that the Canoe Journeys seek to ensconce in collective historical understandings. At a weaving group gathering that I attended, for instance, I asked the members what other items they or others in their community made, either now or in the past. Because we had also been discussing the community canoe, Betty Wilson and Gail Blaney had their Canoe Journeys responsibilities in mind, and they commented on the items that they made for potlatches and giveaways that took place in conjunction with those intercommunity gatherings. Betty described the many pairs of slippers she had knit for a potlatch giveaway that took place elsewhere, while Gail had made many cedar bark baskets (a much quicker process than the involved cedar root baskets that the weaving group typically focuses on) while she travelled on the Canoe Journeys support canoe.³⁶ Sliammon community members' engagement with traditions not necessarily local to them, through these pan-Salish connections, continue to be an illustration of the ways that tradition has never been static; it is an activity based in relationships and agency, intended to respond to and facilitate interpretation of

³⁵ Corinne Mitchell, interview, 21 July 2013.

³⁶ Weaving group conversation with Katya MacDonald, February 19, 2015.

past relationships and change over time.

The relationships between local and regional histories have not always been mutually productive or politically neutral, however. John Louie told a story of an old man, Isaac Paul, who in the early days of European presence around Sliammon, would walk back and forth along Powell Lake. The people living in the area were afraid of him and his behaviour, and wondered if he were crazy, but John theorized that Isaac Paul was likely surveying the area and its resources. It was processes like Isaac Paul's that, John suggested, was crucial in determining the contemporary nature of relationships in Sliammon territory. He explained that families now living in the community historically lived, based largely by family, at various points around what is now Powell River, the reserve of Sliammon, and beyond. Knowing families' movements and their motivations was crucial, he argued, for negotiating and implementing treaty. But he also noted that one argument against treaty was the fact that the territory had never been ceded in the first place, and a treaty could imply that it had been. John placed the rifts caused by the treaty process into a longer timeline of intra-community divides caused by residential schools, the great fire of 1918 that destroyed much of the community, and the reserve system.³⁷ Many of these tensions can be broadly summed up as evidence of the challenges of negotiating territory and interactions in the presence of newcomers. As both structural colonialism and local racism increased over the course of the twentieth century, the relationships among Sliammon people and their neighbours grew more complicated, and the objects that they made and used provide insight into the ways that Tla'amin histories of making complicated what might otherwise have appeared to be black-and-white cultural divides.

As Mary George had described in the context of the shifting availability of basket-making materials, inter-community relationships in Sliammon, particularly in the twentieth century and beyond, were not limited to relationships with other Indigenous communities, nor were outcomes of relationships easily characterized by whether they were with Indigenous communities or not. With the growth and expansion of the mill town of Powell River and its economic needs and interests, day-to-day interactions in Sliammon and Powell River alike involved the negotiation of intercultural understandings. Culture, especially when defined as static or singular, was often not the single determining factor in the form these interactions took, however. Questions of class, race, and gender were closely tied to both the impetuses and outcomes of making things in Sliammon.

While other chapters will explore the economic and social implications of these dynamics, the intercultural and interracial relationships between Powell River and Sliammon over the course of

³⁷ Louie, interview.

the twentieth century provide important context for the relationships among objects, their makers, their users, and their interpreters. The history of these neighbouring communities' experiences of each other is, Melvin Mitchell argued, distinct from those that have occurred in other places, because contact has been a relatively recent phenomenon in comparison to, for instance, more easterly parts of North America. Indeed, Melvin felt that issues of racism that have been "resolved" in the east remain more prevalent in B.C. in general, and in Sliammon and Powell River more specifically: "Powell River is sometimes still like cowboys and Indians."³⁸ Yet at the same time, Melvin's carpentry profession has also, in his view, created opportunities to bridge those previous gaps. Powell River and Sliammon are now, he says, part of the same larger community, and professions like his have helped to forge connections beyond the previous isolation and segregation that had existed.³⁹ These complex and at times conflicting intersections of history, race, experience, and the making of things and interpretations have characterized many of the relationships between Powell River and Sliammon. They also illustrate how histories of objects themselves are also histories of ongoing responses to and mobilizations of objects and their contexts.

While experiences of racism are by no means bygones for community members in Sliammon, they were perhaps more acute or explicit in the past, as elders of two decades ago have described. Some, like Thomas Albert August, felt that there was a fundamental divide between Sliammon and Powell River:

People had jobs there but the forest industry and mills like that are a dying industry. People are fighting over it all the time. A lot of these people from Sliammon worked over there at one time or another. If you think about it, all my brothers worked there. The natives are different. They don't like punching a clock nine to five the rest of their lives. Long time ago, there was a lot of discrimination, a lot of the time we were unaware of it. I guess we thought that's just the way it was. But there was a lot of racism in Powell River towards the native people. It was really bad. The older guys just learned to ride with it. Accepted that that's the way it was. I used to get a kick out of the Patricia Theatre, they used to have the natives go upstairs to the balcony.⁴⁰

This acceptance of these new dynamics was perhaps closely linked to what appeared to be a

³⁸ Melvin Mitchell conversation July 16, 2013.

³⁹ Melvin Mitchell, interview by Katya MacDonald, 24 February 2015.

⁴⁰ August, interview.

relentless onslaught of non-Indigenous interests in Tla'amin lands and territories. In outlining their historical and traditional uses of these areas, community members constructed a long timeline of encroachment, from the first European explorers, to the advent of logging and other resource-harvesting industries, to the hippie movement and beyond. At times, this overriding of Indigenous interests was deliberate; at other times, it was misinformed or ignorant of the differences in priorities, lifestyle, or economic means between Sliammon and Powell River. TUS interviewee Phillip Timothy, for instance, drew a line directly from stories of deliberate sabotage of Sliammon people's health by early explorers, to later environmental contamination of marine resources:

So we lived over here for the whole summer. Then the rest of the year, there was only one year we were home for the summer. I heard Captain Cook or something like gave the people down here. I think it was Chief Tom or Captain Timothy told him to dump it [lead from ships]. They just wanted to poison the people here...Told them to dump it, place was just filled with canned stuff. I guess it was pretty dangerous because I seen on the T.V. there about those sailors and everything did that to Alaska and some of the canned stuff, they died from lead poisoning. They were wondering where the lead was coming from. They lined all the cans, they lined them with lead.⁴¹

Stories of early European involvement in Sliammon tended to include a note of foreboding or apprehension, even at the same time that Tla'amin people sought to take advantage of new and changing opportunities in these new relational spaces.

These stories have been re-interpreted and mobilized in changing ways to respond to specific colonial interventions, both official and in more informal interactions, but they are based on the awareness of Sliammon's long-term habitation and jurisdiction over the region that now also contains Powell River. As TUS interviewer Maynard Harry explained when introducing the TUS project to a group of interviewees, Sliammon's authority is based in this long and rooted past:

Maynard Harry: What I would like to touch upon today would be what the people did, not necessarily what you did but I think it's more important about what your

⁴¹ James Timothy, Robert Timothy, and Phillip Timothy, interview by Kerri Timothy, transcript, 17 May 1996, TUS 23, Sliammon Treaty Society.

parents did or your grandparents, anything you can remember, I think that's really important. I don't know, I was just looking at this, these are archeological sites, these little triangles, and this area that Sliammon is claiming, some of these, there's over 450 of these little archeological sites. And some of these are over 2000 years old so we've been here for a really long time. I go by those signs in town and Powell River has this big sign there and on the other side saying "Historical Townsite." I really don't like that because we've been here for 2000 years I think and you don't see us putting up signs and they're really proud for being here for just 80 years and it really doesn't seem right to me.

Ernie Harry (interviewee): What does that sign say at the Townsite?

MH: Oh, it just says "Historic Townsite of Powell River established in 1912" or something.⁴²

Roots of such dynamics exist in early newcomer histories of Powell River. In 1922, Alfred Carmichael depicted what would become the Powell River region through the lens of *terra nullius* -- "Fifty years ago, an empty, unpopulated wilderness, except for deer and bear" -- and described the paper mill that was built there as an inevitable new stage of "progress."⁴³ For Sliammon people, then, citing the connection to a long history of occupation has been a direct critique of their assumed role within the larger Powell River community.

Citing such connections to the past was the same strategy that has underpinned community members' narratives about tradition, and their uses of tradition to demonstrate particular traits or needs in Sliammon. Yet the discussions of revitalizing traditions that community members have alternately supported and complicated with their own processes of making things appear, at first glance, to be somewhat at odds with elders' discussions of Tla'amin people's adaptability when they first encountered expressions of colonialism. Mary George, who, as discussed earlier, was a leader in creating band-supported structures to preserve basket-making skills, discussed how preservation also entailed adaptation when Europeans first came to the region:

This is my great grandfather, this is Chief Tom, then his father and his grandfather,

⁴² Maynard Harry, transcript, 11 December 1995, MIS 8A/B.9A, Sliammon Treaty Society.

⁴³ Alfred Carmichael, "Indian Legends of the West Coast of Vancouver Island," 1922, MSS 2305, Box 2, file 22, BC Archives.

and his great grandfather, so I guess it was his grandfather's story about when the boat came ashore and brought their sickness here... That was one of our first peoples, that is why they died. Then another one came, the second one, that one was looking to survey here, they went away and my grandfathers father was pointing out these places, he didn't speak very good English, that is why we don't have much land. But in the first place, when there was no white man, we owned everything... our people owned all the land. It was when the second one that came that after that the surveyors kept coming, the white man came, then the priest started coming, then the policeman, Indian Affairs, especially when the Indian Affairs came, they moved the Indian people, they wanted [to] run everything. After that, my grandfather was telling us when the second boat came... they traded us food for our furs, our people were trappers all the way to Powell Lake, they would trade for fur, not cash. They gave them food. Then the native people smartened up, there was a Hudson's Bay in Vancouver... [and] they were buying fur, so that is where our people started bringing their furs there instead of trading with the boat that used to come here.⁴⁴

When Mary George referred to “smartening up,” she explained how Sliammon people changed their approach to trade, insofar as that was economically feasible. In this case, the response to the first experiences of colonialism was to circumvent them, which created a new economic environment not only for the household goods and furs that Mary George described, but also for the items that people made at home. Increasingly, as non-Indigenous presence in and around Powell River became more permanent, economic environments shifted as well. Chapter 5 explores these shifts in greater detail, but they also help to explain the growing need for explanations of tradition as the twentieth century progressed.

Powell River and Sliammon interests became more entwined once transportation between the two communities became quicker with the building of roads. In other words, the canoes that community members had identified as being “genuinely” traditional to Sliammon were of less use as cars became the primary mode of transportation. Leslie Adams, who served as chief for many years, questioned earlier political or infrastructure decisions, but that explained a great deal about Sliammon people's experiences with federal and local efforts to define Indigenous people's lives:

⁴⁴ George, interview, 4 August 1998.

experiences to which subsequent, intentional, community-sponsored processes of making things sought to respond. Leslie Adams regretted how community leadership understood (or perhaps did not) non-Indigenous involvement in Sliammon:

Johnny Bob and all them would come visit me and we'd start talking politics. Anyway when they were building the road through the village, I don't like this story because it sounds so foolish. It's just that D.I.A. Old Johnny Louie, Freddie Louie's grandpa now, I guess he was part of the council. He refused to let the road go through the village, so the construction was stopped right at the entrance of the village there. It was stopped there for a long time. Then the D.I.A. had a lot of meetings with the band trying to convince them to get through. What changed their minds is that D.I.A.'s promised Sliammon people when the road was going through, every car going through here would be like your car. That's how the agreement was made.⁴⁵

Unlike Mary George's narrative of "smartening up," Leslie Adams' story is one of some embarrassment, as Leslie referred to the council's decision as "foolish." Adapting to change was not seamless, nor did efforts to regain or maintain agency always work smoothly.

Within these difficult and complicated contexts, then, narratives about tradition, as expressed through official channels like Charlie Bob's carving classes, Mary George's basket-making workshops, or the current weaving group, were not able to be wholesale solutions to Sliammon people's experiences of discrimination and racism. First contact and interactions with late 19th century federal Indian Agents subsequently led to more immediate, local racism, as Thomas Albert August explained:

It seems like the reason that we didn't keep up with the white society's education and stuff like that is because there was too much racism. They didn't want us to be equal to them and in the white schools it doesn't matter if you were smart, they were jealous. If you were smarter than them, you got picked on and if you were better looking than them you got picked on too, so everybody was jealous all the time, so

⁴⁵ Leslie Adams, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 30 July 1996, TUS 39.40.41, Sliammon Treaty Society.

the native people had a hard time dealing with that, they all dropped out. They were real smart people, they just dropped out of school because of that.⁴⁶

While, as Mary George explained, Sliammon people were at times able to circumvent unhelpful structures, as in the case of nineteenth-century trading with the HBC, as Sliammon people's lives became more closely intertwined with those of Powell River residents, reliance on local knowledge was not only a form of resistance, but also a survival skill: it did not appear to have a place outside of Sliammon.⁴⁷ Given these histories of segregation, then, the demand for Charlie Bob's work and teaching beyond Sliammon, Melvin Mitchell's work with schoolchildren, or the pan-Salish Canoe Journeys can be interpreted as more recent points on the timeline of Sliammon's relationships with other communities and histories. These points, like earlier iterations of tradition or local belonging (particularly as expressed by TUS elders about their own memories) do not represent a wholesale definition of or shift in the idea of what is traditional, but rather, they serve as tools for deciphering how historical relationships have shaped the narratives of today.

As a highly visible figure in the world of Sliammon making and teaching, Charlie Bob might be assumed to have cultivated this role out of these relationships and narratives throughout his lifetime. Yet as questions in TUS interviews addressed resource harvesting, Charlie's occupations were clearly more complex than how they appear today. Clam digging, fishing, and hunting have all occupied his time and concerns as well.⁴⁸ In other words, while the shifting oral historiographies of making things and of Sliammon itself that I have traced throughout this chapter have helped to determine where and why objects have travelled, the conversations have also been the result of specific and targeted questioning, either by me or by earlier TUS interviewers. These histories of making things are therefore also histories of discourse and interpretation, and so the objects under discussion are significant as interpretive tools as well as representations of specific historical moments.

The objects and the processes of making them have also helped to pinpoint how and why

⁴⁶ August, interview.

⁴⁷ A Powell River newspaper article featuring Leslie Adams in the 1960s reinforced this idea, by highlighting the unusualness of Leslie Adams' good work at the Powell River mill and suggesting that it was incumbent upon Indigenous people to overcome racial discrimination: "Adams, by his example is helping to break down barriers which have existed over the years as a result of the Indian's reputation as an unreliable worker. In the early days of the mill, particularly, Indians earned the reputation for being unsuitable for work in an industrial plant. The demands of a different culture's working pattern is not so irritating today..." "Chief Leslie Adams," *Powell River News*, 24 August 1967, sec. B1.

⁴⁸ Charlie Bob, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, transcript, 28 May 1996, TUS 29.30.31.32, Sliammon Treaty Society.

notions of tradition, authenticity, history, and belonging have shifted in Sliammon, particularly over the course of the twentieth century when various outside colonial forces and community members themselves sought to render change. Motivations for seeking this change have been diverse, and the place of objects within them shows the complexity of relationships beyond a “Native-newcomer”⁴⁹ binary: treaty research and negotiations highlighted diverging uses for histories of objects; teaching and learning about handmade items helped to create complex and situational definitions of authenticity; and Sliammon people worked and traded with Powell River people, yet also experience(d) racism at their hands. Even though individual community members have held specific ideas about what tradition or authenticity should entail — TUS interview Maynard Harry exemplified this concisely when he commented that a community member’s spouse knew how to basket weave “even though he’s a *mamatla*”⁵⁰ — bringing individual perspectives into conversation with each other within the context of historical events and change shows how the idea of tradition has had historically-significant impacts on community events and relationships.

Tradition, then, is a temporally-mediated concept that individuals and communities mobilize to highlight particular historical narratives. By extension, objects described as traditional in Sliammon help to describe how tradition has been defined in changing or overlapping ways — sometimes in ways specific to the local community, and at other times within pan-Indigenous or pan-Salish concepts that have accommodated local ideas of tradition from other places. Speaking to community members about their making of objects and about the narratives surrounding objects reveals those overlaps among objects, traditions and histories. The result has been an oral historiography that, through discussions of made things, provides temporal guideposts for motivations behind responding to shifting iterations of colonialism, racism, and inclusion; revitalizing local practices of making things; adapting new practices into ideas of tradition; and evaluating value or use of handmade things in shifting, conflicting, or concurrent social, political, and economic contexts.

⁴⁹ This is a term that was pioneered and popularized by historian J. R. Miller beginning in the 1980s. While it is a useful term in that it forefronts the fact that Indigenous people have been central to histories of Canada rather than outliers, it also risks creating a framework in which relationships among cultures are depicted as simply two-sided exchanges rather than complex, ongoing negotiations involving differences within as well as among communities.

⁵⁰ White person. Maynard Harry, transcript, 2 May 1996, TUS 6.7, Sliammon Treaty Society.

Chapter 4: Objects and Tradition in in Ile-a-la-Crosse Family and Community Histories

When Norma Malboeuf moved to Ile-a-la-Crosse from Ontario in the 1970s with her then-husband, a teacher who had recently secured a job there, she soon became intrigued by the processes involved in making beaded mittens, mukluks, jackets, and other items of clothing. She began to meet with older women in the community to learn the techniques (from preparing the hides through to adding beadwork decoration), eventually settling on making mitten- and moccasin-making as a hobby in which she is usually able to recoup her supply expenses, though not turn a profit, by selling finished items to people in the community and at craft fairs around the province.¹ Norma's perspective on Ile-a-la-Crosse's histories and the tangible items within those histories is somewhat distinct. As a non-Indigenous person who, in comparison to the centuries of Cree and Metis settlement at and around Ile-a-la-Crosse, is a relative newcomer, she is a part of the community, but her personal history from beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse helps her to ask questions of it as well. One of Norma's craftwork mentors, Eliza Aubichon, affirmed that by now, Norma is as much an expert on beadwork and leatherwork as any other maker in the community ("she can do anything now"²); her experience of asking questions and immersing herself in processes of making things allowed her to become skilled in activities that community members value because of their deep historical roots (often synonymous with a definition of tradition) and the moral or political arguments that community members now see in those historical practices. As objects have held new roles in diverse geographies and generations, they have helped to illuminate how community members have used ideas of tradition to meet Ile-a-la-Crosse's needs.

In one of my conversations with Norma, in which I had asked her about histories of handmade items in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Norma wondered out loud about the history of the Metis sash (a well-known symbol of Metis historical and political identity) in Ile-a-la-Crosse. When and why had it arrived there? Had it travelled with eighteenth-century fur traders, or was it a more recent introduction of the twentieth century, when expanded transportation and communication networks prompted people in the Ile-a-la-Crosse region to build connections with ideas about Metis politics and consciousness that were galvanizing in other parts of the province and beyond? And why had the sash become symbolic, when it was not something that any community members that she knew

¹ Norma Malboeuf, interview by Katya MacDonald, 1 September 2015.

² Eliza Aubichon, interview by Katya MacDonald, 1 September 2015.

were able to make? These were questions that were sparked by Norma's analysis of the ways that histories and geographies intersected, as she highlighted several major changes that had occurred in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Thus, this chapter discusses how geography and region has shaped community members' experiences of making things. As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, changes in local lifestyles and economies were closely tied to changes in ideas of and uses for tradition in Ile-a-la-Crosse. When the provincial CCF government placed greater attention on the north beginning in the 1940s, connections across spaces changed, and so too did transportation and access to some social services. But they also changed how community members interacted. I look at objects and processes of making things to show how community members interpreted and communicated those changes. I then explore how discussions about making things can also pinpoint temporal markers to show how and when interactions changed, at moments that did not necessarily appear significant without the added insight of processes of making things. With the growing permanency of the settlement of Ile-a-la-Crosse in the latter half of the twentieth century, processes of making things became ways to assert local identities and definitions of tradition, in response to these new forms of colonialism.

Norma had arrived in Ile-a-la-Crosse in an era of rapid change for the community, in which new local social, economic, and geographical climates interacted with the legacies of provincial and federal policies towards the largely Metis population of the region. Community members began to look to specific historical moments or practices to provide a basis for comparison with contemporary circumstances. They sought to define and mobilize the idea of tradition to address specific questions or concerns that had come to prominence in the community. Conversations about processes of making things — not necessarily specific things like Metis sashes or moccasins, but rather the time periods, geographies, or experiences in which tangible objects were made — have been useful tools for exploring how the idea of tradition is itself a made thing. It has changed according to time period, circumstance, and need, indicating that the tangible things that people made are not simply symbols of an ahistorical notion of tradition or the past. Rather, they are sources that help to build a history of interpreting tradition in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

As histories of handmade items in Sliammon have reinforced, tradition is a concept that changes over time, according to shifting historical interpretations. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, histories of interpreting tradition have been especially significant, but have, over the course of the twentieth century, been subject to scholarly critique that has framed traditions there as static, weak, or inauthentic. Historians G. F. G. Stanley and Marcel Giraud both depicted Metis people, culture, and

communities as caught “in between,” unable to adapt either to Euro-Canadian or to First Nations societies.³ These analyses were not aimed directly at any specific Metis community, and were, as historian J.R. Miller has noted, bound by a “Red River myopia” that did not take into account the geographical and cultural diversity among Metis communities.⁴

Nevertheless, these ideas travelled to northwestern Saskatchewan and were applied by mid-century government officials to contemporary concerns in Ile-a-la-Crosse.⁵ Yet although overall, community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse have identified as Metis both individually and collectively, kinship ties to Cree and Dene communities, as well as legislation that has recently enabled some community members to take treaty, have meant that to define the community as strictly Metis would be to essentialize it and ignore the complexity and interrelatedness of community members’ histories. At the same time, however, Metis historiographies have shaped the ways that community members, especially from the 1970s onward, have interpreted their own histories.

I argue, therefore, that being traditional is not the same as being static, nor have community members needed to insist on specific definitions of what tradition or authenticity mean. When considering histories of handmade items or processes of making things, the idea that has persisted since before Stanley’s and Giraud’s work that Metis is synonymous with “mixedness” becomes more complicated. Indeed, equating Metisness directly with mixedness breaks down in the face of histories of making things in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Metis scholar Chris Andersen has described the “Halfbreed Ball” held as part of the Native American Indigenous Studies Association conference in 2013, where celebrations of Metis food, literature, art, and music seemed to communicate to some of his colleagues for the first time that Metisness was more complex than a racialized category.⁶ The tangible, material things that community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse have discussed, both with me directly and in other informational, political, and economic contexts over the last five decades or so, have shown that cultures are constructed in part from tangible things. But these tangible or visible features are also components of arguments about the past and its relevance in the present: arguments that are invoked by the people who belong to these histories and cultures, to insist on their own belonging within colonizing structures.

³ Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*.

⁴ J. R. Miller, “From Riel to the Métis,” *Canadian Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (1988): 2.

⁵ Sociologist V. F. Valentine, for instance, undertook several government-funded observational studies in Ile-a-la-Crosse in an effort to define a “Metis character” that could explain (or, as most northerners have argued, be blamed for) economic challenges in the north during the 1940s and 1950s. I discuss Valentine’s work in more detail in subsequent chapters.

⁶ Chris Andersen, *Of Wives and Sons: A History of Metis Women in Saskatchewan* (Edmonton: ARCA, 2014), 4.

Chapter 6 of this dissertation discusses these colonizing structures in more detail, but to contextualize the ways that people in Ile-a-la-Crosse have responded to colonizing institutions, it is first important to gain a sense of what community members have seen as valuable in their community, and when and how these values have changed. These changes have been especially significant in Ile-a-la-Crosse where specific ethnic and cultural identities have been in flux during the time period I discuss. Objects are important parts of these larger historical narratives because they help to illustrate the motivations and historical consciousness of people in Ile-a-la-Crosse, past and present. For this chapter, I draw on my own community-based oral history work, both as it has related specifically to made objects, and in other discussions I have had with community members about histories that contextualize objects' places in the community as it has evolved over the course of the twentieth century. My goal was to take part in conversations in which community members are able to share their historical perspectives in ways that are meaningful to them. At the same time, however, I am also explicit in writing about these research relationships that perspectives are not always generalizable into a "community" narrative if I hope to account for diversity in class, gender, race, legal identities, and other differences even within a single place.

I also do not necessarily expect that the depth or focus of my conversations in the two communities under study in this dissertation will be directly comparable with one another. For the reasons of timing and funds that I discuss in more detail in the introduction to this dissertation, most of my conversations with community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse focused on community histories in a more general sense. These more varied discussions, in which objects and processes of making them have been incidental characters rather than protagonists, are helpful as well for depicting how larger contexts shape the objects themselves. Furthermore, as the introduction to this dissertation explains in more detail, the broader range of conversations around handmade items and processes in Ile-a-la-Crosse has its roots in the region's distinct geographical and economic histories.

The objects that community members have discussed, both recently and in the middle decades of the twentieth century, have been tangible and material but not immutable nor static. When those objects and their historical contexts become part of depictions of tradition, it becomes easier to see tradition as a historical argument rather than a set of things or activities. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, tradition has been created by geography, by shifting local interests across generations, and by processes of interpreting the past to address contemporary concerns. When community members have talked about Ile-a-la-Crosse's history, they have interpreted tradition through both things and narratives.

Ile-a-la-Crosse's history, even throughout most of the twentieth century, has not been one of physical permanency in a space, but rather of movement and overlapping connections. These connections across cultures and regions (both local and further afield within the province and the north), and the changes they saw over the course of the past several decades, have underpinned shifts in the ways that people in Ile-a-la-Crosse have interacted with the objects they used and made in their households and beyond. Relationships described and at times defined by geography were in flux in the mid-twentieth century as governments, economic conditions, and transportation possibilities acted, on one hand, to connect the north to the south, and on the other, to magnify the marginalization of people in the north in comparison to economic and political activities in the south of the province. One noteworthy economic shift occurred with the institution of the Fur Conservation Program in the 1940s, which divided trapping regions into designated blocks, within which only specified trappers were permitted to work.⁷ The block system was intended to preserve rights for local residents, to conserve game in an era when fur prices were declining. Each of these fixed areas soon became associated with trappers from a particular settlement.⁸ As these settlements nucleated near residents' fur blocks, finding productive trapping areas became more difficult, and trappers' access to game was limited.

Discussions beginning in the 1940s and continuing until at least the 1970s regarding road and travel conditions⁹ depicted changing contexts for made goods and the new dialogues surrounding tradition and mobilization of the past that they created. A publication of the Roman Catholic mission in Ile-a-la-Crosse, *Island Breezes*, commented on the relative unhelpfulness of local roads in comparison to other forms of transportation:

Anyone wishing to see a new type of road should have rushed to the Ile a la Crosse - Buffalo Narrows highway the second week of January. The novelty was introduced by an L. Waite-paid bulldozer trying to improve conditions. The finished job promises to be O.K. but after the first process, the resulting road was christened "Washboard." No other name could be more suitable. Previous to this stage, a cat

⁷ James D. Winkel, "Northern Saskatchewan – A Transformation" (Saskatchewan Northern Affairs, 2002), 9–10, <http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=22747>.

⁸ Robert Jarvenpa, *The Trappers of Patuanak: Toward a Spatial Ecology of Modern Hunters*, Mercury Series, no. 67 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1980), 59.

⁹ Indeed, given the relatively isolated nature of northern Saskatchewan roads, travel and geography remain important ways that people relate to each other, and particularly with newcomers like me, whom some community members tend to warn against hazardous conditions or poorly-maintained stretches of road.

and plow attempted at least twice to make the road passable but to little or no avail.

The Drivers' only hope lies in the evening-off of the washboard.¹⁰

The construction of the road was in part an economic stimulus project for the region, as Ile-a-la-Crosse elder Vital Morin recalled in 1976: "There was a government project in them days. I worked on that road myself. That was in the 40s. The road was all hand made -- corduroying the soft spots, the sandy spots, and then pulling some soil on top of that. There were a lot of mud holes."¹¹ Yet despite the short-term gain for some local people who worked on the road, its broader benefits were not immediately apparent. As had been the case prior to the construction of roads in the 1940s, for much of the twentieth century, travel via waterways was the most efficient; community members in the largely Dene community of Patuanak, for instance, stated that to drive from Patuanak to Ile-a-la-Crosse would be 114 miles and a three-hour trip, whereas to travel by skiff would be 40 miles and take one-and-a-half hours.¹² In transportation and in daily life, change and development did not lead to automatic gain for people in Ile-a-la-Crosse or in the north more broadly, as Quiring has noted of CCF policies in particular.¹³

This creation of isolation through supposedly greater connections was not a uniform experience, as histories of making things can illustrate. Dorothy Dubrule, now in her 60s, has spoken with me and with other historical researchers about a variety of topics pertaining to Ile-a-la-Crosse's and her own family's past experiences. Dorothy's narratives about her parents', and particularly her mother's life story help to provide not only a snapshot or cross-section of life in Ile-a-la-Crosse in a single generational experience; they also highlighted the connections that the late Georgina Morin, Dorothy's mother, forged across geographical locations. After Dorothy's parents divorced, Georgina travelled to Thompson, Manitoba to live with her niece. At that time, she was able to read and write Cree syllabics, and although she had only a grade three education, she "knew how to do a lot of things."¹⁴ She traded knowledge of syllabics with her niece, who in exchange taught her enough English to be able to read a recipe, and once Georgina moved back to Ile-a-la-Crosse, the two practiced their respective newfound skills by writing letters back and forth. These family connections, maintained in part through an interest in learning to make new things, illustrated

¹⁰ *Island Breezes*, December 1950, Ile-a-la-Crosse Public Library.

¹¹ Vital Morin, interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, transcript, 30 May 2003, The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/01207>.

¹² Robert Jarvenpa, "Robert W. Jarvenpa Fieldnotes," n.d., Box 241, folder 7, Canadian Museum of History.

¹³ See Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*.

¹⁴ Dorothy Dubrule, interview by Katya MacDonald, 2 September 2015.

ways that learning about histories of a community, by undertaking oral history work, cannot be entirely defined by where community histories took place. Georgina Morin's family ties across geographies showed that histories of a community are not limited by that community's geographical location: they also encompass movement, change, and reinterpretation.

The geographical relationships underpinning Ile-a-la-Crosse histories of tradition have not been solely neutral or positive connections. Nap Johnson, who was born to a Treaty mother from Patuanak and a white father, and who worked for many years as a conservation officer in Ile-a-la-Crosse, was consulted for interviews by outside organizations as an expert on past, or traditional, lifestyles. In 1975, the Academic Education Branch of the Northern Saskatchewan Archives, based in La Ronge, undertook one such interview. In it, Nap Johnson described a marked divide between past and present approaches to work and ethics, caused in part, he implied, by changes in the ways that communities in the north were connected to the south:

Nap Johnson: But one thing in those days, people were very honest.

Michael Tymchak (interviewer): More than today?

NJ: (laughter) Oh, today you can't leave nothing on the road! You leave your car out on the road today, doesn't matter where...it's the same all over, right...in the south and in the north, it's the same thing now.

MT: Why do you think people have changed like that?

NJ: Well, I think the life is too easy; they don't want to work. A good working man, he doesn't do that, hey? He works for his money and then he saves his money to buy something and then don't have to steal. But lot of those young guys now, their Dad gave them that free money, so they buy an old car. Something broke on the road, well, if they see a car -- gee, this one is going to break next -- they're going to steal it.¹⁵

Cars, roads, and other means of travel that had, by the 1970s, become more efficient in the north, but when community members were acclimating to these recent changes, they also found that their connections to other regions also brought closer less desirable aspects of those places. Nap Johnson felt that such connections created new attitudes towards work: attitudes that community members

¹⁵ Nap Johnson, interview by Michael Tymchak, transcript, 1975, Department of Northern Saskatchewan Academic Education Branch, Northern Saskatchewan Archives, <http://scaa.usask.ca/ourlegacy/permalink/28615>.

from the 1970s onward would cite as changes that were at odds with local values.

Such issues were regional concerns as well as local ones, meaning that the experiences of people in other communities around the same time help to shed light on the relationships among regions that were, at least to some extent, common across the north. While Ile-a-la-Crosse consists of a different cultural and historical makeup than neighbouring Patuanak, even despite many family and social connections, stories from Patuanak about the ways that handmade items travelled and changed along new transportation routes reinforced the growing sense of separation of people in the north from larger provincial goings-on. Ethnoarchaeologist Robert Jarvenpa spent time in Patuanak in the 1970s documenting and collecting material items on behalf of what is now the Canadian Museum of History, and recounted a story about a beaded moosehide belonged to one of Jarvenpa's contemporaries in the community, Ovide Wolverine:

When [Ovide] walked in the door I was surprised to see him wearing an old-style beaded moosehide jacket, very much like the one I purchased from [another community member]. However, Ovide's coat was 10 years old. He explained that he was wearing the jacket because his wife took his nylon jacket to wear to a bingo at the band hall. The beaded coat was the last in a series of coats that his mother had made for him, about 9 or 10 altogether. Ovide explained that each year his mother would make him a new beaded coat, and he would end up either giving it away to some admirer or selling it 'down south.' 'I would always run into somebody down south and they'd say – 'Sell me your jacket!'¹⁶

Clearly, Ovide's mother's work was well travelled, and had found an audience beyond what she had expected or intended. Furthermore, the jackets travelled along a series of routes that mirrored some of the issues at play in northwestern Saskatchewan at the time that Ovide was wearing his jackets. Ovide's jackets and their travels pinpointed geographical and power relationships, generational shifts in the significance of handmade items, and overlapping definitions of tradition and its uses. It was by no means the only object to do so. While Jarvenpa's and Ovide Wolverine's own narratives about the jackets are single snapshots of a moment in time, listening to community members' stories about objects and processes of making — particularly in Ile-a-la-Crosse, where my work has taken place — illuminates historical relationships that were simultaneously rooted in community-specific

¹⁶ Jarvenpa, "Robert W. Jarvenpa Fieldnotes."

experiences, yet also defined by the ways that objects and makers related to larger contexts of their creation.

Histories of the movement of objects are complicated by other histories seeking to highlight the continuity of certain tangible components of historical Metis life. Liz Durocher founded a youth square dance group in the early 2000s with the aim of providing an opportunity for young people in the community to work closely with elders to learn their knowledge of the past, which they considered tradition. While participants created their own dances, especially as they became more proficient, Liz and the members continued to emphasize the contributions of elders; as Liz commented, they “adapt them to their own culture now.”¹⁷ Developing the dances was a generationally-based, temporally-influenced idea of the relationships between tradition and change. The dance group also had local people make moccasins and traditional outfits (that is, clothing that did not use the shiny, decorated fabric that is popular at many square dance competitions), because the local and handmade aspect of their performance outfits was intended to be a visible nod to tradition.¹⁸

In the early years of the group, Liz often consulted with Duck Lake elder Rose Fleury, whom Liz and others have nicknamed “Metis Rose” on questions of Metis culture and tradition, as understood, defined, and implemented by Rose. In 1984, the Gabriel Dumont Institute conducted an interview with Rose on similar questions, indicating that she has a long-standing reputation as a cultural expert.¹⁹ The interviewer, Brenda Arnault, asked Rose about her childhood activities, particularly “special things together as a family, like...hunting, or fishing, or camping,” berry picking, whether her grandparents had told stories, and what kinds of items her parents and grandparents had made.²⁰ Particularly because these questions were formulated by an organization with a mandate to describe, define, catalogue, and promote Metis culture (as defined by the Gabriel Dumont Institute itself), the interview implicitly identified specific activities as traditionally Metis. Such information has since been discussed and disseminated in places beyond Rose’s home community; it

¹⁷ Liz Durocher, interview by Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, 10 September 2010.

¹⁸ Victor F. Valentine, *A Social Anthropological Study of the Metis Population of Northwestern Saskatchewan: Preliminary Report* (Department of Natural Resources, 1952).

¹⁹ This interview was part of a larger Metis oral history project, the Saskatoon Native Women’s Oral History Project. Seeking to follow up on this work, the Gabriel Dumont Institute undertook a broader oral history project again in 2003 via the Saskatoon Metis Elders Heritage Group. They sought to interview Metis women about their experiences, to record stories and information for future generations and to commemorate Saskatchewan’s centennial in 2005. The other interviews housed with the GDI that I cite in this dissertation were undertaken as part of this later project. See “Saskatoon Métis Elders Heritage Group, 2003,” 2003, SA-1070, folder 5030, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

²⁰ Rose Bertha Fleury, interview by Brenda Arnault, transcript, 27 March 1984, Tape #IH-SD.18, Transcript Disc #151, Gabriel Dumont Institute.

informed some of what was taught to Liz Durocher's youth dance group, for instance. By extension, Rose's comments have shaped my understandings of Ile-a-la-Crosse, since Liz Durocher was one of the first community members I met in Ile-a-la-Crosse in 2006, and since then has become a trusted and generous participant in my research work, offering her house as a place to stay, finding or creating opportunities for me to get to know others in the community, and spending evenings in conversation about Ile-a-la-Crosse. Thus, the questions asked in the GDI interview with Rose created some boundaries for what was considered traditional even in places beyond where Rose's own activities took place: it was a narrative of tradition that was transferred or even translated beyond its original contexts.

Rose Fleury herself noted how historical context would have shaped her understandings of her grandmother's stories, had she been aware of it at the time. She commented:

Well it was mostly true stories, but which was stories that has been told from different things, you know, like people not understanding their religion and then it would go back on them, eh...But if you were, like if we would have been doing what we're doing today, like doing history stuff, we would have listened more, maybe put them down. It was mostly ghost stories and stuff like that, eh, or true incidents of something that happened and stuff like that.²¹

The movement of stories from more southerly Metis communities like Duck Lake into recent Ile-a-la-Crosse discussions of Metis histories suggests ways that timelines and generationally-defined time frames for tradition were not necessarily defined according to Ile-a-la-Crosse-centric historical narratives. In the case of Rose Fleury's stories and knowledge sharing, her geographical and generational understandings were superimposed onto other narratives from Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Rose's narratives resonated with Ile-a-la-Crosse elders, community organizers, and youth, even though the timeline and scope of the narratives did not match precisely with the experiences of people from Ile-a-la-Crosse. They found the content of Rose's narratives valuable. Rose Fleury felt that her experiences of school were positive, particularly in comparison to the experiences of some children growing up or attending school in the north:

Brenda Arnault (interviewer): And then from there, these schools that you were at,

²¹ Ibid.

were you ever shown any discrimination. Like the nuns, were they discriminating towards you?

Rose: No. We had a lot of kids, there was Indian kids from Ile-a-la-Crosse, Beauval, all them places... And they never, because they always took pity on them kids, which lots of time I think they were maybe more preferred than the other ones, than the French and English kids. Because I guess they made them more privileged because they didn't have a regular home, which the other ones... They stayed in the convent, but they always had to go home to go to when the... You know, they had these conventions there, then we'd go home for a few days, eh. But them, they didn't so they had to stay there and stay put, you know. They didn't have school bus so they had no place to go home to. And I always thought that, you know, they were real good to the kids the time that I was there anyway.²²

Rose's expertise as an organizer of community programming, sought after by Liz Durocher and others involved with imparting notions of tradition to youth, was perhaps motivated in part by a desire to help those who did not have the exposure to childhood experiences later defined as traditional. The experiences that Rose described in her interview with GDI were geographically-specific, as her discussions of schooling suggest, as do her analyses of provincial politics as they pertained to the Metis during the postwar period. Rose commented, "that was the NDP, that's the only one, I says, that ever, you know, really worked with the Metis."²³

In the north, Ile-a-la-Crosse narratives of politics in the 1940s and 50s show that the CCF government played an adversarial role with the Metis. Quiring, for instance, has discussed how CCF policies were paternalistic and were implemented with little to no consultation of community members. While Quiring's discussion highlights the reasons for the general poor take-up of these initiatives in northern communities, he does not challenge the CCF's assertions that the north was "underdeveloped" due to the unsuitability of its Indigenous inhabitants for participation in larger provincial economies.²⁴ My discussions here, and in Chapter 6 on implications of government policies on handmade items and their histories, focus on the ways that community members have operated within, despite, and in resistance to these policies. They have done so by forging their own uses for objects and histories that sometimes overlapped with government initiatives, but continued

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*.

to have individually and locally relevant goals. The differences between Rose's and her northern contemporaries' political experiences highlight the need for stories from other regions, like Ile-a-la-Crosse, where Rose shared her teachings, to reinforce the situational nature of tradition.

The geographical and temporal specificity of tradition for people in Ile-a-la-Crosse have been under ongoing interpretation. Contextualizing narratives of change within their historical circumstances as well as the circumstances in which the stories were told highlights ideas of tradition that community members have since mobilized to address contemporary community needs or questions. One such signpost for shifting uses for tradition and traditional items was the 1976 bicentennial of Ile-a-la-Crosse, as measured from the founding of the first Hudson's Bay Company post there. Local teacher Robert Longpre, along with a committee of other young and often politically active community members, researched and authored a community history book that some community members today continue to cite as a definitive history of the town. Part of the volume featured interviews and stories from local elders, including Tom Natomagan, 86 years old at the time of the book's publication, who remembered coming into Ile-a-la-Crosse from his family home across the lake to attend the bicentennial commemoration's midnight mass. He recalled:

We didn't use tents. We slept out in the open. There were only about three houses. We never used to have houses, just teepees. They didn't want to make houses. The people who lived in houses were called "house people." They couldn't believe we lived in teepees. Later, some old men started building houses, until, finally, everybody had a house. There was a smaller church. At times it couldn't fit everybody because then, the people didn't die.²⁵

Tom Natomagan's narrative is one of growing permanency in the town of Ile-a-la-Crosse itself. In the early part of the twentieth century, the town had served largely as a gathering place for religious and trade purposes rather than a place of permanent habitation. By the time that the bicentennial history was written, the town had grown substantially in size,²⁶ with most residents living there year-round: a shift that happened mostly within a single generation. While Rose Fleury, among many

²⁵ Robert Longpre, *Ile-a-la-Crosse 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial* (Ile-a-la-Crosse: Ile-a-la-Crosse Local Community Authority, 1977), 48.

²⁶ A 1976 community plan of Ile-a-la-Crosse recorded only one new subdivision built before 1958, in 1922. By contrast, between 1958 and 1971, the town expanded its surveyed land holdings nine times. "Department of Northern Saskatchewan Community Planning Map Legend – Ile-a-La-Crosse, SK," 1976, R. M. Bone fonds, MG 240, Box 3I, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

others, had depicted processes of making things as a way to enact traditions, Tom Natomagan read making things — houses, in particular — as an indication of a disappearance of a particular way of life. In his interpretation, people of the past were in fact healthier (“then, the people didn’t die”) because unlike in the narratives of tradition fostered, for example, by Rose Fleury’s GDI interview, the process of making dwellings for one’s own family was not necessarily an indication that they lived a traditional lifestyle. In his narration, tradition was defined in large part by a family’s geographical movements and use of a territory, rather than by specific tangible items they made or used.

While processes of making things underwent reinterpretation during (though not solely as a direct result of) the transition years from primarily-water to primarily-road transportation, the relationships between regional connections and motivations for making things reinforced each other. Nap Johnson worked on a scow — “‘napokosay’ they say in Cree, but they are scow...they are 45 feet long, 12 feet wide, boy, and awful heavy”²⁷ — for approximately ten years in the 1940s, as well as on a steamboat that travelled from Grand Rapids to Dillon in the 1920s. This type of work highlighted the expansive distances that were required to sell furs, at times for minimal gain, and such experiences spanned generations. In the 1975 interview with Michael Tymchak of the Northern Saskatchewan Archives, Nap Johnson recounted stories from his father-in-law Celestine Kipling that mirrored his own: “In the night, he said, two men steer the boat, let it drift down, you know, go about two, three miles an hour with the water and then, he said, as soon as daylight, well, these guys go to sleep and the other guys paddle with these oars again. For fifteen skins! Two weeks!”²⁸ Nap Johnson described such lengthy operations and occupations as typical ones for men in the north at that time. The large-scale geography underpinning relationships in the region served as employment. Until the airplane became a commercially viable mode of transportation, Ile-a-la-Crosse served as a hub for freighting in much of the north.²⁹ Because much of this employment was focused on transporting objects and people across distances to connect them with larger markets, making things was not a typical occupation. At the same time, however, makers’ activities, needs, and interests in their diverse iterations over time drew on many of the same relationships that Nap Johnson described. Ile-a-la-Crosse’s physical location helped to determine the ways that generations and individuals depicted tradition by citing their made goods as evidence of particular histories.

²⁷ Johnson, interview, 1975.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Ile-a-La-Crosse, Saskatchewan - Statistical Outline,” 1975 1971, 2, MG 240, Box 3I, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

As in the case of Georgina Morin's experiences of histories that were sometimes community-based but never community-bound, both before and after the advent of roads Ile-a-la-Crosse histories were not defined by whether or not they took place there. At times, the act of getting together despite geographic distance provided an impetus for making things. Daniel Daigneault, who was born in 1923, described in a 2001 interview with the Gabriel Dumont institute how travel and intercommunity gatherings sometimes yielded observations about cross-cultural differences:

I remember when I was fishing at Buffalo [Narrows], they would have a dance and I would go. Stan McKay would be square dance caller. I would sometimes attend dances around here. I remember we'd gather around here. This was the only place that celebrated mass. We would have a feast. I remember this old Dene man nicknamed Apisis. He asked me to get him some jam, so I went to buy some. He ate the jam with his rabbit just like we use cranberry sauce when we eat turkey. It was the same.³⁰

In these experiences, differences or changes in food marked changes in the ways that communities related to one another or shared new habits; the ways that people ate their foods, particularly those they later understood as traditional, could therefore also act as historical sources and temporal markers. In their introduction to an edited collection of essays on food histories in Canada, Franca Iacovetta, Valerie Korinek, and Marlene Epp noted that food is a site of memory, intercultural encounter, and complex identities over time.³¹ Ile-a-la-Crosse community members demonstrate that food is also a site where ideas of authenticity have been created, defined, and interpreted according to local interests that have shifted over time. Food, both at the time and for contemporary historians, could serve as both a historical source and a temporal marker, with processes of making things — in this case specific foods and the tools necessary to acquire them — underpinning moments of exchange like the one that Daniel Daigneault described. Community narratives about making things do not show a clear distinction between material and intangible things. The food that

³⁰ Daniel Daigneault, interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, transcript, 2001, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/06264>. This quotation is a summary and translation, created by GDI, from the original Cree/Michif interview.

³¹ See Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp, "Introduction," in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie J. Korinek, and Marlene Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

people consumed in the past was not typically “exhibit-able” in the same ways as more permanent made goods, but it held similar relevance in narratives about the past and about intercultural interactions over time. While the food that Daniel Daigneault described was a historical source, the processes of creation and historical interpretation that surrounded those foods were equally significant in creating narratives.

Discussing both the processes and the outcomes of making things complicates definitions of “material culture” by showing how a single thing or category of things could be mobilized in many ways and places at once, not only in shifting ways over time. Several studies have sought to consider the ways that objects’ meanings have changed over time. Nicholas Thomas has described how Indigenous and European understandings of objects in the South Pacific were appropriated from each other across a series of exchanges and relationships.³² More recently, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Ivan Gaskell, Sara J. Schechner, and Sarah Anne Carter have argued that to seek out only an object’s original usage or meaning is to ignore the ways that it can change over time.³³ Neither of these perspectives, however, accounts for meanings that are concurrent and may be disparate or even conflicting depending on individual histories and experiences, as Daniel Daigneault’s observation of food differences indicates: in that case, the tangible thing had multiple concurrent uses in the same community.

Ile-a-la-Crosse has a long history as a central gathering place in the north through its location at a meeting of waterways (the Cree name of the town, Sakitawak, means “where the rivers meet”), as a fur trade post, a site of religious establishment, a hub for freighting, and a medical centre (to name the most prominent examples of Ile-a-la-Crosse’s sense of leadership or centrality). Community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse have, rightly and understandably, come to understand their town as a centre for resources and gathering. At the same time, this local pride is also a local idea; observers in other communities have at times seen it differently. Hetty Jo Brumbach, for instance, interviewed a schoolteacher in Patuanak in the 1970s who argued that schoolchildren in Ile-a-la-Crosse were more poorly behaved because of the poorer resources there.³⁴ Quiring has also noted that other communities in the north were the first choice for the provision of some services.³⁵ This is not to discount Ile-a-la-Crosse community members’ observations of their own community, but

³² Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich et al., *Tangible Things: Making History through Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³⁴ Hetty Jo Brumbach, “Hetty Jo Brumbach Fieldnotes,” 1975, Ethnology Archives, Box 241, Folder 8, Canadian Museum of History.

³⁵ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*.

the community exists as a network of communities across the north, and does not operate in isolation. These histories and institutions meant that in an increasingly permanent, sedentary community with family, political, and economic ties across the region and the province, community members sought ways to reinforce local autonomy and uniqueness in response to outside pressures. High-profile events like the controversial 1972 takeover of the local Roman Catholic-run school by a group of community political activists to bring it under local control are the most visible examples of at least some community members' desire for local autonomy in the face of growing connections and pressures from beyond the region and the north.

Other community histories, like those that come to light when examining motivations for making things, also reveal interests in local control and uniqueness that, while at times political in nature, were never intended to be as visible or revolutionary as the school takeover. Many of the researchers who worked on Robert Longpre's 1976 community history, most of them young and comparatively well-to-do and well-travelled men who were Longpre's contemporaries, were also involved with the school takeover a few years earlier. The history presented long-standing intuitions alternately as disruptions to Ile-a-la-Crosse's local traditions, and as means through which community members could assert their local uniqueness. Longpre described the local co-op store, for instance, in these terms: "A no-nonsense atmosphere suggests that as competitor to the 'Bay,' it means business. People-owned, little is wasted on the luxuries dazzling the eyes of all beholders. Food, dry goods, hardware and conversation are the chief goods obtained."³⁶ Defining the co-op as an institution representing local control, in contrast to the long-standing but ultimately outsider HBC store, is significant for the environments in which makers of handmade items worked during the mid-twentieth-century.³⁷ Makers, particularly of items understood (perhaps at least as much by buyers as sellers) as traditional, marketed their work through a Women's Craft Co-op facilitated by the wife of a doctor working at the Ile-a-la-Crosse hospital.³⁸ While the co-op was primarily an economic opportunity for women and their families affected by the limited availability of work in the north — a housing survey of Ile-a-la-Crosse from the 1970s noted that "the services and businesses in the town are few"³⁹ — it also provided an opportunity for those community members seeking to highlight Ile-a-la-Crosse's autonomy to cite instances where locally-produced items, and by extension ideas, had value because of their broader appeal.

³⁶ Longpre, *Ile-a-La-Crosse 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial*, 70.

³⁷ I discuss these environments in more detail in Chapter 6.

³⁸ Aubichon, interview.

³⁹ "Ile-a-La-Crosse, Saskatchewan - Statistical Outline."

The ideological interpretations of making things were not always foremost in community members' minds, particularly when family configurations and geographical location dictated their economic circumstances, and therefore also the opportunities or requirements for making things. Max Morin, who worked on Robert Longpre's community history and would become mayor of Ile-a-la-Crosse about twenty-five years later, also compiled his own informal history of the community in the 1970s, based on interviews with elders around a set of themes pertaining to aspects of daily life in the past. He noted in his introduction that, given the age range of the elders, the temporal scope of the themes discussed reached from about the 1920s onward. Implicitly, then, by equating elders' activities with tradition, Max Morin's history helped to create a definition of tradition that was dependent on generational change, interpretation, and mobilization. When asked about how they made a living or were employed when they were young, the elders interviewed reported that berry picking, fishing, and trapping were common occupations, while some (mostly women) worked at the hospital, and others (mostly men) worked at the HBC post or the Roman Catholic Mission. Typically, they noted, whole families would travel to the trapline, but the men in the family would make the deals when it came time to sell the furs.⁴⁰ At first glance, these conventions hint at gendered experiences of work and necessities of making particular things to suit specific occupations or economic needs. Within these experiences, though, were also embedded family configurations and geographical locations that dictated individuals' economic circumstances, and by extension, their processes, opportunities, and requirements for making the specific things that community members past and present have interpreted. The things that people made were inseparable from the other facets of their lives: the things themselves both created and illustrated those contexts.

Within experiences of change, communicating about tradition has been a relatively recent concern, growing in prevalence in common discussion from the mid-twentieth-century onwards. While the changing geographical relationships depicted in the previous section helped in part to spark discussions about tradition, looking to other concurrent community changes also reflect an era of rapid change and conflicting ideals for the present and future. The new geographical links, though, underpinned connections to places and ideas beyond the regional. In the early part of the twentieth century, families tended to follow a similar yearly cycle as others in the region, consisting of an intensive fall and early winter trapping season, an interlude around Christmas and New Year, occasional mid-winter trapping and fishing, concentrated spring trapping, intensive early summer

⁴⁰ Max Morin, "History and Culture, Ile A La Crosse," 1975 1971, R. M. Bone fonds, MG 240, Box 3I, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

fishing, and sporadic late summer fishing.⁴¹ With diminishing fur prices from the 1940s onward, trapping was less and less a viable economic venture, with few other occupations to take its place.⁴² The provincial government response was to institute the Fur Conservation Program in the 1940s, which divided trapping regions into designated blocks, within which only specified trappers were permitted to work.⁴³ Finding productive trapping areas required a longer journey, and the result was an overcrowding of fur blocks near villages.⁴⁴ At the same time, though, villages housed most of the services that inhabitants of the region made use of,⁴⁵ and so as they became more central, permanent gathering places, the ties between people and the places they made for themselves were translated into the spatial and social layout of towns like Ile-a-la-Crosse. Just as in the broader region, the town itself housed family settlements and well-defined spaces of belonging on a small scale, and defining these places served as a way of retaining and emphasising the familiar (in all senses of the word) while adapting to new situations.⁴⁶

Coinciding closely with economic changes was an increased emphasis from the provincial government on education for children in the north,⁴⁷ and this, too, accentuated the ways in which people now interacted. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, the Roman Catholic mission-run boarding school allowed parents some flexibility of location and lifestyle during the school year, but their children, without the extended opportunity to learn the same survival and occupational skills their parents possessed, had more reasons to stay in town after completing their schooling. Furthermore, Ile-a-la-Crosse was unique among northwestern Saskatchewan communities in the settlement changes wrought by the education system; in the early 1970s, the town of Ile-a-la-Crosse took control of its school, with strong feelings on both sides that, to an extent, persist today.⁴¹ A vocal advocate for a residential school settlement (particularly because the boarding school at Ile-a-la-Crosse was excluded from the 2008 federal government's Residential Schools Settlement Agreement), the late Don Favel commented on the takeover:

⁴¹ Jarvenpa, *The Trappers of Patuanak*, 65. This discussion of spatial and institutional change comes from Katya Claire MacDonald, "Looking for Snob Hill and Sq'ewqel: Exploring the Changing Histories of Aboriginality and Community in Two Aboriginal Communities" (MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2009), <http://hdl.handle.net/10388/etd-12112009-105634>.

⁴² Valentine, *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*, 11.

⁴³ Winkel, "Northern Saskatchewan – A Transformation," 9–10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Dubrule, interview by Jon Anuik, Kevin Gambell, and Katya MacDonald, 26 May 2008.

⁴⁶ These points about the relationships between spatial and social historical changes in Ile-a-la-Crosse are adapted from my MA thesis. I have discussed them more fully in MacDonald, "Looking for Snob Hill and Sq'ewqel."

⁴⁷ Valentine, *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*, 65.; Helen Buckley, J. E. Michael Kew, and John B. Hawley, *The Indians and Métis of Northern Saskatchewan: A Report on Economic and Social Development* (Saskatoon: Centre for Community Studies, 1963), 27.

They [governments or non-local institutions] don't like people that speak out, that's one thing they don't like. They don't like us being vocal and standing up for our rights. And they don't like that. And they always seem to find a way, it's either turning half of the people on us, or, you know, there's always something going on. No different than when we took over the school, they had a standoff. They had a standoff, they stood, they said, "All church people stand on this side, because these are the devils over here"...And that old wound is still there. It's still there, and most of it has healed, but every once in a while, somebody will open that wound again. It's not completely healed or completely forgotten.⁴⁸

The educational change in the 1970s, while fraught with conflict among interpretations of politics and religion, to some extent allowed the school to reflect (some) local interests more closely, but, with the closing of the boarding school, also meant that families were tied year-round to the community for their children to attend school. This development further reinforced permanency in the town, which in turn helped to accentuate interactions, and perhaps increase their significance, beyond what they might have been in more diffuse geographical relationships among people.⁴⁹

Political bodies, both locally and beyond, expressed interest in other ways in shaping the connections among specific histories and their consequences. Dorothy Dubrule remembered an explicit attempt in the 1970s on the part of local governance to foster what they viewed as important relationships among community members:

The mayor and council and the local housing board thought that if these families stayed closer to each other, they'd have more of a family unit, and it wouldn't be more of a breakup of the family unit, and more support for the younger people...Because it was so, when people my age were growing up, we had clusters of families, had all the support we needed from great-grandmothers down to great-cousin-aunt.⁵⁰

With expansion of the town, though, came new concerns about the town's character and well-being,

⁴⁸ Don Favel, interview by Katya MacDonald and Kevin Gambell, 25 May 2008.

⁴⁹ This paragraph was originally part of Katya MacDonald, MacDonald, "Looking for Snob Hill and Sq'ewqel."

⁵⁰ Dubrule, interview, 26 May 2008.

and these, too, have become embedded in the physical makeup of Ile-a-la-Crosse, as Don Favel commented: “There’s a place actually called Crack Avenue over here...where the crackheads come...you ask anybody, and they’ll tell you where it is.”⁵¹ Concerns about young people’s increased exposure to unhealthy lifestyles — whether drug and alcohol abuse, or simply a shift away from their parents’ and grandparents’ physically active occupations — have underpinned many community members’ discussions of the value or uses of tradition, as defined by specific and tangible activities.

As community members’ comments suggest, since the decades of rapid change in Ile-a-la-Crosse, their definition of tradition has become less stable, and carries less weight in light of other forces in the community. One of these forces, particularly in the decades of the 1950s through 1970s when the town was first establishing itself as a locally-governed municipality, was the push towards assimilation from governments. An anthropological study from 1963 argued that assimilation was “an erroneous conception of social change as a one-directional process...Cultural and social change is not necessarily a progression and does not occur simply by the substitution of one system for another.”⁵² While the study argued for the specific regional and cultural needs of people in northwestern Saskatchewan, its very existence as a counterargument to assimilation suggests that the push for uniformity was strong and multifaceted at the time. It also did not leave room for northerners’ local solutions to new municipal and economic challenges.

When community members in recent years have reflected on that period, they have tended to speak about the changes they experienced in terms of a move away from tradition. High school principal Vince Ahenakew was the first person I interviewed in Ile-a-la-Crosse, in 2006 as an undergraduate summer student employee. Since then, I have spoken with Vince on nearly every visit to Ile-a-la-Crosse, on diverse topics directly related to my research questions, as well as on larger questions of approaching elders respectfully, or understanding how I might contribute to local events like school career fairs or Vince’s historical place names work with elders. In our very first meeting, Vince, who developed the provincial Michif curriculum for high school students, commented of his students’ knowledge of the language:

Probably all the time [high school students are] talking English...they don’t understand Cree or Michif when we speak to them; it’s here and there, eh...but the

⁵¹ Favel, interview.

⁵² Buckley, Kew, and Hawley, *The Indians and Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*, 10.

ones that do know, they're kind of reluctant to speak...Something's out of whack, is what I'm going to say, what I'm trying to say, but I still try to speak to them in Cree or Michif. Hopefully that will change, once people start accepting the fact, start being proud of their language, I think they'll start bringing it back.⁵³

Vince had noted a distinct break from earlier generations' knowledge of the language, but he felt that it was a skill and a worldview that his students would come to value or "bring back." In other words, he saw Michif as a historical skill that, while still relevant, would not necessarily change a great deal. While those definitions of tradition may appear static at first glance, they have also been direct responses to assimilationist efforts, meaning that tradition is not simply a catalogue of specific traits: it is also an argument about the viability of a community and its histories. Scholars of religious texts use the term "reception history" to refer to the ways that readers have interpreted and deployed texts to make arguments about their contemporary world. In such arguments, the concept of tradition is in fact a decision, based on individual and collective discussions about which portions of the text or of religious history are deemed most relevant.⁵⁴ In the case of my work with community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon, objects and processes of making things have also been "received" in distinct ways over time, so that tradition is also a decision about which historical activities should have the most contemporary meaning.

As community members have discussed changes in making things, the value of particular practices, and young people's needs, they have explained some of the outcomes of change that has occurred across the last two or three generations in Ile-a-la-Crosse. The antecedents or motivations for those changing interpretations, though, are not always clear from community members' narratives alone. While Ile-a-la-Crosse has been a focal point of newcomer scrutiny since the eighteenth century, in the mid-twentieth century, this scrutiny and involvement began to stem in a concerted way from the provincial government.⁵⁵ This meant that new geographical connections, local political arguments, community economic and social interests, and indeed processes of making things were increasingly interconnected, and increasingly objects of local concern and dialogue. While these conversations began to come to the fore alongside CCF interest in northern Saskatchewan, they continued to underpin community members' arguments about tradition,

⁵³ Vince Ahenakew, interview by Katya MacDonald, 18 June 2006.

⁵⁴ See for instance Jonathan Roberts, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

⁵⁵ See for instance Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*.

community, and contemporary needs well into the late twentieth century and beyond.

Just as people, economies, and processes of making things occupied many different geographical locations even within histories of a single community, tracing the items that people made and interpreted across time reveals generational shifts in the ways that tradition has been defined and mobilized within those histories. Both the content and contexts of interviews with community members depict tradition as an idea with multiple meanings depending on time period and context. A short exchange between Daniel Daigneault and his interviewer from the Gabriel Dumont Institute in 2001 offers a broad example of the shifting environments in which tradition was defined and used. The interviewer asked Daniel what language he spoke. He replied:

I speak Cree. A little French and English.

Interviewer: Do you speak Michif?

Daniel: Yeah. I picked it up from listening to others speaking the language. Dad probably spoke Michif. [My grandparents] spoke Cree.⁵⁶

This exchange suggests that Daniel did not consider Michif to be his mother tongue, or at least considered Cree to be on an equal footing. The question was not only a demographic one: it was also intended to establish the historical scope of Metis people — as defined in part by speaking Michif — and examine to what extent people in Ile-a-la-Crosse fit into a politically Metis identity provincially and beyond. Significantly, though, community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse have often not defined their language in precise terms; individuals who identify as Metis often describe their language as “Michif or Cree,” given that in that region, there are not large differences between the two. While some community members who travelled elsewhere to attend school discovered that the variety of Cree that they spoke was different from the language in other regions,⁵⁷ it was the advent of province-wide pan-Metis political movements in the 1940s and beyond that helped to describe the language spoken in Ile-a-la-Crosse as something distinct from Cree. Daniel Daigneault’s description of his and his ancestors’ language offers an illustration of shifts in the ways that each generation defined the language that they spoke. The conversation hints at differences between past and present, and pan-Metis and local understandings of the past. It was therefore not only a conversation about history or the past, but also about historiographical change over time as it

⁵⁶ Daigneault, interview, 2001.

⁵⁷ Yvonne Longworth, interview by Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, 2010.

pertained to Metis histories. The overlapping historiographies within Ile-a-la-Crosse were shaped in part by the geographies with which local people interacted. The things that people made, used, and mobilized for specific gains help to unify these histories of mobilizing the past to make contemporary arguments.

The differences in experiences between generations of making cannot, of course, be attributed solely to change over time that each family experienced uniformly. In a GDI interview, Gilbert McCallum made the point that geographical differences were not only descriptors of where people lived; they sometimes also described inhabitants' economic circumstances. Particularly in the twentieth century, poverty was a common experience and therefore a common element of remembrance for community members I spoke with, so that it was both a marker of change over time, as well as a component of contemporary invocations of tradition. Yet regionally-based wellbeing also existed on a small scale; it was not only a marker of a north-south divide like the one that Rose Fleury had identified. He noted that “[p]eople in Sandy Point [across the lake from Ile-a-la-Crosse] were well off. They had horses and cattle.”⁵⁸ Considered in the context of his other remarks on historical change and a sense of separation between past and present, Gilbert McCallum's discussion of disparate wealth indicates that circumstances surrounding families' made goods could not be interpreted without either their geographical or temporal contexts. For Gilbert McCallum, the material items that people had and made in the past served as evidence of change, at times for the worse. The items he described were not necessarily direct contributors to work or to household maintenance, as Dorothy Dubrule remembered; rather, incidental items also offered him opportunities for depicting the past in specific, defined way:

People lived well a long time ago. Today, I don't know why things have changed so much. I often think about this...We played all sorts of games. We made a ball out of cloth. When someone ran to the bases you through the ball to hit that person, and when you hit him, that means he's out. I don't know where we learned the game, probably from the elders at Big Island. It has a Cree name...A lot of people would go there to camp and sing and dance the powwow.⁵⁹

Gilbert McCallum invoked these experiences to argue for the quality of life in the past, despite

⁵⁸ Gilbert McCallum, interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, transcript, 4 July 2001, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/06286>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

poverty or economic inequalities that he had also observed at that time, citing elders' knowledge and community gatherings as evidence of values that existed alongside the making of things to facilitate those gatherings.

Contemporaries of Gilbert McCallum also commented on a shift between past and present values and interests, reinforcing broadly generational experiences and interests that helped to inform later arguments and invocations of the past. Nap Johnson, who was interviewed for the GDI project as well, recounted a similar time period as Gilbert McCallum. As a result, their stories hold common features that they used to describe the past in comparison to the present. Nap Johnson cited poverty as a noteworthy marker of past experiences, particularly in comparison to what he saw as young people's contemporary lifestyles:

...boy this is a good story for young people — my mother used to tell me, from about, I was eight years old, he said, haul wood, we had to go in the bush to haul dry wood, and there was no sweet saw back then, just cross-cut saw. I had to use that cross-cut saw to, to cut wood. I cut wood for all those people, and my mother used to tell me — there was no old age pension yet at that time — and then, uh, my mother used to tell me, she said, don't stand there to wait for them to pay you. They got nothing. They're poor just like us.⁶⁰

Nap Johnson evidently had a specific audience in mind for his narrative, characterizing it as “a good story for young people;” that is, a story that reflected values and activities that he felt were important for young people to learn. This didactic intention for recounting historical activities and relationships implied that young people and their attitudes towards work are different now than they were in the past. The common experience of poverty, and the activities that Nap Johnson described were processes of making things, or at least that facilitated the making of things, but the most significant product in this narrative was not an object, but rather a lesson for young people and a commentary on changes in values in addition to economic circumstances and lifestyles.

The moral and ethical values that some community members have attached to historical processes of making things were closely tied to narratives about change — often for the worse — in comparison to earlier generations, even despite the poverty and hard work that members of those generations frequently described. Mike Durocher, born in 1954, was one of the youngest

⁶⁰ Johnson, interview, 1975.

participants in GDI's interviewing project, as well as one of the earliest participants interviewed, in 1999. He was selected in part because of his work as a radio personality in the north and therefore someone who had reflected on stories and depictions of the past, and had advocated for these perspectives in his career as a lawyer as well as in radio. His interview with GDI, though, was also shaped by the somewhat leading questions that the interviewer formulated, largely unprompted by Mike Durocher's earlier remarks:

Q: When you grew up you got a lot of strength from the land but then when you went out into the world —?

A: Oh yes, a lot of times I used to think over here...my parents and all about the land and how we used to work how the land was abundant to us all...I used to think a lot of times and I used to dream about it, how I would sit out here and think about our situation, we lived good and were raised good from a caring family, we learned all we were supposed to learn and we learned to pray, and though we were dependent on our parents the land was what gave it all to us; if it wasn't for that, we would never [have] had anything. It was the land and the way we made a living that made us strong, we never had to ask for anything...Well, these young people, they see us, and I see them, they want to give up, these young people here, right away they want to quit. They make it hard on themselves, anything at all they do...I have twins now, there in Saskatoon now...I teach them about the North, how to live, the land, they like it when they come, we'd go fishing, snaring rabbits, we'd eat off the land...I like to see that with these young people. To learn how to live in unity and to survive on the land.⁶¹

In the context of interviews intended, in part, to document Metis history as a feature of a rights-bearing nation, a discussion of land usage with a lawyer was an act of claiming a common history, even if that was not the primary intention of the interview. Mike Durocher's remarks depict the land as a space of making specific values rooted in specific activities of land usage largely belonging to the past. These discussions offer a marker of ways that community members have interpreted and

⁶¹ Mike Durocher, interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, transcript, 1999, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/13708>. Note: the information page for both Mike Durocher's interview and Angus Gardiner's interview state that the interviews were conducted in 2001. However, the transcripts themselves state 1999.

invoked the past for specific social or political arguments, based on a timeline that refers to changes across generations. By depicting his parents' activities as ones to emulate, Mike Durocher reinforced this timeline not only of lifestyles but also of historical arguments about values and rights.

Shifts in historical understanding that have been based on generational interpretation and experience are also, crucially, tied to the role of memory in interpreting the past with political or social purposes in mind. Angus Gardiner, who was also interviewed in 1999 by the GDI, responded to questions about how his grandfather and father had made their livings by making things. These economic undertakings helped to facilitate or relieve economic concerns. Community members' recollections of them show how ideals for making things have changed alongside other community needs and interests. Angus Gardiner's father was 69 years old in 1999, and had experienced similar living conditions — described by some as poverty and by others as simplicity — to those that others like Nap Johnson and Gilbert McCallum described. Angus himself described his grandparents' and father's occupations in fairly neutral terms, however:

Q: Now, do you remember how your grandfather made a living?

A: I remember a little bit, he pretty well always commercial fished and trapped, that was the main way he made a living and he worked, I never saw him, but my grandmother told about him, just like in the summer time he worked for the Bay; they never paid him much but they earned enough for grub, which they were given; it was good for that.

Q: Now, your grandmother...What did she do?

A: Well, she was grandfather's wife.

Q: I heard that she was a medicine woman she gathered herbs? The same as her father.

A: Maybe, that might be, he never said nothing about it, he never told me, I don't remember, it was along time ago.

Q: Was she going around helping people [as a midwife]?

A: I used to go with him. She went around helping people.

Q: So how did your dad make a living?

A: He was a trapper and he was a good hunter. He sure fed us good here [you]

know.⁶²

These descriptions of older generations' work indicate that people's occupations were fairly singularly focused on contributing to making a living: a living in which labour was gendered but not regarded as unequal by subsequent generations, like the GDI interviewer.

Since Angus Gardiner's family narratives were not necessarily constructed to make a specific argument (as suggested by the interviewer's prompts to discuss specific topics), they provide a point of comparison for other more didactic narratives like Nap Johnson's stories intended specifically for young people, or Mike Durocher's land-based reflections on the past. When considered collectively, in relation to one another, these narratives about change in occupation and making things across generations show that ideas of tradition are acts of memory as well as argument. Africanist scholar Terrence Ranger argues that traditions that may appear to be long-standing have in fact been intentionally created as symbolic practices that seek to highlight continuity with the past to legitimise contemporary concerns.⁶³ While Ranger notes that invention is not synonymous with artificial,⁶⁴ his argument does imply that tradition is ahistorical. Ile-a-la-Crosse community members' narratives discussed here, however, show that the invocation of tradition to make arguments is a practice that has occurred across generations, meaning that tradition is a historical process in and of itself.

At the same time that some community members have described earlier generations' processes of making things as activities that belonged to a (sometimes idealized) past, others' similar narratives about everyday items and practices have demonstrated that while the content of narratives and historical arguments have changed over the course of the last two or three generations in Ile-a-la-Crosse, certain threads of interest or concern have been consistent motivations for individual and collective arguments about the past. Just as community advocates like Liz Durocher have cited older generations' activities as ones to emulate, Angus Gardiner's father (whose name the interviewer did not record) highlighted his own childhood experiences to indicate his concern for contemporary youth:

When I grew up here, lots of people said I was poor but I wasn't poor because I had lots to eat and different things from the bush, meat. Today's times are different. The

⁶² Angus Gardiner, interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, transcript, 1999, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/13709>.

⁶³ Ranger, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 4–5.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

people that raised me worked hard, I learned and I followed in their footsteps, it helped me...In the place where I was raised we didn't have much room and stuff, when I went to bed I slept on the floor. I used to cover up with a duck feather blanket and a little pillow was there. When it was cold, 30 below, 40 below, maybe even 50 below, I didn't know, I used to be able to sleep with my blanket, in the morning the water in the pail in the house was frozen about one inch thick.⁶⁵

The ongoing concern for youth is one that has transcended generations, though what has changed is whose history has been the benchmark for comparison (one's own, versus one's parents' or grandparents'). What remains uncertain from these narratives alone, though, is to what, in particular, these concerns respond. Angus Gardiner's father referred to hard work and to satisfaction with whatever his family was able to give him, as illustrated by the simple bedding he recalled fondly — bedding that, given Dorothy Dubrule's description of her own mother's household work as well as the general unavailability of store-bought goods, was probably homemade as well. Processes of making things, then, help to answer the question of how community members hope to address their concern for contemporary youth. Making things, in these narratives, was not only an act of survival or frugality, but also of values and good habits.

While some community members have cited their personal or family histories as illustrations of the values that accompanied lifestyles in which ordinary things were handmade, contemporary makers today also talk about ways in which their items have become extraordinary in some way. The unusualness of handmade items today points to conversations about tradition and authenticity that have developed alongside the narratives, particularly from older generations reflecting on the early part of the twentieth century, about change for the worse in the community and its activities or values. Norma Malboeuf took up beadwork and sewing hides out of curiosity, learning from several older ladies in the community who made items to sell through a craft co-operative, and were also hired by the municipality and school board to teach classes. I had met with Norma at her homes several times when working on other projects and knew that she made mittens and moccasins as a hobby, but had only spoken with her once specifically regarding these activities. Many of her comments about the community, from the perspective of a comparative newcomer, were larger observations, in this instance simply discussed in the context of making items considered traditional. Norma's analyses touched on themes of economic need, tradition, and authenticity, adding a

⁶⁵ "Old Man Albert/Harry(?) Gardiner," quoted in Angus Gardiner, interview, 1999.

tangible dimension to some of the questions of change over time that other community members, such as those interviewed by GDI, had alluded to but not necessarily discussed in detail.

Norma noted that most people are no longer interested in making things because it is an expensive, time-consuming process with a heavy demand, depending on the items being made. Beaded mittens are particularly popular, she noted, because it is a “dying art” with only a few left in the community who are able to do it.⁶⁶ Teenagers in the community often ask for beadwork designs featuring sports team or clothing brand logos, while young children favour cartoon characters. In such instances, the outward appearance of the finished item is not what represents authenticity; rather, the process of making the mittens carries the idea of tradition for those who seek out the handmade items. The interest in such items, alongside the processes and circumstances of their construction, have helped to show how tradition and authenticity have been negotiated alongside changing understandings of community needs and interests.

Community members’ narratives about handmade items and about local histories have often been intertwined. Changing connections across spaces and geographies led to practical changes in transportation and access to services, but they also changed the ways that people interacted within and beyond communities. Within those contexts, objects can be useful in showing how community members interpreted and communicated about those changes. They can also be temporal markers that help to pinpoint how and when interpretations changed. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, the growing permanency of settlement in the latter half of the twentieth century was not a neutral process; it was the result of new forms of colonialism but also new ways for communities to assert local identities or definitions of tradition. Processes of making things were not stand-alone events or simply symbols of that tradition; rather, they help to show how community members discussed the significance of sociopolitical events like the school-takeover or reinterpreted the value of the past by drawing on broader connections beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse. Sometimes, intentional iterations of tradition were meant to be for the educational benefit of future generations. At other times, memory and even nostalgia underpinned conversations about making things. These processes of making things show how community members responded to changes by finding ways to maintain and articulate important features of their community and its many overlapping identities.

These generational changes in activities and narratives showed the growing impact of nostalgia that was evident in some community members’ narratives about handmade items. Beyond that they also contained a sense of urgency to maintain tangible skills because they were equated

⁶⁶ Malboeuf, interview.

with historical values and were connected to a time when people lived in ways that community members now define as traditional. Linking objects, traditions, and values is a conversation that has been occurring across two or three generations, as community members' perspectives recorded in community-created, institutional, and my own oral history work show. Often, handmade items have been central to those discussions, whether or not I or another interviewer had explicitly asked about them. As a result, histories of objects help to explain histories of community or familial change, and how community members have sought ways to mitigate or adapt changes to foster a vision for the future that is based on interpretations of how the past was. Tradition and authenticity are therefore dialogic processes, constructed alongside tangible items. Geographical and generational change have helped to set the stage in Ile-a-la-Crosse for contexts in which these shifting narratives about authenticity developed.

Chapter 5: Interpreting Tradition Through Making Things in Ile-a-la-Crosse

Like nearly any political or economic act, making things in Ile-a-la-Crosse has not been a neutral process, as evidenced by some community members' narratives about the value of preserving knowledge or building connections to perceived historical values. Tradition, as employed in community members' discussions of the value of the past, has been cast in a strictly positive light, in which traditional things are historical, but not all historical things become part of the canon of tradition. Stories about making things, then, have not always been stories that connect to the moral values of the past that some community members have cited. When Gilbert McCallum reminisced about the past in an interview with GDI, he talked about his and his friends' occupations as hunters, trappers, or fishermen, but he also talked about activities that have underlain subsequent debate about the specific nature of tradition and authenticity in contemporary Ile-a-la-Crosse:

They had a lot of fun [at dances]. They had home brew. They would boil it all night and sometimes they would make about 45 gallons. It was whiskey they made. The alcohol would separate from the water and it would drain to separate drums and that was what they drank. They wouldn't drink all the time. Not like they do today. They did not continue to drink to cure a hangover. They had to leave to make their livelihood. They would either go to work, trap, or fish, or hunt.¹

Like other narratives, both from Gilbert McCallum and from other community members, that drew a distinction between the past and the present, the theme of alcohol consumption was an area in which practices of the past were portrayed as wiser or better-informed than practices of the present.

The process of making alcohol, traced through individuals' narratives of the past, shows how narratives about nostalgia and tradition have been created intentionally through argument and interpretation. Even Gilbert McCallum's remembrance of alcohol being a more measured indulgence in the past is, for some community members, an inaccurate depiction of the era that has sparked contemporary definitions of tradition. Jules Daigneault's comparison of his past and present took a much more black-and-white view of alcohol, and did not acknowledge its making or existence: "And everybody used to get along together. There was no liquor, no drugs. Just tea and bannock and dancing. Everybody got along. There was no politicians or nothing. Just straight

¹ McCallum, interview.

laughing and dancing. Just talking about fishing and trapping and how everybody's doing, and who's making moccasins, and who's got moccasins for sale."²

Jules is a community member who is keen to speak with visitors and newcomers, even approaching me on the street on one of my first visits to Ile-a-la-Crosse as an undergraduate summer student. As a result, I have visited Jules on nearly every subsequent trip to the community, and had at times relied heavily on his perspectives of the past. As I got to know more community members, and told them about my visits with Jules, some of these people members have cautioned me that I should not take Jules' narratives at face value; indeed, as Jules' wife Lena has told me on more than one occasion, "Daigneaults are bullshitters." His stories therefore occupy a tenuous or conflicted place in community narratives; although he is recognized as a skilled skiff-builder, and Ile-a-la-Crosse teachers and schools have often called upon him to help students with traditional skills or knowledge, his knowledge is not necessarily universally valued in the community, even by those who consult him for assistance with educational projects. Jules' interest in favouring a compelling story over complete accuracy does indicate some of the ways in which tradition has been defined and reinterpreted not only across time or generations, but also within contemporary discussions about the relevance of the past for contemporary Ile-a-la-Crosse. Jules has depicted a clearly idealized version of the past that, in this narrative, did not have a clear connection to a specific person's memories nor to a specific time period. This ideal past was simply diametrically opposed to the present, with foods, activities, and specific handmade items representing that equation of tradition with community ideals.

These diverging meanings of tradition provide the basis for this chapter: I discuss how processes of making things have become tools for making historical arguments, which community members have used to pinpoint how community needs have changed since the time they identify as traditional. I first show how processes of making things in Ile-a-la-Crosse have also been ways for community members to define tradition in a way that is relevant to local needs. I then expand on the earlier discussion of geographical change to show that these local contexts were not only ways to describe relationships in the north; changing geographical contexts also provided platforms for community members to highlight political, social, and economic needs that deviated from their definitions of an earlier traditional lifestyle that was symbolized, in part, by making things. Because the contexts of making things changed over time, I then discuss how tradition itself has been generationally constructed, as community members have evaluated change through their own

² Jules Daigneault, interview by Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, 6 October 2010.

respective lenses. Thus, processes of making things have become ways for community members to make historical arguments about the significance of tradition.

While Jules Daigneault's reflections on the relationships between tradition and history take a somewhat simplified stance, other community members speaking in relatively recent years commented on their memories of childhood or of older generations' activities, they often alluded to the complexities of relationships within their communities, which in turn helped to create complexities in motivations for telling stories about the past. Work, family, and overlapping definitions of culture within a single region underpinned the ways that tradition has been mobilized as an argument about the past, as well as a set of characteristics that community members like Jules Daigneault have at times identified. Nap Johnson's interview with GDI interviewer Wayne Morin mentioned some of the ways that intertwined cultural affiliations facilitated involvement with activities that were identified, by GDI and by some community members, as traditionally (though not exclusively) Metis. Nap Johnson's mother was treaty, from primarily-Dene Patuanak, whereas Ile-a-la-Crosse is a community with a predominantly Metis population. Nap Johnson explained how these relationships played out in day-to-day contexts:

We used to borrow a canoe to go to get [my mother's] rations, little bit salt pork, and about six pounds, and three balls of twine to make nets, and side line, seaming twine, and we got two hooks with line to cast out you know, so that's how we used to — when I was about eight, twelve years old I started trapping for weasels and minks eh.³

In this case, treaty connections within the family facilitated Nap's own involvement with so-called traditional activities in the realm of Metis culture, as identified in this case by GDI's interest in that history, but also by Ile-a-la-Crosse community members' identification with Metis histories in their own community. A common question in the GDI collection of interviews was whether the interviewee and their parents, grandparents, or other family members had considered themselves Metis: the interviews sought to create a timeline of "Metis-ness" that encompassed specific activities and sociopolitical awareness, though it is not always clear from the interviews whether the interviewees themselves held similar viewpoints. In any case, the focus of these interviews was on

³ Nap Johnson, interview by Wayne Morin, transcript, 1999, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/06302>.

the idea of a traditional lifestyle that was defined by specific activities like hunting, trapping, and fishing — even if those activities were, as Nap Johnson described, sometimes facilitated by *not* being Metis.

In Ile-a-la-Crosse, it is a complicated question whether something is historically or traditionally Metis, given the layers of kinship and political affiliations, as well as legislative processes that have defined shifting identities throughout the twentieth century and beyond. At times, tradition and “Metis-ness” are synonymous, and in other instances, they are not necessarily linked. Processes of making things that community members have identified as traditionally Metis, be they physical items like skiffs or moccasins, or less concrete like foods or music, have also been part of broader narratives about northern Saskatchewan. In 2010, my friend and colleague Mandy Fehr and I worked on a small project that we initially envisioned as a history of Metis fiddle music and dancing in northwestern Saskatchewan. We soon found that although many community members whom we spoke with in Ile-a-la-Crosse were enthusiastic about describing these activities as traditionally Metis, they also cited the value and skill of fiddlers from neighbouring Cree and Dene communities with caveats that local (that is, Ile-a-la-Crosse Metis) music was more authentic. Martin Durocher, for instance, who was involved in Ile-a-la-Crosse’s first travelling square dance troupe in the 1980s, acknowledged that Dene people do fiddle and dance, but he argued that Dene people were attracted to the family and community gatherings forged by music, as he felt that they had lost their own culture. In this case, music-making was also a way to construct distinctive histories of both a culture and a community.⁴

Other community members took more measured perspectives; fiddle player Adam Daigneault acknowledged the skill of well-known Dene fiddlers, but also noted that “I wouldn’t think it’s Metis style fiddle playing ... there’s a lot of players in the Dene nation – they play different as well.”⁵ Taking an alternate perspective, Jim Durocher, a former president of the Metis nation of Saskatchewan and the Métis National Council, argued that governments’ divisions of Indigenous peoples in northwestern Saskatchewan had been artificial, particularly in the long-lasting effects of the ways that treaty and scrip had been administered.⁶ When Treaty 10 was negotiated and signed in northwestern Saskatchewan in 1906 and 1907, Treaty and Scrip Commissioner James McKenna

⁴ Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, “The Red River Jig in Sakitawak: Making Metis Music and Identities in Northwestern Saskatchewan” (Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, Sacramento, CA, 2011).

⁵ Adam Daigneault, interview by Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, October 2010.

⁶ Fehr and MacDonald, “The Red River Jig in Sakitawak: Making Metis Music and Identities in Northwestern Saskatchewan.”

came, for the first time in the numbered treaty negotiations, with a mandate to negotiate Metis scrip: a cash payment or land grant intended to extinguish Metis Aboriginal title to the land, administered on an individual basis, rather than collectively like the treaties. Unlike scrip commissions that had taken place in Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan since the 1880s, family, community, and cultural dynamics in northwestern Saskatchewan complicated the process of determining who could take treaty and who should take scrip. As McKenna himself wrote:

The Indians dealt with are in character, habit, manner or dress and mode of living similar to the Chipewyans and Crees of the Athabasca country. It is difficult to draw a line of demarcation between those who classed themselves as Indians and those who elected to be treated with as half-breeds. Both dress alike and follow the same mode of life. It struck me that the one group was, on the whole, as well able to provide for self-support as the other.⁷

As a result, the commission decided that individuals should determine for themselves whether to take treaty or scrip. Indigenous inhabitants of northwestern Saskatchewan weighed their options, and chose what they felt was the best deal for their family. In practice, the outcomes did not have equal merit; speculators quickly bought up most of the scrip and sold it at massive profit in Prince Albert and more southerly communities. Those who retained their land titles found that scrip was only redeemable to open Crown lands, most of which were located far away from the Ile-a-la-Crosse region, most of it south of North Battleford.⁸ Furthermore, some of those who received scrip understood it to be an ongoing agreement like the treaty, rather than a one-time offer.⁹ The result was that although at the time of treaty, lifestyles and kinship ties made it nearly impossible to define ethnic or cultural belonging according to the federal government's criteria, the decision whether to take treaty or scrip determined the nature of the ongoing rights that individuals and families would be party to. In particular, choosing scrip meant, from a governmental standpoint, that the scrip recipient and their descendants would not be recognized as rights-bearing Aboriginal peoples until Metis people were specifically included in the 1982 Constitution.

⁷ Cited in Kenneth Coates, "Treaty Research Report - Treaty No. 10 (1906)," report (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 1986), <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028870/1100100028872>.

⁸ "Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Presentation by the Metis Society of Saskatchewan, Clem Chartier" (La Loche, SK, 10 December 1992), 85, Native Law Centre Fonds, University of Saskatchewan Archives, <http://digital.scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/permalink/30676>.

⁹ Ibid.

In terms of defining tradition and authenticity, the tangible or visible practices that have often become synonymous with culture remained complex and interconnected. Like other members of his family, Jim Durocher explained that in the northwest, First Nations and Metis people “grew up together, intermarried, danced together, played music together, so it didn’t make any difference. The only time I became aware of the supposed difference was when I moved south.”¹⁰ Thus, seeking to define identities or histories based on visible traditional practices can yield an incomplete or oversimplified portrayals of changes in a community over time. Seemingly concrete traditions, in which community members have recognized the value of historical practices like gathering for music and dancing, have in fact been forged from the complicated and intertwined political and familial identities of people in northwestern Saskatchewan.

At dances across northwestern Saskatchewan that we attended, the Red River Jig – widely recognized within and beyond Metis communities as the iconic Metis fiddle tune – was the backdrop to jigging competitions in Dene, Cree, and Metis communities alike, and indeed Dene fiddler Arsene Nezcroche argued that Dene fiddlers and dancers were the best in the northwest. There is, of course, a notable distinction between Martin Durocher’s and Adam Daigneault’s narratives about Metis distinctiveness, and Jim Durocher’s comments on the interconnectedness of cultures. At the same time, Jim’s arguments about the arbitrary and colonial legal separation between Metis and First Nations people in the north were also shaped by his longstanding political involvement in arguments for Metis rights specifically.¹¹ Some of these differences in perspective may be shaped by generational differences; those who connected fiddle music and dancing with a politically and culturally Metis identity were generally in their sixties or younger. Older community members whom we spoke with tended to reflect, often nostalgically, on specific memories of what music and dance meant for them on a more personal level.¹² Returning to the 1976 community history of Ile-a-la-Crosse, many of those involved with its creation were individuals, including Jim Durocher, who were already involved with province-wide Metis politics (as evidenced by the influence of the Associated Metis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan, and the Metis Society of Saskatchewan during the school takeover)¹³ were also vocal in defining specific historical activities, like those contained in Max Morin’s interviewing categories, as traditional and by extension traditionally Metis.

¹⁰ Jim Durocher, interview by Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, 6 October 2010.

¹¹ I discuss some of these activities in greater detail in Chapter X.

¹² Fehr and MacDonald, “The Red River Jig in Sakitawak: Making Metis Music and Identities in Northwestern Saskatchewan.”

¹³ Vernon Greenshields, “Racial Overtones in Native School Board Issue,” *The Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, 16 February 1973. Reprinted in *The Northian* 10 (1974): 18.

Tradition, then, is a narrative or argument about the past, invoked intentionally in reference to the present. While the nostalgia that community members have expressed can be a way of creating ahistorical narratives like Jules Daigneault's, contrasting past and present through nostalgia can also provide a tool for discussing the reasons for change across time and generations. A GDI interview with Irene Gardiner asked her to elaborate on the kinds of daily and special-event activities that she engaged in as a young person, with the questions stated in ways that yielded direct comparisons between the past and present:

Q: What are, what were some of your favorite hobbies or activities?

A: Camping (laughs), camping, working, sewing.

Q: They never have feasts hey?

A: No but I help lots; I volunteer lots even for the elders I cook so much. I am always on the go.

Q: Do you know what some of the Metis holidays, what holidays like New Years, Easter and Christmas were called in Michif?

A: No. Christmas the only thing they celebrated really.

Q: How about Easter?

A: Easter too and Good Friday.

Q: What did they call it in Cree?

A: I don't know what they called it.

Q: Nobody knows about Easter. What did you guys do for these kind of things?

A: Christmas I hardly remember I didn't know what...Christmas there was always Christmas mass that's it, even tiny kids we they were growing up; we didn't know nothing what was Christmas till years after.

Q: Not till like today eh?

A: Yes, not like today you spend so much money and everything and the kids are spoiled now, the kids that didn't have nothing are not spoiled.¹⁴

These conversations illustrated how Irene perceived the differences between her youth and the lives of contemporary youth, but like many such discussions, the contrast between past and present is so

¹⁴ Irene Gardiner, interview by Lilah Morin, transcript, 17 August 2001, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/13707>.

stark that it lacks a sense of connection to explain how and why lifestyles and values have changed. In such instances, the idea of tradition actually serves to break down that dichotomy. It helps to fill the gap when the changing idea of tradition is placed within the same chronologies as geographical change, generational reinterpretations, political arguments, and social needs.

The relationship between Duck Lake's "Metis Rose" Rose Fleury and community organizations in Ile-a-la-Crosse has highlighted the link between social needs and the uses of particular ideas of tradition to make arguments about the past and the present. Rose's economic, political, and educational experiences were quite different (and often more privileged) than they were for people in the north. But as a more collective sense of collective Metis political identity spread to the north (exemplified, for instance, by provincial Metis political organizations' support for the 1972 school takeover in Ile-a-la-Crosse and by the ongoing involvement of those same community members and their families in provincial organizations and local politics through to today), Rose's teaching of activities identified as traditionally Metis became a valuable resource for community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse. At the same time, though, the overlaps in Rose's and Liz Durocher's (for example) definitions of what tradition should entail did not mean that their perceptions of Ile-a-la-Crosse and its needs were precisely the same. While Liz Durocher saw the formation of a youth dance troupe as a way to improve young people's knowledge of their history and their connections to local elders,¹⁵ Rose's perception of northern communities meant that she saw her fostering of tradition as a charitable act. She discussed the differences among northern and southern communities in her 1984 interview with GDI interviewer Brenda Arnault:

Brenda: Do you think people in the future will be better off in the north, or in the cities, or country?

Rose: Well, I think for the Metis people as it is land base is okay. But if they're going to have land base I think they should...okay, take a good look at themselves, what they want, put it on a piece of paper and then work from there. What is there, like for one local at least. Okay, you take your local, you sit down, what we're going to do, what does our people want, and then go by that. I think if you go in the north, what you going to do in the north? There's no work there. In the cities it's full with white people. I think if you run your own programs and do what you want to do --

¹⁵ Durocher, interview, 10 September 2010.

like myself, I'm involved in Farmer's Market right now. We're doing our gardening, we're doing our own plants and we're selling our own goods, like our baked goods, our craft stuff, and I think if we think along that line we can bring a few cents to ourselves and if we belong to each other.¹⁶

Rose depicted the north as a place where few employment opportunities were available, and by extension where resources for fostering tradition were few. While both Liz and Rose saw Metis tradition as something that was collective or could be translated across regions, the motivations underpinning their senses of tradition were at times separate. Even when employed for a unified purpose, then, the idea of tradition was still informed by individual and local understandings of Ile-a-la-Crosse's history.

Differences in the deployment of tradition have not emerged in a vacuum. Rose's ability to be recognized as an authority on Metis tradition was born in part from a certain amount of political and social privilege. The interview questions and context provided a tangible "Metis-ness" made visible by Rose's discussions of material making activities of tanning, quill beadwork, jigging, and other pursuits defined as traditional.

Brenda: Did any...like your grandmother or mother, did they do any beadwork or tanning hides?

Rose: Grandma tanned hides and she beaded them and she made moccasins. This is where I learned all my crafts and trades. You know, all the beading was done with the quills, she done it with the quills plus — that's porcupine quills — and she done it with slough grass, they called it. And you wove it with, and you sewed it with the beads. And she always done the birch bark cossettes, they called them. They were round ones and square ones, oblong ones...

Brenda: What were they used for?

Rose: For bread and stuff. Like your bread, your rice, your —

Brenda: Were they sort of bowls like?

¹⁶ Fleury, interview.

Rose: It was like a little basket-like affair, eh, but it wasn't a woven one but it was sewed back and forth. And it was done with the slough grass, they used long slough grass.

Brenda: And the quills, how did they prepare the porcupine quills, like for —

Rose: Well when that, I seen Grandpa used to, because I was so, because we couldn't touch them, eh, because if they're alive and you touch them they just stick to your hands. But when he killed it he used to turn over the porcupines on a board and then he'd cut all the edge, you know, the top edges, like the ends off, and then he'd take them off. Because he said if you don't take them off they won't come off, like, you know. You have to take the air out and then it releases them. Then he put them all in a tobacco can and that would be aired out, like, you know, in the open can, like, in the sun and they'd dry. And then Grandma would cut the other end, then you pass the needle through.¹⁷

Rose's personal history also shaped the kind of authority she both claimed and was given by others interested in collective Metis histories. In particular, she had been involved with the Native Women's Organization and the Metis Society of Saskatchewan,¹⁸ publicly visible and political activities that later shaped her role as a spokesperson or role model on culture, as Liz Durocher, for instance, sought out. Rose also noted that she had never been denied work based on being Metis: "in my community here everybody was served the same, whether they were white, or Metis, or Indian"¹⁹ — an experience that was not to be taken for granted. Rose's reflections on the practices of making things, combined with her public roles in politics and education, brought those past traditional activities into contemporary relevance, by connecting that knowledge to specific community goals, like those addressed by the creation of the youth dance group.

Rose's public roles were not the only factors that made her an appealing authority to inform Ile-a-la-Crosse community needs. She also had specific practical experience in setting up community organizations focused on specific skills that members had defined as traditional. When Rose was in

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. Both organizations were political in nature, intended to advocate for Metis rights across the province (although, until the 1970s when people from the north began to link their needs to these organizations, these groups were mainly based in south-central Saskatchewan), and at times took a radical approach to political arguments; the MSS, for instance, was involved in the school takeover in Ile-a-la-Crosse.

¹⁹ Ibid.

her 50s, she became ill with cancer, and while she was unable to work at her serving job in a restaurant, she began to organize handicraft teaching and selling programs, funded by the Metis Society. Her motivations for becoming involved in these programs were representative of questions that community members sought to address, so that her knowledge of making things became an entree into addressing community needs and interests, particularly in realms where women were underrepresented or small communities were at a disadvantage:

And then after that, when the last year I was in, well, we had a great big sewing program. It was a handicraft, ceramics, sewing, and beading. It was an altogether program. And we had a great big sale and display...And it was a very extensive program. Well we had it for six months, but then we had an awful lot of stuff that was done, which the people that sewed and everything, they learned so much that they could sew their own clothes. They don't have to go to the store to buy something, they just go pick up a piece of cloth and they, you know, make whatever...because it's something that you don't know about, you have to learn it to do it, and you got to see it done...We done all that and all the ladies that was in here all want to make their own money as their own expense money like, you know. You hate that when your husband is working you're..., just like your money is placed for this and that, then you got no money for you, really, yourself alone, eh. This way, well, if they make something, they can go and sell that and rebuy more supplies for what they wanted to spend their time with. This way it's not taking the money out of your husband's salary. This is what we were thinking about, the ladies, because you know, in a small community it's not like a great big city. There's always something to do, something to get into. You can get another job but in a small city you can't.²⁰

Whether it was created in concert with experts from other places, or discussed locally, tradition in Ile-a-la-Crosse was a skill that could be developed in and of itself, as Rose's experience of program creation illustrates; the skills were not always valuable simply because they were traditional. Rather, they also provided sources of personal income for women and opportunities to learn. In these instances, making tradition through historical narrative and conversation was a result of making tangible things, but the things themselves did not automatically invoke tradition. Implementing it in

²⁰ Ibid.

the context of Ile-a-la-Crosse required reflection on the skills themselves, but also on the experiences and time periods when those skills were first developed.

Implementing tradition in Ile-a-la-Crosse has therefore been a process of locating common historical experience, even beyond the explicitly political realm that community members like Jim Durocher have championed. The aim for community members has been to cite that common experience to build community in specific ways, or to make specific histories relevant to those needs. Rose Fleury's central-Saskatchewan experiences of Metis histories and politics were translated in subsequent decades to apply to northern contexts in Ile-a-la-Crosse, but it was not only her specific knowledge of making specific things, nor her adherence to a collectively-defined idea of tradition that helped to build a shared interpretation of the past as it applied to the Ile-a-la-Crosse dance group. Shared narratives about tradition also strengthened the authority of experts from beyond the geographical and historical experience of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Rose described social gatherings and somewhat generic experiences of making food that were easy to take for granted at the time that they occurred, but were later re-imagined within the same narratives as histories of making specific items:

Rose: Christmas them days was not celebrated very much. The day they used to celebrate was New Year's.

Brenda Arnault (interviewer): And how did they go about celebrating that?

Rose: Well, most was like what they call meatballs, and [rrababô, a kind of stew], and, you know, with onions and potatoes, and that was the great meal. And then they had meat pies, and blueberry pie or saskatoon berry pie most of the time, you know. Because it was mostly wild meat and wild berries that they used — they didn't have like cows and stuff...they'd get all in a sleigh and they had sleigh bells and they'd be singing carols or old songs, whatever. And they'd go from house to house and they'd celebrate there, and have a pot of tea or whatever, and go to the next house and do the same.²¹

Those in Ile-a-la-Crosse who drew on Rose's knowledge to facilitate their own recreations of tradition had to undertake a process of forming a sense of common experience between local elders'

²¹ Ibid.

memories and those of their introduced cultural expert, Rose Fleury. Food and community celebrations were creations of collective experience that elders in Ile-a-la-Crosse had also discussed.²² Of course, individuals and families had separate experiences as well, and the fact that seeking out common experiences helped to facilitate narratives about tradition does not discount the fact that definitions of tradition are also the result of individual historical interpretations. But at the same time, the traditions that community members have deployed for specific purposes have been built on narratives of common experience or memory.

Some of these common features of tradition have been reinforced by the geographical and intercultural relationships that have underpinned histories of Ile-a-la-Crosse. Although many experiences were common ones across the north (as exemplified, for instance, by Nap Johnson's discussion of family relationships across government-defined cultural divides, or by the paradoxical isolation that new modes of transportation caused in many northern communities in the 1940s and onward), the growing permanency of settlement in communities also reinforced perspectives on tradition that were dictated by Ile-a-la-Crosse community members' perception of their local circumstances in comparison to those in neighbouring communities.

The features of daily life that "counted" as tradition were not solely defined by cultural identification or language, but rather by individual and local interpretations of the past. Elder Elizabeth Durocher (no direct relation to Liz Durocher) spoke with a GDI interviewer in 1999, and in that conversation, she highlighted differences not only between her own knowledge and the knowledge that GDI sought to document and ensconce as traditionally Metis, but also between Ile-a-la-Crosse and the neighbouring town of Buffalo Narrows, which, despite its similar size to Ile-a-la-Crosse, was home to more industry and government services as they developed in the north in the mid-twentieth-century. In the interview, the two discussed place names, and whether there were people in other places who spoke Michif. To the latter question, Elizabeth Durocher replied, "I don't think about Buffalo [Narrows] because they think they're white over there."²³ The connection to activities originating from beyond the north was, in her view, outside the scope of what could be considered Metis, because those involvements had left people less able or interested in speaking Michif.

Correlating Michif with tradition, though, was not as straightforward as that initial reply

²² Jules Daigneault's stories about peacefulness and cooperation in the community, for instance, were key points in defining his narratives of traditional activities.

²³ Elizabeth Durocher, interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, transcript, 1999, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/13713>.

suggested. Part of the interview was focused on translating sentences from English into Michif, a process that caused some confusion and even frustration on the part of the interviewer, when, when asked to repeat a phrase in Michif, Elizabeth Durocher responded in what the interviewer deemed to be Cree, but that Elizabeth understood to be her variety of Michif. The conversation unfolded:

Interviewer: Are there any fish in the lake — in that lake?

Elizabeth: Whose lake?

Interviewer: No, I'm asking you, I want you to talk to me in Michif, saying the same, but in Michif — are there any fish in that lake?

Elizabeth (in Cree): Are there any fish in that lake?

Interviewer: Maybe le pusso (fish).

Elizabeth: Yes, le pusso, they say pusso.²⁴

The variety of Michif that the interviewer suggested to Elizabeth was not the one she identified with, commenting that “they” — other people — used “le pusso” to mean fish. Although both participants in the interview process were engaging with the Michif language as a feature to be documented as traditional, the precise nature of that tradition was dictated by geographically-based history and experience. The conversation reinforced the situational nature of tradition, where even similar understandings of the process of defining tradition could still lead to disparate outcomes of that definition.

The fact that Elizabeth Durocher considered Michif to be a language that other people spoke (“they say pusso”) reflects the social, political, and economic contexts in which Elizabeth had grown up. A generation or so younger than Elizabeth, Yvonne Longworth, who attended university in Regina in the 1970s, explained to me and a colleague, in the context of a more general conversation about traditional (in that case, early twentieth-century) life in Ile-a-la-Crosse, that she had assumed that her mother tongue was simply Cree, until she met other Cree speakers at university who hailed from other regions. It was then that she realized that the French vocabulary in her Cree was distinct. She began to think of herself at that point as Metis, and a Michif speaker, an experience that her brother Jim Durocher also identified with. Thus, even though many community members do and have identified that way, depicting Ile-a-la-Crosse as a solely Metis community does

²⁴ Ibid.

not reflect the ways that individual and collective narratives have changed over time. By extension, tradition in Ile-a-la-Crosse has been a geographical and a narrative concept at least as much as it has been an ethnic one. This is not to say that community members have not found ideas about Metis traditions to be meaningful: quite the opposite, as this and subsequent chapters will explain. But the roles that traditions of all kinds have changed according to the ways that community members have conveyed histories of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

The complex familial and intercultural relationships that have underpinned Ile-a-la-Crosse histories have also, seemingly paradoxically, helped to create contemporary arguments about tradition and culture that use physical or made things to define the uniqueness of Ile-a-la-Crosse and broader Metis histories. While ethnographers' work from the 1970s and 1980s did not always reflect the interpretive and situational nature of tradition in the north, at other times, their observations fit well with ones that some community members continue to make, in efforts to reinforce the validity of the histories they cite. Despite not often engaging directly with each other's arguments, ethnographers and community members identified similar features of life in Ile-a-la-Crosse, with community members' ongoing observations showing the durability of community members' statements about themselves in relation to others. In an undated report written sometime during the provincial CCF government's tenure in the 1950s, government sociologist Vic Valentine placed the predominantly Cree/Metis Ile-a-la-Crosse in the context of its neighbours. Apparently quoting an uncited source, Valentine reported of the Dene: "It is said about them, 'Although the best known of all the Athapaskan tribes, the Chipewyan [Dene] seemed to have possessed the weakest culture. They borrowed much from their neighbours the Crees, Yellowknife, and Dogrib tribes.'"²⁵ Valentine was writing within a salvage ethnography paradigm that sought to define – regardless of community members' actual experiences – a static set of traits of cultures, but specifically, the report had a primary aim of depicting an inherent, generalizable Metis nature and its effect on social and economic progress (as defined by Valentine and the CCF government).

Cultural authenticity, which Valentine defined in part by the visibility of specific practices like engagement with the larger economy via trapping or fishing (that is, practices that community members have since defined as traditional) was in Valentine's observations lacking among the Metis. Although community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse today are likely not aware of Valentine's specific comments about them, those who remembered or reflected on the era in which Valentine was writing provided counterarguments, seeking out evidence of what they deemed themselves to be

²⁵ Valentine, *A Social Anthropological Study of the Metis Population of Northwestern Saskatchewan*.

authentic Metis activities. Although these observations appear essentialized at first glance, when considered in the context of outside ethnographers' discussions, they reflect the centrality of historical interpretation in definitions of tradition. Martin Durocher, who works in the health sector in Ile-a-la-Crosse, commented in a conversation about fiddle music and square dancing — two activities that Metis people have ensconced as traditionally Metis both formally and informally — that he felt that Metis people could claim ownership of those activities, and even though they had been popular in Dene communities since the eighteenth century just as they had in Ile-a-la-Crosse, the Dene had borrowed them from the Metis.²⁶ Citing tangible activities as evidence of tradition was therefore common to outside observers and community members who responded to those observations. When definitions of tradition came up against each other, they became arguments for local or cultural superiority despite the connections that have also existed among communities.

Adam Daigneault, a fiddle player from Ile-a-la-Crosse who comes from a family of makers of diverse crafts and knowledges from beadwork to healing, sought to ensconce the Metis Nation — as he referred to it in an effort to draw Ile-a-la-Crosse into larger provincial, regional, and political expressions of tradition — as a strong and legitimate entity. He commented that the Metis had been “rejected by both sides [First Nations and European], which makes us more of a solid nation I guess.”²⁷ The equation of Metis tradition with strength, viability, and authority was a direct counterargument to the ethnographic and historiographical tradition of citing racial mixedness as fundamentally deficient. Valentine summed up such arguments by comparing Metis residents of Ile-a-la-Crosse to their Cree neighbours:

Without going into detail, I would say that fear of ridicule and fear of the unknown are perhaps the strongest emotions in Metis personality and society. A man fears the opinions of his friends; he fears the white man who comes into his life with objects and ideas he has never seen or heard before and dominates every phase of his life; he fears the ‘wild men’ who live in the bush...and does not like to go into the bush alone; and he fears the ‘Pure Indian’ who has ‘medicinal’ powers to harm or cure him.²⁸

These characterizations carried weight for lawmakers and social services well into the twentieth

²⁶ Martin Durocher, conversation with Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, 2010.

²⁷ Adam Daigneault, interview, October 2010.

²⁸ Valentine, *A Social Anthropological Study of the Metis Population of Northwestern Saskatchewan*, 5.

century,²⁹ and to create a counterargument about strength and authenticity in Metis history required a similarly strident and closely-defined set of attributes to refer to. This argument for unity is, however, a relatively recent usage of tradition. Community members such as Adam Daigneault have presented Metis history in Ile-a-la-Crosse and beyond as a collective history, and one that has gained strength through its culturally diverse origins that became solidified into identifiable common elements. It was a few years before Adam Daigneault's birth that the Ile-a-la-Crosse bicentennial history book was published, and the narrative of unity stemming from diverse beginnings was less apparent. Longpre instead depicted Metis origins in Ile-a-la-Crosse as a history of loss or division:

It is with mixed feelings we regard these Frenchmen from Quebec who took our grandmothers for wives. Lost to us are the names of our ancestors of the old times when the 'White' man was not in our country. Hidden are the names of our 'White' grandparents of the first quarter century of occupation. However, the Hudson's Bay Company kept accounts of all our grandparents earned and spent along with their wages. Much can be learned from these dusty pages of fur trade business. The names and origins of these voyageurs remain for each coming generation to explore and question. Our heritage will not ALL disappear. Perhaps some is better than none. Perhaps none is better than divided allegiance.³⁰

Longpre evidently did not regard as traditional or relevant the histories of making things that community members later discussed in interviews with GDI (on topics of collective Metis histories) and me (on topics of local histories of handmade items). Rather than being a point of political strength, the influence of multiple histories on contemporary Metis experiences became a hindrance to Longpre's narrative of Ile-a-la-Crosse's past. At the same time, though, the book was part of an ongoing process of creating a specifically Metis definition of authenticity through tangible items and activities, because the stories that the book recounted remained salient for subsequent generations. For those who came to see Metis history as a history of resilience rather than weakness, the narratives ensconced in the book formed the basis for their arguments.

²⁹ While Chapter 4 considers the relationships among made things and newcomer institutions in more depth, these relationships also reveal the ways in which processes of making things helped to cement definitions of tradition or authenticity, when historical processes of earlier generations were interpreted for later arguments about culture and community.

³⁰ Longpre, *Ile-a-La-Crosse 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial*, 16.

While academics, community members, and politicians (not necessarily mutually exclusive categories) have all cited tangible items and activities as evidence of specific definitions of tradition, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that community members have cited *only* these specific things as traditional. When some community members spoke about processes of making things, they also spoke about instances when they did not make certain items. Yet those conversations continued to revolve around specific values that accompanied discussions of tradition in other contexts. In the project of defining tradition collectively-Metis ways that the GDI interviews undertook, interviewers' questions were focused on traditional skills and items, which turned conversations towards discussions of tradition even when the specific practice in question was not a part of an interviewee's past. Irene Gardiner exemplified one such conversation:

Q: Did you ever make moccasins and stuff like that?

A: No, I never learned.

Q: You never learned how to sew.

A: No, no.

Q: Who used to make the clothes?

A: My grandma. I sew lots; I used to sew for my kids, I didn't learn how to make moccasins but clothing I make my own, even for my kids I used to make my own. I still do, I still sew, I have a sewing machine. Blankets I made my own, clothes. My grandma showed me how to sew...she sews lots. Cause my kids, when one getting too big the other one has to wear that, I have to sew it a little bit, hand-me-downs.³¹

Irene's lack of making specific things was not automatically a failure to live up to tradition. By citing her connection to the time period being used as a benchmark for tradition, Irene was able to retain authority as an expert on tradition, particularly because she could highlight constancy and connection to those activities defined as traditional. When I met with her in 2008, she noted:

Everything seems to be the same, except for the church. Everything else changed, but the only thing is church, and the schools. No convent, no place for the kids to

³¹ Gardiner, interview, 17 August 2001.

stay...Once every town had its own school and everything, then people don't come here. No, they didn't come after that. But the main thing is the school and the church, that's the main thing that I can think of...That really changed the town.³²

While institutions shifted, she remained connected with values that later interpreters like Mike Durocher identified as traditional: tradition has been a process as well as a product. As a thing in and of itself that has been produced from historical narratives, it is a kind of made object too. The narratives that have helped to construct contemporary definitions of tradition sit alongside the definitions of tradition that have cited specific objects as evidence. This has occurred in the GDI interview in which Irene took part, but community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse — particularly those who made traditional items themselves or who reminisced about older family members who did — discussed similar aspects of tradition with me a decade or more later. Narratives about tradition-as-things and tradition-as-values were not separate, but rather part of similar contexts, invoked for similar conversations and intentions.

Of course, narratives and tangible things have sometimes come into direct dialogue with each other. Bannock, one of the items that many community members have linked to tradition, has become a tool for teaching about those ideas of tradition. When Liz Durocher's dance troupe travelled to Las Vegas in 2005 to take part in a worldwide cultural festival, they brought along politician and public speaker Louis Roy as their MC. At the performances, he explained to the audience about the Michif language, the historical way of life in Ile-a-la-Crosse, the significance of the dances being performed, and the foods that in the group's view encapsulated who the Metis are. Bannock became a tool for cultural exchange. As a newcomer to the community, I have also experienced bannock-making as a teaching tool, and have taken part in several lessons (often alongside local children or youth) designed to teach this skill, with the end goal of participants becoming more familiar with Ile-a-la-Crosse's histories. When academics have become part of these events with the intention of incorporating their learning into their own research, iterations of tradition have been drawn into methodological debates.

As a result, definitions of tradition are shaped in part by academic methodologies, even when the intention is to follow community members' lead in determining the relationships between tradition and specific histories. Because Ile-a-la-Crosse has been considered distinct in diverse ways — culturally, historically, in its institutions, and linguistically, to name the most common scholarly

³² Irene Gardiner, interview by Jon Anuik, Katya MacDonald, and Kevin Gambell, 27 May 2008.

observations — it has also been the subject of diverse scholarly attention. Linguist Peter Bakker has argued that the Ile-a-la-Crosse variety of Michif is distinct from Michif spoken in other regions, as it consists of more Cree words than varieties that are a more even combination of Cree, French, and sometimes English or other Indigenous languages.³³ Some community members, like Yvonne Longworth, have commented that it was only when they travelled south for school or university that they met other Cree speakers and realized that their version of Cree was different. It was then that they began to identify their language as Michif instead of, or as well as, Cree.

Other scholarly studies of Ile-a-la-Crosse since the 1930s have tended to focus on Ile-a-la-Crosse as a place of ethnic or cultural specificity that has been critiqued as deficient, as evidenced by V.F. Valentine's sociological studies, as well as by Philip Taft Spaulding's "The Metis of Ile-a-la-Crosse," an unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1970; and former Ile-a-la-Crosse priest M. Rossignol's "The Religion of the Saskatchewan and Western Manitoba Cree," in *Primitive Man* 11:3/4 (1938). More recently, Indigenous Studies scholar Brenda Macdougall has argued for the significance of family in creating local identities in Ile-a-la-Crosse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁴ Macdougall relies primarily on church records to form her genealogical analysis, highlighting Ile-a-la-Crosse's lasting role as a religious centre. Tim Foran's "Les gens de cette place': Oblates and the Evolving Concept of *Metis* at Ile-a-la-Crosse, 1845-1898," a PhD dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2011, reinforces this idea as well. Ile-a-la-Crosse, as the only community in northwestern Saskatchewan to have a hospital, has also been an ongoing site of community health research and training, particularly in recent years. Ile-a-la-Crosse is therefore a place where several research themes have received concurrent attention, helping to solidify understandings both for community members and visiting academics of Ile-a-la-Crosse as a centre for historical and contemporary contribution to the region.

In 2012, Liz Durocher and her partner TJ Roy served as the main community contact people for two linguists, both PhD students, studying the Ile-a-la-Crosse variety of Michif. They and Liz organized a bannock-making lesson with three of Liz's neighbours. I and historian friend Mandy Fehr also attended, at Liz's encouragement, since she felt it would help us to get to know community members and their stories about Ile-a-la-Crosse. In preparation, we rearranged the kitchen to make room for a bigger table, and all of us worked in a group, while the three instructors (Tanis Laliberte, Yvonne Longworth, and Shirley Laroque) offered instructions mostly in Michif,

³³ See Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*, Rev. ed., Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics 10 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³⁴ Macdougall, *One of the Family*.

alongside demonstrations. In this instance, the linguists' goal was to record the conversation that took place in Michif, whereas my fieldnotes reflect an interest in the practical details of bannock-making and a somewhat self-serving wish that I could understand the stories being told. While our respective disciplinary interests were quite separate, the bannock workshop was a place for cataloguing something handmade and the processes of making it. Although the knowledge that community members shared in that space was the same, the questions about tradition that the academics in the room sought to answer were quite different from each other; in other words, we, too, had a hand in defining which aspects of traditional activities were significant, according to our own scholarly needs.

On another of my visits to Ile-a-la-Crosse, Liz invited Shirley to her house to give another bannock lesson. When I later recorded Shirley's instructions with the hope of being able to recreate her recipe at home, my extended annotations on how to mix, shape, and bake bannock became an implicit discussion of my research methodologies as well: the conversations we had about bannock transitioned into discussions of larger issues of making histories. Our homemade stew and bannock supper was followed by the weekly TV bingo, and then by conversation and stories. Liz and Shirley made reference to little people living under Big Island, not far across the lake from Ile-a-la-Crosse, as well as bigfoot-like creatures in Cree stories, and Shirley even showed us a footprint she thought could have been made by such a creature.³⁵ Asking questions of the ways that people have made things led naturally to discussions of old stories and reminiscences, reinforcing that Ile-a-la-Crosse, like any community, is a place where histories, people, and things are inextricable from one another.

Discussions of the histories of made things are necessarily methodological discussions as well, since the processes of learning about these things have been more instructive than the specific answers that individuals have given to my questions: questions that were initially formulated without the experience about learning about things and traditions in their contexts of origin. Processes of making things in Ile-a-la-Crosse have been processes of creating the kinds of tradition that contemporary community members cite as useful or important to local needs. It is therefore not always significant which specific items have been made, but rather in what contexts they have been made and then later interpreted. Local geographical contexts were not only descriptors of relationships in the twentieth century; they also provided platforms for analysing social, political, and economic change. Community members have at times evaluated these changes in terms of

³⁵ Bannock "inservice" with Shirley Laroque, 16 October 2012.

generations: local change had direct consequences for those experiencing it, and subsequent generations had the opportunity to consider those consequences in terms of contemporary local needs and the needs of younger generations. Their observations helped to create definitions of tradition, by highlighting tangible activities and objects from the past that they felt had better encapsulated the values they hoped would be sustained in Ile-a-la-Crosse. The idea of tradition, and within it, processes of making things, have therefore become tools for making historical arguments with the intent of addressing contemporary needs. Tradition itself has changed over time alongside other changes in Ile-a-la-Crosse; it has been a consistent need, but one that has been expressed in terms of changing arguments about the past and present. By extension, then, histories of making things are not only histories of material culture; they are community-based methods for interpreting histories as well.

Part II: Objects in Newcomer Institutions

Chapter 6: Institutions and Making Things in Ile-a-la-Crosse

Although Ile-a-la-Crosse and its inhabitants have asserted aspects of Metis identities for much of the community's recent history, relationships with handmade objects in the community have often been based on regional conditions more than (or in addition to) a specific, locally-depicted cultural identity. Meanwhile, governments' engagements with these items have also attributed their relevance to a generalized assumption about the overall "indigenoussness" of the community, rather than the local or individual specificity that community members have discussed, and that I outline in Part 1 of my dissertation. In this chapter, I discuss objects' travels beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse, through channels created and maintained by outside, institutional commodification of Aboriginal people's work. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, these channels developed alongside institutions that sought to regulate local people's lives in other ways: through residential schools, government employment and handicraft marketing programs, scholarly research and archives, as well as more informal or individual relationships with newcomers carrying their own expectations for the histories of the objects and people they encountered.

Ile-a-la-Crosse in the twentieth century has experienced a series of distinct but sometimes overlapping economies that were often introduced through outside institutions with the intention of shaping local people's involvement. By extension, local people in Ile-a-la-Crosse sought means of retaining autonomy over their own relationships with institutions. These relationships were not limited to economic transactions or even governance or power structures. They were also the catalysts for conversations — among community members and directly with institutions — about the implications of economic conditions in the community. For Ile-a-la-Crosse, as a place that gained wider renown as a centre for the fur trade, the presence of the HBC and other fur trade companies has continued to permeate the historiography¹ of the region. Continued changes in economic conditions and involvements, though, have received less attention. In particular, the relationships among changing economies and tangible processes of making things highlight how changing economies have sparked changing needs — both practical and moral or philosophical — for handmade items.

¹ Indigenous Studies scholar Brenda Macdougall, who has published one of the only historical studies of Ile-a-la-Crosse to be undertaken in recent years, focuses on the formation of a local identity (which she describes as Metis but, as this dissertation argues, is often more complicated than that) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the height of the HBC's involvement in the region. See Macdougall, *One of the Family*. Indeed, especially until the early 2000s, nearly all mentions of Ile-a-la-Crosse in the historiography were within larger surveys of fur trade history.

The HBC and other fur trade companies based out of Ile-a-la-Crosse provided local contexts for wage economies, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Specifically, in the context of making things — particularly those things that, as Chapter 4 discusses, community members have defined as traditional — tracing the economic impacts of newcomer institutions helps to show how ideas of tradition have been linked to economic opportunities. As Monique Gardiner noted of her own youth in a 2001 interview with GDI, “It was tough in those days although things were not expensive.”² She elaborated that she had worked at the Revillon Frères (a fur trading company) store, cleaning, cooking, and washing clothes for the traders there.³ Although like other fur trade companies, the presence of the Revillon Frères store allowed local people to maintain similar economic relationships with institutions to the ones that they were accustomed to since the first HBC post opened in the late eighteenth century, economic necessity also meant that other jobs, particularly those for women, developed out of financial necessity rather than any specific skill sets. Making things, in the early part of the twentieth century, was for individual use rather than economic gain, with jobs with newcomer institutions providing the specific financial benefit for at least a few community members.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century presence of fur companies, most notably the HBC in its heyday, were central in creating and defining the materials that community members considered necessities. A report from the Ile-a-la-Crosse HBC post in 1888 recounted the practical and financial challenges of transporting flour to more remote posts from a hub in Prince Albert. In particular, post managers commented on the increased cost of hiring inland boats, and the unreliability that they had experienced that season.⁴ The corresponding increase in flour prices at the post therefore had a direct effect on the kinds of foods consumed in the Ile-a-la-Crosse region: as the post journal recounted, the post was “compelled to purchase wherever we could obtain [fish] from Indians and settlers sufficient to enable us to feed families and dogs, besides keeping an additional fishery going all winter, thus increasing temporary labour.”⁵ The economic conditions created by the post were therefore not only financial matters; in the context of handmade items and ideas of tradition, evaluating the necessary household goods of previous generations provided part of the definition of tradition that community members refer to today. In other words, the economic

² Monique Gardiner, interview by Gabriel Dumont Institute, transcript, 5 July 2001, Gabriel Dumont Institute, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/06297>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Post Reports -- Ile-a-La-Crosse,” 1888, B.89/e/6, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives.

⁵ Ibid.

needs and climates created by the HBC would later be drawn into narratives about tradition and the kinds of tangible things that community members today remember from the past.

Although it would be easy to assume that the HBC could easily create specific economic conditions in nineteenth-century Ile-a-la-Crosse because of the region's isolation from larger economic patterns, the community did not shed its regional uniqueness within larger structures once community members had more ready access to income and institutions beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse itself. Although, as Chapter 4 has discussed, Rose Fleury from Duck Lake had contributed to Ile-a-la-Crosse organizations as cultural advisor on Metis tradition, her more southern perspective also serves as a foil for Ile-a-la-Crosse experiences. With more widespread and diverse access to employment than the two or three employers in Ile-a-la-Crosse in the era, the 1940s and 1950s, that both Monique Gardiner and Rose Fleury discussed, Rose was readily able to find economic stability. She worked as a waitress for many years, and had the option to take time off to care for each of her babies but to return to work afterwards.⁶ In Ile-a-la-Crosse, by contrast, the scarcity of steady, waged employment meant that leisure time was rare, and making things was a necessity rather than a hobby, as it became for Rose. Economic stability through wage labour was therefore linked to a kind of knowledge-based privilege: Rose's knowledge of making things granted her authority as a cultural expert, as discussed in Chapter 4, not only because she had extensive knowledge. After all, so did many community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse. But Rose's economic stability allowed her to devote energy to building her reputation in a way that did not become possible in Ile-a-la-Crosse until economies and community interests changed in subsequent decades.

It would be an overgeneralization to state that newcomer institutions in Ile-a-la-Crosse determined the nature of tradition or of economic opportunity, since community members continued to place their own needs at the fore. At the same time, though, some institutions held considerable sway in shaping community members' opportunities to engage with economies and traditions. Most notable of these institutions was the Roman Catholic convent and associated boarding school in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Despite the school's exclusion from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (a decision that community members are currently pushing to have reversed), students' experiences at the school mirrored those of children at other residential schools, in terms of the dislocation from family and community, neglect, and abuse. Beyond the power that the school held over children's lives, it also shaped the nature of the entire community and surrounding region. The school affected the ways that parents were able to make a living during the

⁶ Fleury, interview.

years when the school was operational — that is, until the early 1970s when local activists wrested control of the school from the Roman Catholic church into local hands (an action that was not universally supported by community members, many of whom had and have strong ties to the church that made them reluctant or unwilling to speak publicly against it) — it affected the ways that parents were able to make a living.

Community member Gilbert McCallum noted in a 2001 interview with GDI that the convent was an imposing feature of the economy: “The convent was very convenient for some who needed to go make a living. They would leave their children in the convent and go on their traplines.”⁷ Paradoxically, the school, whose mandate was to separate students from their own histories also enabled parents to continue making a living in ways that community members now define as traditional. But for community members reflecting in later years on their own school experiences, prominent in their minds were the school’s narratives about necessary skills for the wage economy, students’ “inherent” capabilities or needs, and arguments about what aspects of tradition should be “acceptable” for students to retain. When asked about what she had learned at school, Irene Gardiner replied, “All kinds of things like French...cooking, sewing.”⁸ These were precisely the kinds of skills that, for those a generation or two younger, comprised the ideas of tradition that they highlighted based on their childhood memories. When I talked with Dorothy Dubrule about the items that people in Ile-a-la-Crosse had made in the past, she commented on her mother’s tradition, as represented not through iconically traditional items like the beaded items that many Metis political leaders today wear as a symbol of identity, but rather through household items based on skills that Irene Gardiner connected to her school education. Dorothy recalled that her mother “knitted a lot; she knitted many, many pairs of socks, mittens, and scarves, toques, and all that. So we never had much clothing that came from the store-bought; it was hand-me-downs that she would make over from people that gave her things or whatever.”⁹ By the time that Georgina Morin, Dorothy’s mother, learned her household skills, the school had been present in the community for several decades, so it is not necessarily the case that she learned her housekeeping skills directly from school, from family members, or from other sources. But the fact that it is not clear also highlights how entwined the church and school were with community members’ lives and household economies, regardless of their personal experiences with those institutions.

Although the school’s influence on local economies and processes of making things was

⁷ Gilbert McCallum, interview.

⁸ Irene Gardiner, interview, 17 August 2001.

⁹ Dubrule, interview, 2 September 2015.

widespread, it also had its most immediate impacts on students, and in particular on students from less privileged family or economic circumstances. This was particularly true in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, before social welfare programs existed or were accessible to people in the north. Robert Longpre's 1977 community history of Ile-a-la-Crosse included an interview with Claudia Lariviere, at the time 59 years old. As a child, her mother had died, and Father Rossignol had taken her in. She explained, "I then grew up in the mission. It was busy. I went to school for a while and then I helped peel potatoes. Later the sisters showed me how to sew."¹⁰ In such instances, the school and mission did not only communicate their expectations for students' participation in local and broader economies; they were also direct participants in the bulk of some students' upbringing – including their future economic place in the community.

For a time in the 1940s and 1950s, the Ile-a-la-Crosse residential school published a newsletter called *Island Breezes*, intended to inform local people about the students' activities and other events organized by the school or mission. Read as a source depicting the school's relationships with the community, as well as students' activities, the newsletter offers insights into the ways that the school and mission not only shaped children's and families' activities, but also had the power to impose narratives about making things in addition to the specific activities themselves. Sometimes these narratives were implicit in seemingly factual reports about students' work, as in this 1950 description of the contexts for students' handmade work:

The girls' sewing room is a centre of activity. The loom shuttles and the knitting needles keep time (not always with metrical precision) to the radio programs. Since Christmas 22 carpets, 21 towels of various weaves and colors were made and give evidence of the weavers' increasing skill. Suzanne Lariviere, Rose Belanger and Clara Corrigan deserve an honorable mention. After making socks, sweaters, baby sets, mitts, dresses, the knitters have begun filling their contract: 12 white sweaters, touched up with blue and red for next year's HOCKEY TEAM. The finished products will be the pride and joy not only of the players but of the knitters too.¹¹

While on one hand, the school allowed for students' own interests — in local sports, for instance — to drive their work, the expectations were also that these skills would support households

¹⁰ Longpre, *Ile-a-La-Crosse 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial*.

¹¹ *Island Breezes*, March 1950, Ile-a-la-Crosse Public Library.

resembling Euro-Canadian ones. Dorothy Dubrule's memories, for instance, help to show how school- and church-based narratives expanded and were sometimes even removed from their original institutional contexts to reinforce community members' own narratives about tradition.

At other times, though, the school's relationship with its students' tradition was actively reductionist. In the same issue as the article about the older girls' crafting activities were short reports written by grade 3 students. The students' work was a clear reflection of the narratives expressed by the school regarding the children's own histories. The school itself took a strong perspective on the relationships between making specific things and specific ideas of tradition, in some instances even making students complicit in narratives about their own "disappearance" or contemporary irrelevance. Grade 3 student Margaret Raymond wrote, "The Indians made beads out of shells and tiny rocks. They made all kinds of nice things with beads. They made belts, necklaces, moccasins, and also beaded their clothes. They liked bright colors, like red orange and blue."¹² To critique this perspective is, of course, not a critique of a child's writing or knowledge, but rather of the informational material that students were introduced to. The students' reports reflected ahistorical, generic, or even problematic perspectives of Indigenous people — another grade 3 student, Therese Lariviere, wrote that "the Indian mother was called a squaw"¹³ — perspectives that did not make mention of students' own local experiences. Information about histories and traditions provided in school did not acknowledge students' own family members' knowledge of making things, or of sociopolitical identities that, by the 1950s, some local people were defining as distinctly Metis.¹⁴ Even simply the use of past tense in reference to "Indians" in the broadest sense created a separation between the school's narratives and those that reflected the ongoing lived experiences of students and their families. It fell to the students themselves, as they grew older, to place their school knowledge and historical narratives into locally- and culturally-relevant contexts.

Handmade items made at the Ile-a-la-Crosse residential school also helped to create connections through the school that were institutionally-created but adapted by former attendees to address needs in their individual, local circumstances. While former residential school students have in some instances cited the school as a place where large-scale political connections formed (the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs being one notable example), in Ile-a-la-Crosse, these connections were also sometimes social and craft-based. The institution both reflected and served as a place to

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ I elaborate on the relationship between Ile-a-la-Crosse Metis political involvement and handmade items later in this chapter.

promote local identities. A handicraft show at the school, showcasing students' work from the year, was portrayed by the newsletter authors as an example of local competitiveness in the larger context of Saskatchewan:

End of June there was a varied display of handicraft and needlework done by the girls since Christmas. There were dozens of linen tea cloths, face cloths in pastel shades, table runners and carpets of different colors & patterns — all hand woven on the two looms; 9 sturdy white hockey sweaters trimmed in red and blue, these definitely not for sale; tea aprons, children's dresses, sweaters, white blouses with applique motif or Ile a la Crosse embroidered on them. It's amazing how the girls found time to do as much in spite of skating, club meetings, study, choir practice, concerts, parties and picnics, all competing for their spare time.

Before the exhibition was read, Mr. Waugh examined some of the pieces piled up on the tables and found the work "outstanding" so he wrote in his appraising the sewing and needlecraft done by the girls of various grades. They will mostly likely keep in mind next year that our administrator hopes to be able to arrange a display in Prince Albert of this type of work from the Northern Schools. An incentive to do more and better!¹⁵

The good work produced by the schoolgirls was, at the time that they were producing it, evidence for the school that it was achieving its aims of providing a "civilizing" influence, especially given that the organizers of the show drew comparisons between "the Northern Schools" — that is, the remotest ones by larger Saskatchewan standards — and schools elsewhere in Saskatchewan. As subsequent sections of this chapter will discuss in more detail, though, processes of making things individually and collectively would also form, for a time, the basis for particularly women's involvement in economies that did not otherwise have a great deal of room for their work. The commonalities among their abilities remained avenues for comparing their work with the work of others, for economic and local gain.

The specific types of making that took place in the Ile-a-la-Crosse residential school also reflected the values that local institutions sought to communicate, and where necessary, impose upon local residents. In a 1954 issue of *Island Breezes*, Grade 9 student Lorraine Gervais described

¹⁵ *Island Breezes*, June 1950, Ile-a-la-Crosse Public Library.

the expectations underpinning her sewing classes:

Our sewing classes started on September 10. Some of the girls work on machines and others knit or embroider. Sr. I. Lefebvre and Sr. I. Laramee are our supervisors.

I wish to express our thanks for the help they have given us.

In the room where we are all using machines we are all doing a great amount of sewing. We sew towels, blankets, sheets, and we might sew nighties for the hospital.

The girls in the other room are doing knitting and embroidery. I think most of the girls in sewing classes are enjoying them very much. At least I know quite a few who think that this class will help prepare them for the life ahead of them.¹⁶

Making items for the hospital, which was connected to the Roman Catholic mission just as the school was, meant that the girls' work contributed directly to the operations of all facets of the major institution in Ile-a-la-Crosse during the mid-twentieth century. Beyond physical or practical assistance, though, making things for these institutions with the intention that the skills being learned were crucial lifelong ones meant that the school created narratives of students' dependence on the institution's work. Making these items was therefore not only a process of learning life skills, but was also a means of fostering the narratives of local people's insufficient skills to navigate the "modern" world. In other words, sewing for the hospital was on one hand a collective activity that students did draw on a decade or two later to supplement their incomes, but on the other hand, the interconnection of institutions with local lives meant that making things at school was also a process of making narratives about Indigenous people's irrelevance in contemporary life.

At times, students' handmade schoolwork was not only a process of making narratives; the finished items also became sites where school curricula could communicate authority. Some of the students' writing in *Island Breezes* reported on a knitting and needlework display, at which a priest and several nuns awarded prizes for the best work. Students Annette Gardiner and Julie McCallum, in grades 7 and 6 respectively, reported on the aesthetic and technical qualities that made for prize-winning work:

There were ninety-six pieces at the exhibition. The nicest piece was the large white tablecloth and twelve napkins embroidered in white by Mary Mispounas, Julie

¹⁶ *Island Breezes*, September 1954, Ile-a-la-Crosse Public Library.

McCallum, Yvonne Lariviere and Alice Desjarlais. These four girls of course had first prize for their neat and good work. Velma Landry had seven pieces of knitting, three sweaters and four pairs of socks. She also had first prize for her even knitting.¹⁷

The aesthetics of the girls' work, as determined by school teachers and administrators, was an avenue through which the school could communicate and incentivize their own values for making things. It would not be justified to assume that households in 1950s Ile-a-la-Crosse did not want or need fine items like embroidered table linens, but at the same time, when considered in comparison to Georgina Morin's household practices of making things around the same time, economic circumstances dictated that most handmade items served immediately practical needs. The aesthetics that the school encouraged were therefore partly sites of institutional power, where students' ability was measured by aesthetic appearance that was defined by the school, beyond the functionality of their finished items.

These power dynamics, in which function and aesthetics took on specific, culturally-mediated value when they became part of institutional narratives, were also gendered. While general good construction was a feature on which school staff evaluated both boys' and girls' work, the boys' carpentry exhibit that took place at the same time as the girls' sewing and knitting display suggested that the school drew a distinction between the domestic aesthetics of the girls' work and the functional practicality of the boys' finished items. Josaphat Aubichon, a grade 7 student, described his experience of the carpentry exhibit:

Each of the boys made a bread board, a waste paper basket, a knife holder, or knife rack, a bird house, and three boys made a stool.

After setting up the work we put the names of the ones who made them.

When we came in class the next day nearly all the pupils went beside the table to look at the things...After Benediction the Sisters went to see the birdhouses, etc.

When Sister Labonte came to the boys' house she said we did the things very well for the first year.¹⁸

While the table linens that the girls made were, arguably, not crucial in setting up a household, most

¹⁷ *Island Breezes*, April 1954, Ile-a-la-Crosse Public Library.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

of the boys' items were directly connected to the practical tasks that members of a household would undertake. The boys' and girls' work cannot be divided wholesale along gendered lines of aesthetic and practicality (the girls' knitwear, for instance, clearly served immediately practical purposes, while the boys' birdhouses were largely decorative items), but the evaluation criteria for the girls' work seems to have focused more immediately on the aesthetic value — the tidiness and fineness of the work — than the boys' items. These processes of making within a newcomer institution therefore both grew out of and continued to contribute to the institution's own narratives about the lifestyles and skills that staff members expected their students to adapt to once they had left school.

The narratives that the school fostered through its students' handmade items were not only locally-based narratives; they also served to contribute to broader institutional understandings of the north. The boys' carpentry work was not only a local venture, but was linked to the larger goals that administrators held for northern schools specifically. Grade 7 student Ralph Landry described the origins of the carpentry classes, and, implicitly, the relationships and expectations that provided the class with resources:

On February the second Mr. Stoeber received the tools we are now using for our carpentry courses. We were so happy that we didn't even bother to ask him who sent them, but now we know it was Mr. T. H. Waugh, who is the administrator of the Saskatchewan Northern Schools...Some boys fixed the table while others fixed the work bench. At the second carpentry period we had to make bread boards. Jimmy, Archie and I had to make the easiest ones but I went off the line and had to start another one. Ernest, Armand Murray, Albert, and Armand Roy had to make the work bench. Thomas and I are now making a knife and spool rack. Armand Murray, Ernest and Jimmy each made a mallet. I like our work we are doing with Mr. J. Stoeber who is the head of it. We thank Mr. Waugh who has been so kind to our school.¹⁹

The boys' carpentry work was not only an activity that the school had introduced for local needs; it was also directly linked to larger ideas about the requirements, capabilities, and circumstances of northern Saskatchewan pupils in general, as understood by regional administrators. Making things in the carpentry class was a channel through which local and regional administrators could

¹⁹ *Island Breezes*, February 1954, Ile-a-la-Crosse Public Library.

communicate their expectations of their pupils' abilities and needs. Especially within the larger provincial political context of this period, the carpentry classes, and more broadly the ways that administrators discussed the needs of northern schools, were not neutral activities. As Quiring has argued, the CCF provincial government tended to take a paternalistic, colonial approach to policy implementation in the north.²⁰ Certainly, these approaches are reinforced by the presence of a Saskatchewan Northern Schools administrative structure that was directly concerned with specific vocational training in the Ile-a-la-Crosse school.²¹ The connections between local and regional school administration fostered ongoing narratives about the state of education in the north during this time, so that boys' carpentry classes were not only local activities, but also components of larger narratives about the necessity, from administrators' perspectives, of residential schools.

But although Quiring also states that northern Saskatchewan residents had little political power in the provincial context, community members' approaches to making things helped to complicate the narratives that newcomer institutions put forth, sometimes even working in concert to do so. Though the pervasive nature of colonialism meant that community members' ability to work within these systems did not negate colonialism's harmful impacts, making things sometimes served as a way to make agency as well: mid-twentieth-century Ile-a-la-Crosse did not exist in a binary of powerfulness and powerlessness, even when narratives from outside institutions suggested otherwise. Beginning in the 1930s, the Saskatchewan CCF government sought economic diversification to combat the Depression and to increase government revenues for new social programs. To undertake these ventures, they turned to the northern part of the province, to foster economic development there.²²

When the provincial CCF government first instituted programs in the north in 1945, they sought to address a deteriorating economic base, high death rates, and low education and literacy levels through attention to hospitals and health care, education reforms, development of a commercial fishery, constructing access roads to remote communities, establishing Crown

²⁰ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, xv.

²¹ Historian J. R. Miller has written about widespread residential schooling pedagogy that assumed that the Indigenous pupils they taught were either of limited intellect, or were otherwise unsuited for anything other than vocational learning and labour. See J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 155. More recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has collected the testimony of residential school survivors, many of whose "vocational training" was actually facility maintenance labour that was disproportionate to the amount of actual skills training they received. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, ed., *Residential Schools. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Volume 1: The History, Part 2, 1939 to 2000*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report (Montreal; Kingston: Published for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

²² Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, xv.

Corporations for marketing fish and timber, and the establishment of the Fur Conservation Program.²³ When Buckley, Kew, and Hawley reassessed the impact of these initiatives in 1963, they wondered if government programs were perhaps not “a great leap forward, but a logical development along the lines laid down before... [they] operate within the framework of the fur and fish economy.”²⁴ Indeed, as Chapter 5 discusses in more detail, community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse and in neighbouring communities have, in more recent years, incorporated narratives of economic hardship into narratives about traditional lifestyles. Yet poverty has been only one part of the equation. Community members recalling a time when hardship shaped lifestyles were also recalling a time when social welfare programs were recent resources that had not yet become part of discussions about the moral value of self-sufficiency, including making things to support a household economy. Other scholars²⁵ have explored in more detail the specific impacts of social welfare programs in Ile-a-la-Crosse and the region, but community members’ perspectives on the relationships between welfare and ideas of traditional activities shed light on the role of handmade items as means of asserting individual priorities within outside institutions like welfare.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Max Morin’s informal 1970s catalogue of elders’ memories of Ile-a-la-Crosse “History and Culture” included a section on economic activities, as remembered by the elders he interviewed. One of the significant moments that they recalled was the introduction by the Mackenzie King government of the family allowance. The family allowance, and later, related, unemployment or welfare programs were, for those in need, part of a spectrum of economic survival that had previously included fewer possibilities for community members. Especially for those without a great deal of family support, welfare was a means of making a living alongside activities of making things. Eliza Aubichon, now in her 80s, knows me as a “history student,” as we have conversed about diverse topics since I first met her in 2010, depending on her interests as well as the specific project for which I was in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Other community members, who knew the specifics of my dissertation work, had also mentioned Eliza’s reputation as a skilled beader and leather worker, but this topic occupied relatively little of our conversations, since unlike my

²³ Buckley, Kew, and Hawley, *The Indians and Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*, 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁵ See Liam Haggarty, “Métis Economics: Sharing and Exchange in Northwest Saskatchewan,” in *Métis in Canada: History, Identity, Law & Politics*, ed. Christopher Adams, Ian Peach, and Gregg Dahl (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2013). Haggarty’s work focuses mainly on practices of sharing among male hunters who, especially in recent years, have been employed in other occupations as the main source of their incomes. Amanda Fehr’s forthcoming work illuminates the ways that the withholding or selective administration of the federal family allowance was used to force attendance at the residential school, a practice that disproportionately affected single mothers or families with few other sources of income.

dissertation topic, Eliza's lived experience did not separate her craft work from her other responsibilities over the course of her life. Instead, she drew a contrast between the economic challenges that her parents had faced, and those that she herself had faced while raising her own children. My questions about handmade items mainly sparked memories about her own childhood:

I do beadwork and I do knitting and I do crochet, and what else I do, I think just housecleaning. [laughs] And I play bingo. [laughs]...And cooking. I used to cook for my family. There was twelve of us in the family from my dad and my mom. Six boys and six girls...And we all grow up — ah, we used to have a hard time sometimes, no food. It was hard those days. So my brothers as they were getting bigger and bigger they started hunting. We used to have lots of wild food to eat.²⁶

For Eliza, making things was a matter of economic survival, whether in concert with the availability of welfare or not. To prompt the conversation after a few moments of silence — Eliza had not been feeling well that day, but had said that she would still like me to stay for a visit and interview — I mentioned how Eliza had told me that she had sometimes sold her beadwork and knitting. She replied, “Uh huh. I always do, I make something, I sell it. I’m still doing that...It was low prices then [when her children were young]. Now it’s higher prices they sell them for, but not me...No, it’s no use, because those people want to live too eh, make their living.”²⁷ Pricing her items reasonably was motivated by empathy, since, as she explained,

I had my hard times when I was young...I got married in ‘52 and my husband died in ‘71. And then I had to support his kids. We had nine kids. But five of them died...It was tough on me, you know, but I made it. I had odd jobs. Welfare was only 37 dollars, after I lost my husband I went on welfare, it was only 37 dollars a month, and then my kids were there eh.²⁸

Whether during her own childhood or while raising her own children, Eliza's handmade items belonged within her general individual or household economy. Welfare, like making things, was a tool for economic survival within hardships beyond those that many other community members

²⁶ Aubichon, interview.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

faced.

At the same time, though, Eliza's narrative also responded to criticisms that contemporary community members sometimes make, which, while critiquing the lack of employment opportunities for young people in the community, also express frustration about alcohol and drug use that they cite as a barrier to young people finding employment. Eliza pointed out that while she was raising a young family, "I never took no liquor, nothing at all. But I used to go to parties, just for the hell of it. I used to dance, too. I used to join them but I didn't drink."²⁹ While overall, the shifting attitudes towards welfare in Ile-a-la-Crosse are outside the scope of this dissertation, it is significant that some community members today, particularly those who work in social programming capacities, sometimes see welfare and alcohol abuse as intertwined. As introduced phenomena, these community members have at times defined both as untraditional, set in contrast to other tangible markers of tradition like food, clothing, or resource harvesting.

At the time that contemporary elders were engaging in traditional economies and processes of making things, alcohol in particular was often a feature of everyday life, both socially and economically. Sociologist V. F. Valentine commented in a report created for the CCF government of the 1950s: "Once a man has provided the simple needs for his family, he may drink without fear of public censure, but should he not, he is pointed out as being a fool."³⁰ Valentine's analysis should not be taken at face value, since it had a singular focus of "improving" Metis populations from what the CCF government viewed as underdevelopment (that is, a failure to operate to the same standards that the CCF government defined for them), and community members experienced as poverty. While Valentine's comments do underscore the prevalence of alcohol in the community, they do not take into consideration the long history of alcohol's role in fur trade transactions,³¹ nor the traumatic experiences of residential school that sometimes led to unhealthy relationships with alcohol later in life. Indeed, Tony Laliberte, who works as an elder at the Ile-a-la-Crosse high school, often cites these experiences as a cause of significant anger and depression as a young adult, and credited his determination to attain a carpentry career with his ability to become sober. But regardless of its detrimental effects for many community members, alcohol was part of an economic structure as well as in subsequent narratives about tradition.

When I joined a group of women for a bannock-making workshop set up by Liz Durocher

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Valentine, *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*, 3.

³¹ Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 142.

to help me and a colleague meet community members, one of the participants, Yvonne Longworth, told a story about someone she remembered from her childhood, who had lived in the bush and sold moonshine from a covert operation there. Being isolated, and having grown up in an era when trade and HBC credit governed most transactions, he didn't have a great deal of exposure to currency. Yvonne explained laughingly that although she was unsure of whether it was true or not, over time, a story had developed that people would pay the moonshine maker with Monopoly money because he didn't know the difference,³² to the great disappointment of his clients when he began to wise up. While the story was told primarily for the entertainment of the bannock-making group, it also helped to show how economic change took place at varying rates in individuals' experiences. Community members today often lament the challenges with alcohol abuse that young people, especially, face. But at the same time, stories about something that is discouraged or even vilified have also become part of larger narratives about tradition and changing economies.

Similarly, community members viewed the institution of welfare in diverse ways, sometimes depending on the accessibility of processes of making things. Jules Daigneault, who, as described in Chapter 5 tends to frame his narratives in terms of nostalgia or an idealized past, explained of his youth:

All different families across the lake had different jobs to do. Like the Morins from Sandy Point, they were musicians, and they were also the fishermen; they used to be good fishermen. Every family had different titles. Like the Daigneaults were the people that make boats and toboggans and sleighs. And the Gardiners were the ones that had gardens across [at] Canoe River. All different, like the Belangers that were living at Sandy Point were the loudmouths. They were the politicians...Some of them were hunters; the McCallums were hunters. Widows used to get a permit from the government to hire somebody to shoot a moose, so the McCallums used to be chosen to be hunters. They used to go out and bring a moose home for a widow. Because the widows used to get help from the government. Even the elders never used to get nothing.³³

Jules depicted a system in which community members largely arranged to look after each

³² Yvonne Longworth, conversation with Katya MacDonald, 29 March 2012.

³³ Jules Daigneault, interview, 6 October 2010.

other. Overall, though, some people experienced barriers to economic wellbeing, often as a result of family circumstances that did not allow them the time or resources to support self-sufficiency through making things. Nap Johnson, who worked as a conservation officer in Ile-a-la-Crosse after he returned from World War II, explained in a 1975 interview about the role of the RCMP shortly following the war:

Nap Johnson: Well, you see, one thing like they were handling what they call Social Aid now. You come across some people that just couldn't make their living, you see, like some old guys have no relatives, hey? Some old ladies and some people are sick with a large family; most of the people had a large family in those days. So, this is very important, say those people in winter time.

Michael Tymchak (interviewer): So the RCMP used to do that?

NJ: Yes, they used to do that, yes. But we had very few people...like here in Ile-a-la-Crosse, we had only two, that were taking Social Aid...one old lady by the name of Eliza Gerrard, she married to some half-French guy and then he died, the old man; then her son died, and this old lady had to look after three little girls. Now then, she couldn't there was no work for babysitting or anything like that...she had some rabbit snares but you know...she was getting Social Aid. Another guy, he had a crippled leg you know...Robert Gardiner. There was only two people in Ile-a-la-Crosse that had Social Aid, the rest of them was working.³⁴

These contexts spoke to the necessity of being able to work in specific pursuits – the ones that community members today define as traditional – to survive. To circumvent personal challenges therefore required either government assistance, or a way to capitalize on existing skills.

Paradoxically, the presence of welfare and other related government institutions in the north was more pronounced than in the south (as exemplified, for instance, by Rose Fleury's ability to find steady work whenever she needed it) in the mid-twentieth-century when constructing an income from multiple sources was a pronounced necessity in the north. Although provincial government

³⁴ Johnson, interview, 1975.

initiatives recognized, at least on the surface, the economic and practical constraints on northerners' means of making a living, they also operated based on expectations of authenticity and tradition that limited community members' engagements with larger economies. In a series of ultimately unsuccessful efforts to alleviate the effects of newcomers' overtrapping in the 1940s, the CCF government implemented two regulatory changes to the trapping industry, the Fur Conservation Block System and the Fur Marketing system, which restricted trappers to specific assigned areas, and regulated the channels through which they could sell their goods. Trappers soon found that the system primarily served to limit their work to the point that it was no longer a viable means of sustaining themselves, as it had been for the past century or more.³⁵

Thus, while the HBC had established a basis for economic and labour conditions in the Ile-a-la-Crosse region, it also operated alongside social assistance programs once they were established in the north by the CCF government of the 1940s and 1950s by the newly-formed Department of Northern Resources (DNR). These programs on one hand operated based on assumptions about northern Saskatchewan Indigenous people's limited capabilities for work, based on essentialized notions of northerners' lifestyles: lifestyles that had in fact been shaped by the economic contexts of the HBC and other fur companies.³⁶ On the other hand, though, governments and (generally white, newcomer) individuals identified northerners' poverty as a concern, and sought to establish local institutions (with or without local consultation) like co-operatives, sometimes based on local traditional activities, as responses to difficult economic conditions. The intersection of these institutions in community members' lives helped to create an environment in which notions of tradition were particularly contested, and in which community members sought tangible ways of articulating their tradition in response to outsiders' assumptions. While processes of making things remained relatively constant throughout at least the first three-quarters of the twentieth century (until the transportation and communications channels described in more detail in Chapter 4 connected Ile-a-la-Crosse more readily to a broader range of socioeconomic circumstances), community members' reasons for doing so changed alongside the institutions that shaped their economic needs.

Community members' stories of the era prior to the establishment of the DNR reflected an era in which making things like pemmican or moosehide to sell "to buy the basics," as Monique Gardiner explained in 2001, was part of an economy based on overall survival, not necessarily wages

³⁵ Ens and Sawchuk, *From New Peoples to New Nations*, 315.

³⁶ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, xvi.

specifically. Community members at the time recalled how changes to fur marketing sparked changes in entire economies and ways of making a living. University of Saskatchewan geographer R. M. Bone worked in several northern communities during the 1960s and 1970s, on projects intended to evaluate the usefulness or the challenges of the fur block system in these communities. An “elderly man” living near Portage La Loche with whom Bone conducted an interview made direct references to systemic economic change:

The Fur Marketing Service is no good, mister. I heard a man got 16 [musk]rats and he got a cheque for sixty-two cents!...It’s no good for the people, mister. Before we go to the Hudson’s Bay Company and have lotsa credit and grub to last, now the widows got no money even to buy glass for the house. Mister, it’s no good. Can’t get no credit, no nothing.³⁷

Even though ostensibly, it was trappers who would be most directly affected by these changes, Bone’s informant pointed out that in fact, those in the most precarious financial situations, like widows, were most adversely affected by a system that disrupted the ways that people had managed their individual and collective economic affairs. Thus, when community members today or in recent years (in the GDI interview series, for instance) have referred to rapid change from the past, their narratives often refer to the decades in which community members were adapting to new economic systems and challenges formed by the fur block system and other DNR initiatives.

Community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse raised similar issues, arguing that the Fur Marketing Service was not only a practical complication; it also fundamentally undermined systems that trappers, their families, and indeed their entire communities felt worked well for them. “An elderly man living with his family near Ile-a-la-Crosse” (one of the small settlements across the lake that most community members would soon leave for at least parts of the year to live more permanently in town) spoke through an interpreter to critique the way that the Fur Marketing System undermined existing relationships:

The big trouble with the Fur Marketing Service is that it ruins a man’s credit. At one time a man could go to the store and buy enough grub for the whole summer with

³⁷ R. M. Bone, “Progress Report and Letters Pertaining to Collecting Field Data,” 1972, 6, MG 240 Box 27 II, folder 1, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

his [musk]rats. But now all he can get for twenty-five rats is enough grub to go back and catch thirty more. When the cheques do come the stores get them all anyway. To get credit we have to sign the cheque over to them.³⁸

Younger community members commenting around the same time critiqued the HBC for creating a dependency on store credit before limiting community members' access to it. This argument gained traction among Indigenous political leaders across Canada; the discussions of the HBC in the 1976 community history of Ile-a-la-Crosse mirrored, though somewhat less stridently, the arguments set forth in the 1972 NFB film "The Other Side of the Ledger," narrated by the Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood, George Manuel.³⁹ At the time that the new trapping and fur marketing regulations were introduced, the CCF government, and specifically DNS, were viewed as the catalysts of economic change that altered the ways that community members made a living and interacted with material goods.

Paradoxically, the democratic socialism of the CCF helped to foster or speed up a shift from a subsistence economy supported by HBC credit, to a wage economy; making things remained a way of making do, but within the context of survival in a wage economy rather than in the surrounding natural environment. As Valentine explained of the trapping system that DNS sought to replace with the Fur Marketing System:

Each man is more or less in business for himself as he acquires the necessary license and the required outfit such as traps, nets and food. Because these items take a lot of initial capital, a man "buys" them on credit from the trader to whom he sells his catch. The amount of credit he is given is determined by his skill as a fisherman or trapper as well as his honesty. There is no system of saving money to provide for in-between seasons, nor to provide an outfit for the next season, the individual MUST have credit.⁴⁰

Narratives of making things, then, were based on narratives of economics and of making do. The implementation of social programs was an effort to remove the need to make things on a survival

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Martin DeFalco, Willie Dunn, and George Manuel, *7KH2WKHU6LGHRIWVKH/HGJHUSQJQGDDQ9UHZRIVKHXGVRQV%D0 Company*, videorecording (National Film Board of Canada, 1972).

⁴⁰ Bone, "Progress Report and Letters Pertaining to Collecting Field Data," 6.

basis. For those interpreting those changes, both at the time and several decades later, the introduction of DNR programs provided mechanisms to encourage the making of traditional things as a viable means of making a living as well.

At the same time, government programs also paradoxically stripped makers of their autonomy and agency, because of the structures and assumptions of the marketing programs. Sociologist V. F. Valentine described a relationship between CCF programs and the idea of traditional lifestyles as a stubbornly static way of life: “the new system of marketing is rapidly changing the whole traditional pattern of living. It is this *change* and not the benefits of collective marketing that is being resisted.”⁴¹ Whereas Valentine argued that community members were simply unable or unwilling to change, regardless of the details of the new system, Bone’s informants, as well as Ile-a-la-Crosse community members past and present, saw the situation in quite the opposite way. The implementation of the Fur Marketing System and its resultant changes marked a colonial intrusion that, unlike the church or the HBC, community members viewed quite universally as intrusive and as a threat to their way of life. While community members today do not usually cite the CCF specifically as a cause of detrimental change, their narratives about previous generations and about tradition refer to the 1960s and 1970s as a time when defining tradition began to matter on a political or economic level, as Chapter 5 has described. For community members today who have described their processes of making things, narratives about tradition, as described through making things, are narratives about economics as well.

A particularly illustrative example is that of co-operatives in Ile-a-la-Crosse. The community was home to a co-operative store for several decades, but alongside the general store, several smaller, more specific co-ops operated to provide a basis for those engaged in specific industries (such as fisheries, beadwork, textile work, or carpentry) to market their work. I discuss community members’ own experiences with these organizations in Chapter 6, but the co-ops in Ile-a-la-Crosse also offer insight into the ways that institutions that were introduced or supported by the provincial government directly shaped the economic environments in which makers worked. Non-local, non-Indigenous perceptions of the co-ops were mixed, but all were centred on assumptions about local people’s economic capabilities, based on their racial and ethnic identities.

Valentine undertook a series of observational studies in Ile-a-la-Crosse in the early 1950s, all with the overall aim of explaining to DNR whether local residents, and Metis people more generally, were capable according to his assessment of managing their own economic affairs. One of the

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

CCF's mandates in Ile-a-la-Crosse was to facilitate the establishment of a co-op store there, but Valentine's report reveals that some community members were concerned that he had come to take away their means of making a living or to "entice" them to vote CCF.⁴² As the co-op grew in its success, Valentine continued to base his assessments on what he saw as the inherent, racially-defined capabilities of Metis people, in keeping with other historical and ethnographic analyses of the Metis as a maladapted people "in between." He explained, "The method I adopted was to get the Métis together in groups to appoint their own leaders, and make suggestions concerning what should be done about the things *they* felt were impeding their development."⁴³ In other words, although Valentine appeared to make space for local agency, in effect, he asked community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse to take responsibility for what the CCF government saw as their deficiencies, without resisting the colonial policies like the changes to fur regulation that had necessitated new economic measures like the co-op in the first place.

Although Valentine was, overall, confident that community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse were well equipped to run their own co-op store, other observers took a different view. Anthropology PhD student Philip Spaulding, who was undertaking fieldwork for his dissertation at around the same time that Valentine was making his reports, took the eventual closure of the co-op store as an indication that "natives were not ready for this kind of responsibility," and that government efforts had failed because they threatened the status quo: "the authority of whites to decide what was best for the natives and because they ran counter to conservative native practices."⁴⁴ These two opposing, yet equally paternalistic analyses of the Ile-a-la-Crosse co-op indicate that the presence and impacts of newcomer institutions in the community were not simply based on an insider-outsider dichotomy; all parties recognized that changes to fur regulation had sparked needs for new economic structures. Furthermore, although Valentine specifically explained in a broader report on Metis people in northwestern Saskatchewan that he did not intend to "praise or blame" the decisions of DNR,⁴⁵ he did not consider that his efforts at objectivity did not extend to his research subjects. Although Valentine did not acknowledge his own positionality, I consider how the questions that newcomer institutions asked shaped the contexts for processes of making things in the mid-twentieth century. Focusing on those processes of making shows how government

⁴² Victor F. Valentine, "The Fort Black Co-Operative Store: A Social Experiment Among the Ile A La Crosse Métis," 1957, 1, Robert Doucette fonds, SA-1035, #1, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁴ Spaulding, "The Metis of Ile-a-La-Crosse," 5–6.

⁴⁵ Valentine, *A Social Anthropological Study of the Metis Population of Northwestern Saskatchewan*.

involvement in twentieth-century Ile-a-la-Crosse was not wholly binary or oppositional; individual makers incorporated these institutions into their lifestyles but were also limited by them, and their processes of making things show the contexts in which their reactions to government involvement took place.

The CCF government specifically sought to define (and confine northerners to) specific ideas about tradition. As Quiring has argued, efforts to implement co-operative marketing in the commercial fishing industry (exemplified, for instance, by the co-op fish processing plant that operated in Ile-a-la-Crosse until the 1970s) were designed to foster maximal cooperation from northerners by “allowing” them to pursue what they considered traditional occupations.⁴⁶ Of course, as community members’ responses to the changes to fur marketing suggest, this strategy was not wholly successful, largely because the eventual users of the system were not consulted. To work effectively within these new systems, community members were unable to change the systems themselves; instead, they turned to other processes of making things to provide for themselves. By making things, they created an economy that worked for them by responding directly to their actual individual and family needs.

Monique Gardiner explained in a GDI interview how although she worked at the Revillon Frères store and the hospital as a source of income, they continued to rely on the results of hunting trips. While some of the results of a hunt directly contributed to food and household supplies, Monique also noted that “we’d make pemmican which we would sell to buy the basics.”⁴⁷ Given Monique’s age at the time of the interview, the period to which she referred was largely prior to the CCF’s tenure in government. The economy in which her family made and sold things was based on the availability of wages as well as materials or resources to make things that would allow them to purchase what they needed. The wages from Monique’s work did not cover “the basics;” rather it was processes of making things that did that.

Quiring has stated that the CCF government had attempted to alleviate the disconnect between community members’ work and their ability to make a living from it, but that the actual policies as implemented did not create the kind of change intended, in part because the CCF did not devote sufficient resources to developing new industries.⁴⁸ But beyond that, it is apparent when comparing community members’ changing experiences of the economy that the efforts of CCF restructuring of the north also changed the ways that community members needed to define

⁴⁶ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, 147.

⁴⁷ Monique Gardiner, interview, 5 July 2001.

⁴⁸ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, 147.

tradition. New CCF structures intended to remove the need to make things for survival, by paradoxically seeking to change economic structures without changing northerners' economic activities.⁴⁹ Although Quiring describes northerners' occupations within a dichotomy of “modernization” and “tradition,”⁵⁰ community members whose items became part of newcomer institutions also helped to reinforce narratives about tradition. Within an economy where making things was intended to facilitate engagement with wage labour, these things allowed community members to maintain certain tangible aspects of their previous lifestyles. But in these new contexts, community members were also stripped of autonomy or agency because of expectations from government programs that economic change should take place in specific, regulated ways. As a result, traditions of making things took on new significance, as they began to symbolize ways that economic relationships had functioned in the past.

The narratives of those who worked to resist colonizing institutions help to reinforce the relationships among specific made things, economic change, and political autonomy. Jim Durocher (more frequently known in Ile-a-la-Crosse as Jimmy D), through his several decades working in Metis politics, had developed a narrative about his political involvements and his motivations behind them. When I first met him in 2010, he explained that after a stint in the air force, two years at university, and some time as a commercial pilot, he became interested in Metis politics in the late 1960s, serving as treasurer and later president for the Metis Society of Saskatchewan, as well as the president of the Metis National Council.⁵¹ While his early political experience was also a social one, in which primarily young men would gather — “in the good old days when we were having a lot of fun, you know, talking about constitutional issues, you know those kinds of things with Jim Sinclair [a well-known Metis leader in Saskatchewan] and those types”⁵² — these politics were based partly on Jim's evaluation of tradition and the past. He explained, by way of introducing me and my friend to Metis history:

I spent a lot of time with my grandparents [growing up] because in the old days, that's what firstborns in families were expected to do; it's kind of an unwritten rule...So Grandma and Grandpa decided, well, you would come and live with us. So I lived with them for quite a while, and that's where I learned a lot about tradition, if

⁴⁹ Ibid., xvi.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jim Durocher, interview, 6 October 2010.

⁵² Ibid.

you want to call it tradition, culture, if you want to call it culture, way of life, whichever way you want to label you want to put on it, that's where I learned it.⁵³

In this narrative, Jim linked tradition directly with both a tangible way of life, and a definition of culture that would take on political connotations for Jim in his adult life. But although his grandparents' lifestyle constituted tradition, he also noted that that was an era of economic hardship, particularly for those without social supports:

In those days, particularly ladies, there was no such thing as welfare in those days. You couldn't go, [my grandmother] couldn't go and see the social worker because they didn't exist. And so the only way you could, I guess, survive, was to remarry, and that's what she did. She got married three times.⁵⁴

It was because of such instances that Jim Durocher later advocated for Metis rights, to seek assistance in setting up more accessible social welfare institutions and access for Metis people, particularly in more northerly or remote regions like Ile-a-la-Crosse. His commentary serves as a reminder that although community members have critiqued the changes and in several instances damages wrought by various newcomer institutions throughout the twentieth century, what community members sought was beneficial change, not necessarily a static maintenance of the economic and social conditions of previous generations.

These wishes were reinforced by the political organizations with which Jim Durocher was involved. Although Quiring, for instance, has argued that economic development in the north was primarily a concern of the mid-twentieth-century, the activities of the Metis Society of Saskatchewan suggest that "parallel developments in education, training and cultural and social support services" were goals into the 1990s and beyond.⁵⁵ These proposed institutional developments were intertwined with the processes of making things that some community members have described as survival tools that later took on political meaning as they came to symbolize autonomy or distinctiveness in the face of colonialism.

Seeking autonomous social and economic institutions in the way that Jim Durocher and

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Metis Society of Saskatchewan, "Developing the Métis Economy: A Strategy for Saskatchewan," 17 June 1993, Robert Doucette Fonds S-A 1035 file 141, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

others advocated had been ongoing since before the large-scale involvement of the CCF in the north. In 1956, the MSS developed its own response to DNR policies, explaining that they sought to be an “independent and self-sustaining group of people able to conduct their own enterprises and to solve their particular problems without excessive reference to Government or other agencies.”⁵⁶

When he returned from the air force about ten years later, Jim Durocher became interested in these discussions. Jim is also a keen musician, and frequently visits classrooms and community gatherings to sing Michif adaptations of popular country tunes. One of his songs addresses the theme of poverty and making things for physical and political survival. In his preamble to the song, he explained how he had been, as he said, “partying with” an elder in the community:

One day I said [to him], how do you know when a family is really poor, I said. You know you’ve got lots of kids, and you know sometimes things are hard. There was nothing in those days sometimes eh, it was tough. The only game was not there, you know, no fish sometimes. Things were tough. And so I said... how do you know when things are really tough? And he looked at me and he said geeze, he said, Jim, you should know, he said when it’s really tough, that’s when you’ve got no flour, he said. Makîkwêy lafarrine...that means “there’s no flour.” That’s when it’s really tough, because if you’ve got no flour then you can’t make bannock. You got no flour, you can’t make rrababô [wild meat stew], which is to thicken the soup, and so to him, that was the thing. So I made a song about that. It’s based on a Jimmy Rogers tune.⁵⁷

To be unable to make bannock and stew meant that, even though Jim’s friend described poverty as part of a way of life that contemporary community members respect as traditional, a lack of flour made it difficult to create tangibly, identifiably Metis things. For Jim Durocher, flour and its products were political symbols rather than survival tools, and although his song about being too poor to afford flour is partly humorous, it stemmed from Jim’s involvement in political negotiations that sought to craft relationships between local, provincial Metis, and larger government institutions. In the 1970s, prominent Metis political leaders like Howard Adams and Jim Sinclair organized a demonstration to draw attention to issues of poverty in the north. It was called Flour Power, and as

⁵⁶ “Northern Native Rehabilitation: Course of Action to Be Followed by DNR as of February 1, 1957,” 1957, 2, Robert Doucette Fonds S-A 1035 file 537, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

⁵⁷ Durocher, interview, 6 October 2010.

Jim Durocher explained, its approach was to create media attention around the fact that people were starving in the north. While Jim noted that the stories were slightly exaggerated for effect, the central point was that people were so poor that they could not even afford to make bannock.⁵⁸ They were not only hungry; organizers also argued by not being able to make specific items, they were deprived of the ability to assert their presence and resilience as Metis people in the north. The Flour Power demonstration, while short-lived,⁵⁹ highlighted the complicated relationships among institutions, community members' economic lives, and the necessity of making things either for personal survival or political symbolism. Organizers of the movement arranged donations of flour from the National Farmers' Union, and Siemens Transport trucked it into communities.⁶⁰

Through these partnerships, the act of making bannock became the focal point of charity and of not only a single political organization, but also political advocacy from diverse interests. Tying bannock directly to economic needs in the north allowed political organizers an inroad to larger discussions of northern exclusion: an outgrowth of Flour Power was a takeover of the provincial legislature for several days.⁶¹ The issue of poverty had direct consequences on individuals' survival — their ability to make stew and bannock — but larger issues included the limited trickle-down of uranium-mining profits to northern communities, and the restricted ability of northern municipalities in the 1970s to make decisions without Regina's input.⁶² In the climate of 1970s Metis political organizing, making things was not a direct question of economic survival, but of resistance to colonialism and asserting a tangible, collective Metis identity through handmade items.

More recently, some community members have continued to foster narratives that poverty and a politically Metis identity can be symbolized by the same kinds of objects. A conversation that colleague and friend Mandy Fehr and I had with Jules Daigneault about histories of fiddle music and

⁵⁸ Jim Durocher conversation with Amanda Fehr and Katya MacDonald, November 2010.

⁵⁹ It is worth noting, though, that although this particular action was relatively short, provincial Metis organizations maintained their focus on northern poverty for most of the 1970s. In particular, *New Breed* magazine, published by Metis Society, published comparisons of food prices across the north, letters from readers across the province decrying the lack of equality between the north and south, and hosted a regular column detailing the economic struggles of northerners. Thus, northern economic conditions were the subject of political narratives, in addition to the narratives of individuals who have since interpreted their experiences of poverty in the context of making things.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. Administration of northern villages changed several times over the course of the twentieth century. Following the establishment of DNS, though, that branch oversaw not only economic activities in the north, but also political structures. In the 1970s, for instance, the provincial government set up Northern Local Community Authorities, comprised of elected councillors but under the direct jurisdiction of DNS. "Ile-a-La-Crosse, Saskatchewan - Statistical Outline."

dancing sparked discussion from Jules about other symbols of tradition in the north. While on one hand, he noted that fiddle music “connects the communities” across cultures, there were also economic differences between Ile-a-la-Crosse and the First Nations communities that Jules and his wife Lena liked to visit for dances. He described the tables of handmade wares that local people would set up at the dances, hoping to sell them to visitors:

And sometimes they’ll put up a table and they’ll be trying to sell their moccasins in there eh. You’ve gotta have something; the dancers are just like tourists. And when you go somewhere you see all these moccasins all over. It’s interesting, that’s what they used to do a long time ago, they used to bring their stuff across, trying to make a living, money, while they’re dancing so they can buy groceries eh. But today nobody brings anything; they say, oh I’ve got a lot of moccasins at home, they’re proud of them. But all they have to do is set up a table.⁶³

By “they,” Jules explained, he meant the First Nations (mostly Dene) residents of the communities he visited; they had the money to buy status symbols or souvenirs like moccasins, whereas Metis people, he argued, did not, because they did not have a history of negotiating for rights and resources with governments. Certainly, First Nations members of Treaty 10 would likely argue that the deal that was struck with them was insufficient in many ways,⁶⁴ but Metis people have also argued that treaties have provided a clear basis for rights that Metis people have had to fight for.⁶⁵ For Jules, the moccasins were symbols of a tradition that was being lost, but that only First Nations people, through their longstanding institutional relationships with government, were in an economic position to access the traditions — and therefore the political legitimacy that accompanied a recognized history of occupation of a place — that they held in common.

Regardless of the relative benefits or disadvantages of treaty and scrip agreements, Jules was correct that residents of Ile-a-la-Crosse had a lower average income than in other communities in the same region during the decades that economic change was most drastic. Metis Society leader Malcolm Norris undertook a survey in 1947, and found that the average annual income in Ile-a-la-

⁶³ Daigneault, interview, 6 October 2010.

⁶⁴ Treaty 10 was negotiated hastily in the summer of 1906, which was poor timing because most of the local people were deeply occupied in hunting season. The hastiness of those negotiations meant that many of the provisions were vague, misunderstood, or nonexistent. J. R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009).

⁶⁵ Jim Durocher, interview, 6 October 2010.

Crosse was \$91.15, as compared to \$102.73 in Patuanak and \$124.48 in Beauval,⁶⁶ even despite the larger number of institutions in Ile-a-la-Crosse than in the other communities that could have offered further employment opportunities. Furthermore, even in the mid-1970s, the town had electricity, but no water treatment, sewage hookup, or garbage disposal.⁶⁷ There was therefore even greater impetus in Ile-a-la-Crosse during these years for individuals to seek out solutions to their own economic challenges, taking advantage of what available waged labour existed and supplementing the rest by employing their skills for economic gain.

Community members' relationships with newcomer institutions shaped their economic involvements and possibilities from childhood. The influence of institutions took place not only in the ways that shifting opportunities to use their existing skills affected their ability to make a living from those skills; community members also responded to these changes through their processes of making things. Longstanding institutions like the HBC and the Roman Catholic mission and school held strong sway in local economies and in the kinds of skills that local people attained, and they also helped to shape narratives about local people's abilities by encouraging specific types of handmade items. But for those who were employed in so-called traditional occupations, or who attended the residential school in the middle decades of the twentieth century, those skills sometimes became tools for critiquing or resisting economic challenges that community members experienced, particularly ones that resulted from the increased involvement of the provincial government in the north. Using specific things or processes of making things, some community members decided to reinforce their own narratives about authenticity and tradition to highlight economic challenges or to create opportunities for using their practical skills. Although the visible and tangible nature of making things was what helped newcomer and local institutions alike to convey their arguments about Indigenous people in Ile-a-la-Crosse, the resulting items were significant beyond their physical existence as symbols or practical items; they were also part of arguments about gender, economic class or ability, and political movements.

⁶⁶ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, 203.

⁶⁷ R. M. Bone, "Community Profile of Ile-a-La-Crosse, SK," 1971, MG 240, Box 3I, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

Chapter 7: Adapting Ethnographic Narratives to Local Histories of Things

I had an uncle Burnouf in Beauval, they used to go over there to work for him...And then he used to pay them in flour, sugar, tea. He used to go down south, he had a big truck, and also he used to bring us clothes as we were growing up. So we were lucky to have those things. 'Cause it was poor in those days, you see. You have nothing to eat.¹

Eliza Aubichon recalled these economic conditions of her childhood in a conversation with me, in which I had asked her about ways that she and her family had made a living in the past, and whether processes of making things had been part of her experience. In Ile-a-la-Crosse, the relationships among making things and making a living have been closely tied to the ways that community members have experienced newcomer institutions. For those who grew up prior to the 1960s and 1970s, when economic and institutional changes prompted many people to live more permanently in the town, poverty that threatened survival was a focal point of their experience. It set the stage, at least in part, for later discussions of making a living in new economic contexts, where contemporary conditions were evaluated in comparison to earlier experiences. Both economic and generational differences influenced community members' processes of making things. For those who relied on making things to make a living in difficult economic times, expectations from beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse of what Indigenous authenticity should look like provided the market for selling their work. For some who interpreted these processes of making things (sometimes, but not exclusively in subsequent generations), tradition and authenticity became goals, as well as opportunities for directly addressing the lasting effects of colonialism; handmade items sometimes symbolized these arguments directly.

To explore these experiences, I first discuss the economic environments that many community members lived within during much of the twentieth century. I then explain how newcomer institutions responded to these economic conditions in part by using ethnographic description to support their motivations for intervening in the north. Whether these descriptions stemmed from scholarly institutions, the Department of Northern Saskatchewan, or less officially through the residential school curriculum, institutions created an idea that Indigenous people and cultures in the north were static, and should aspire to the institutions' definitions of what an

¹ Aubichon, interview.

“authentic” Indigenous person did for a living. I then explore how, paradoxically, these expectations also helped to create a market for community members’ work that would appeal to outside buyers. Thus, I show how making things at home helped community members, particularly women, to circumvent, critique, and complicate DNS understandings of labour and economies in the north. Even once these institutions were no longer central in most northerners’ lives, the idea of tradition itself became marketable, because community members with traditional skills could appeal to the respect that such knowledge gained within Ile-a-la-Crosse itself.

In contrast to Eliza’s memories of poverty as a circumstance that she had been fortunate to survive, Jules Daigneault, who is about ten years younger than Eliza and grew up in similar conditions, remembered poverty with nostalgia instead of condemnation: “There was no drinking, it was so poor a long time ago. Nowadays people are so rich, they have everything. They have everything to drink, drugs. Yet they don’t have anything.”² While Jules Daigneault’s reflections on the relationships between tradition and history take a somewhat simplified stance, they are not to be disregarded entirely, in part because they are revealing of local and individual approaches to tradition, and because other community members’ discussions of tradition have addressed similar themes. Monique Gardiner, who was born in Ile-a-la-Crosse in 1910 and was 91 years old when she was interviewed by GDI, noted that while her godmother had taught her to survive, her own skills in making hides, drymeat, and other daily requirements were mostly self-taught: “we had to keep working to survive.”³ For Monique, this survival consisted of camping trips so that the men could hunt, and women could make drymeat, tan hides, and make pemmican “to buy the basics.”⁴ Considered in the context of generational shifts, Monique Gardiner’s comments provide an underpinning for narratives about tradition that changed alongside living conditions themselves. There was and remains a distinction between “making” and “making do,” where survival changed from being a physical need to a narrative of historical and cultural survival, at least according to community members’ discussions of the need for tradition particularly in the decades during which Ile-a-la-Crosse was undergoing significant geographical and economic change. Making things was no longer only a matter of exploiting available resources for everyday needs; it also became a reference point for narratives about self-sufficiency, autonomy, and local knowledge.

Many of these arguments drew on experiences of making and material goods, and these items were closely tied to other family and community experiences that were inseparable from geographies or labour

² Jules Daigneault, interview, 6 October 2010.

³ Monique Gardiner, interview, 5 July 2001.

⁴ Ibid.

and economic circumstances. Monique Gardiner, who was interviewed as part of the GDI's 2001 collection of oral histories, recalled, "It was hard to travel, it was hard and we were poor."⁵ Comparing her life at the time of the interview to that of her childhood, she noted that "we only had the basics like flour, sugar, salt, tea from the store."⁶ Her reflections suggested not only a shift in lifestyle over the course of those decades, but also a shift in expectations for daily life and for existence in a community. Travel and food were closely tied to the circumstances underpinning the making of items: the "basics" that families like Monique's purchased were symbols of poverty rather than of acquisition. With elders like those interviewed for the 2001 GDI project providing a "baseline" for present-day iterations of what tradition consists of, their life experiences became the material that subsequent generations would draw on to compare contemporary life and inform senses of tradition or nostalgia. Gilbert McCallum, who was born in 1919 in Pinehouse but spent most of his life in Ile-a-la-Crosse, commented in an interview with the Gabriel Dumont Institute (part of the same series to which Daniel Daigneault and several other elders from Ile-a-la-Crosse contributed) on his family's poverty that provided a context for making things:

We didn't know much of anything, because we lived in the bush. I spoke to my wife about that. I told her that having bannock once a week, I was very happy, because we were not fed bannock all the time, because times were hard. They saved the flour for soup base when boiling a duck's meat. Even spoons, we were lucky to have one or two to a family. See, this is what we used to eat soup [clam shells].⁷

The family's material items, whether they were more permanent fixtures like spoons, or more transient food items, were, in Gilbert McCallum's narrative and like most families, a product of their economic circumstances. By extension, processes of making things were also economically driven, but perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, making things in Gilbert McCallum's interpretation were not activities to alleviate poverty — making things was not an act of "making do." Rather, even "making do" by making basic tools and staple foods was not always possible.

Nostalgia, then, was also a creation of tradition and of subsequent generations' reflections on traditional processes of making things. By comparing narratives of poverty across generations, it is possible to see a shift from poverty as an immediate concern, to historical poverty as a feature of traditional lifestyles. Provincial government sociologist Victor Valentine conducted interviews in the 1950s with Metis people in

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gilbert McCallum, interview.

northwestern Saskatchewan, regarding their immediate economic needs, with the aim of informing government policy. One man in his forties, living at the Beaver River near Ile-a-la-Crosse commented:

We can't even kill nothing to feed our kids with. We're just sitting at home doing nothing. What's feeding our kids right now, to tell the truth, is our family allowances, but it isn't enough to buy clothes. If we bought any clothes then the kids would have to go hungry. I'd like to see a little work around the country. The CCF never gives us any work that's why we're against them. Can't even kill a duck to make a pot of soup for our kids. As soon as they let things go free so's we can take a fish or a duck to feed our kids we'll be okay -- now if we do we'll go to jail and that's all that's got to happen to us.⁸

While poverty was a vivid struggle in community members' experiences and later memories, those who experienced poverty mainly as children also noted the positive values that they associated with those experiences. Narratives of poverty sit in contrast to those of community members who today recount both their own and their parents' memories of their respective childhoods. Dorothy Dubrule noted of her own growing up in the 1950s and 1960s that there was little availability, either financially or practically, of acquiring pre-made furniture and other household goods. Instead, whenever the family moved, which Dorothy recalled as being quite frequently, her father would make new furniture each time they set up a new household: a "routine" procedure in Dorothy's memory.⁹

At the same time, her mother worked to maintain the family's steady access to food and functional clothing, precisely through the processes of "making do" that Gilbert McCallum's family experienced, one generation earlier. Dorothy described her mother as "resourceful," making rag rugs, socks, clothes, quilts, canvas tents, and working together with others to build canoes. Furthermore, she stretched her resources creatively to put store-bought materials to new uses: she would disassemble a winter coat after it had been worn for a season, to switch the lining to the outside of the coat and have it be presentable and functional for another year.¹⁰ Many of Dorothy's stories about the past take the form of reminiscences: that is, she has reflected on her own experience, as well as interpreted her parents' experiences through that same lens. These memories of making things point to a definition of tradition that is generationally-constructed, particularly because Dorothy has also commented on the features she recognizes from her own past being

⁸ Valentine, *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*.

⁹ Dubrule, interview, 2 September 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid.

reflected in subsequent generations. She noted that few of her mother's skills had been passed down, with baking — and particularly the family tradition of Christmas puddings — being the one notable exception, as her daughter has taken up this practice. Drawing on these observations of changes in her family's approaches to making things, Dorothy has pointed to changes in tradition using generational markers.

Although some community members invoked specific ideas of tradition and authenticity to make political arguments, their arguments grew out of histories of threats to their self-determination. At times, the institutions that had taken root in the community sought to employ their own essentialized depictions of Indigenous people to define their expectations for local people's behaviour. Some of the work that schoolchildren at the boarding school undertook not only reflected the mission's educational goals, as discussed in Chapter 6, but also the apparent disconnect between students' families' experiences and the ways that teachers portrayed Indigenous lives. In 1946, the Roman Catholic mission's newsletter *Island Breezes* published the writings of grade 3 students, who described the life of "the Indians" prior to the arrival of the mission. Annie Durocher wrote:

Before the Missionaries came the Indians prayed to the Manitou or gods. They did not believe in God but they believed in a Chief Manitou. He was called the Great Spirit. When the white men told the Indians about God they believed He was the Great Spirit and they liked to hear about Him.¹¹

Annie Durocher's report reflected the mission's interest in defining local people as inherently prepared for conversion, based on depictions of a pre-contact past that appeared to be based at least as much in generalizations as local people's own experiences. Other students wrote about specific objects that seemed to be connected more to Hollywood stereotypes than to students' own histories. Mary Durocher described the peace pipe: "The Pipe of Peace was a long pipe decorated with bright colored feathers. Dry leaves were used for tobacco. If an Indian asked you to smoke the pipe of peace it meant he would not hurt you. It meant 'from my heart to your heart let there be peace.'"¹² Classmate Williamina Ramsay's topic was the tomahawk: "When the white men came the Indians had no guns they used bows and arrows and the tomahawks for hunting. It was made from bone or

¹¹ *Island Breezes*, 1946, Ile-a-la-Crosse Public Library.

¹² *Ibid.*

stone with a handle on it. The Indian used it to hit hard, to kill.”¹³ In these narratives, clearly informed by the school’s teachings, the material, handmade things that students described were archaic or even, in the students’ experiences, imaginary items. Because they accompanied the mission’s essentialized or disconnected understandings of “the Indian,” the idea of authenticity became a tool for the school to dispossess students of their own histories. Twenty years later, when some community members, as young adults, sought to use homemade material goods like bannock as symbols of northerners’ — and specifically Metis people’s — autonomy, they were responding, in part, to these earlier narratives that had sought to equate authenticity with irrelevance or disappearance.

Indeed, when I spoke with Eliza Aubichon about how she had learned the beadwork for which she is now well-known in Ile-a-la-Crosse, she recalled how her time at residential school had been at direct odds with her own knowledge, reinforced by the violence and isolation that she experienced:

No, when I was a kid I was in the convent, I couldn’t do nothing...when I got out of school then I started learning [beadwork]. I used to learn, I used to make little designs in the classroom. I used to put the colours there, that’s the plan I want to do. I had that in my mind, I was going to do it when I get out of there. At first I was a very quiet girl eh. And then they call me down and they...used to give me a licking every night. And that strap was big around, this big, and this wide. So that was awful. Sister, I said, one of these days you hit my back, I said to her, you’re going to get it, I said to her! [laughs] I’ll fight for myself, I said. I was mad at her.¹⁴

For Eliza as a child, planning her future beadwork was an escape from her experiences in the school, reinforcing the fact that the school’s inventions of authenticity were sometimes worse than meaningless for the students who encountered them. Beadwork was a way of separating herself from the school, both while she attended, and later in her life when she used beadwork as a way to provide for her family after she was widowed.

At the same time, though, educational institutions from further afield continued to arbitrate definitions of authenticity, sometimes with the specific aim of dictating Metis people’s actions.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Aubichon, interview.

Ethnographies and academic institutions thus helped to foster the relationship between access to handmade items and political legitimacy that Ile-a-la-Crosse community members have described. In some instances, like the use of Valentine's reports to inform CCF policy in the north, ethnographic work sought to define the channels through which traditional skills could gain economic traction. Other ethnographic work, which in the Ile-a-la-Crosse region mainly took place between the 1950s and 1980s, simply served to reinforce existing scholarly or governmental assessments of northerners' concerns, abilities, and occupations. As Chapter 6 has noted, Spaulding's PhD dissertation, one of the few scholarly works that focus on Ile-a-la-Crosse in an era past the height of the fur trade, was closely informed by scholarship on Metis people that cast them as inherently socially or culturally deficient. Valentine's work sometimes took a similar tone, suggesting that:

I would say that fear of ridicule and fear of the unknown are perhaps the strongest emotions in Metis personality and society. A man fears the opinions of his friends; he fears the white man who comes into his life with objects and ideas he has never seen or heard before and dominates every phase of his life; he fears the 'wild men' who live in the bush...and does not like to go into the bush alone; and he fears the 'Pure Indian' who has 'medicinal' powers to harm or cure him.¹⁵

By equating social or economic change with "flawed" individual personalities, and personalities with a "flawed" (or by implication impure) culture, Valentine solidified concepts about Ile-a-la-Crosse against which community members mobilized counterarguments. Sometimes this was a direct process, by beginning political action that used material items as symbols of Metis cultural strength. At other times, community members used their processes of making things for economic gain in ways that subverted Valentine's expectations.

Twenty years after Valentine's and Spaulding's work, ethnoarchaeologists Robert Jarvenpa and Hetty Jo Brumbach worked in the neighbouring community of Patuanak, partly on contract with the Canadian Museum of Man (as it was then known) to document and collect handmade items that met the museum's standards for evaluating authenticity (that is, adherence to pre-contact construction methods). Jarvenpa's and Brumbach paid makers for items that were brought back to the museum, thereby helping to foster a regional economy, not only in Patuanak but also for families and communities connected to it, that was based on specific institutional definitions and monetary

¹⁵ Valentine, *A Social Anthropological Study of the Metis Population of Northwestern Saskatchewan*, 5.

valuing of authenticity. It was apparent in the two scholars' field notes that they also viewed themselves as part of transactions of money as well as knowledge. Brumbach wrote of one informant: "We went to [her] house to pay her and get the second portfolio. We decided that since she is getting a generous price from us that I would interview her and get some information. For this, I brought along the questionnaire on women's roles and skills that I had made up."¹⁶ Brumbach seemed to consider herself to be part of a direct exchange with community members, roles that were facilitated by the resources of the museum. It is not clear whether the makers of the items or contributors to interviews considered themselves part of the same transactional contexts, but Brumbach's notes reveal differences in taste and expectation for the items: "The purse when it arrived was a combination of beads, sequins, moose hide, wooden caribou, rick-rack, red cloth, yarn draw-strings, and lining. We found the purse just a little garish but decided to buy it anyway."¹⁷

The dictates of the museum also shaped the questions and the expectations that Jarvenpa and Brumbach held for their informants. Their evaluation of items that contained decorations beyond those that would have been "traditionally" available as "garish" offers one indication that they sought a different definition of authenticity than the makers themselves did. Furthermore, the work of the two ethnographers helps to show how academic research attempted to create different timelines for tradition than the ones that community members themselves held. Brumbach described a conversation that she had had with a middle-aged beader and leather worker in which she attempted to explain the characteristics of objects that the museum deemed valuable:

I asked her about 'old-fashioned' items but she seemed to think I was looking for old things. She told me that all the old things 'went on the fire' and that all she has left are the porcupine quill objects that her mother had made long ago. I tried to explain that I meant things that were new but made to look like old-fashioned ones.¹⁸

The museum was interested in reproducing specific practices, regardless of whether those practices were meaningful to makers, and Brumbach and Jarvenpa attached specific monetary value not only the objects themselves, but also to the processes of making them in ways that held appeal to public or scholarly interests beyond the region where the objects originated. In the case of Brumbach's and Jarvenpa's work, they sometimes set their prices based on what community members themselves

¹⁶ Brumbach, "Hetty Jo Brumbach Fieldnotes."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

were already charging; Brumbach described how one Patuanak maker had made some items for a local teacher: “2 pairs of slippers, one with mink fur, one purse, and (I think) a belt for a total price of \$65. She commented that moose hide is hard to make.”¹⁹ Thus, while academics did not create the craft market, nor were they the sole authors of narratives about tradition or authenticity, they did solidify specific definitions of authenticity within institutions that community members themselves did not communicate with directly. To make money, then, community members sometimes had to meet those institutional expectations to make their items as marketable as possible.

Even when ethnographers’ work was not directly linked to monetary gain for makers, the narratives that academics created helped to reinforce tradition, authenticity, or particular types of knowledge as expectations for makers. In some cases, they became arbiters of authenticity. The ethnographic process became a market for particular knowledge, as defined by ethnographers’ interests. In the early 1980s, ethnobotanist Anna Leighton visited the Pelican Narrows region in northeastern Saskatchewan (a region that those on the “west side” consider quite culturally distinct, but that also had had similar experiences of redefining “isolation” in relation to the southern part of the province) to speak with community members about traditional plant uses. Her field notes reveal the technical details in which she was interested, and indicate that her questions had their basis in academia. Of one interviewee, she commented:

I am not sure how many plants she knows because sitting in an office is the wrong place to find this out. Going through *Edible Wild* by Berglund and Bolsky, looking at the pictures and names. This anyway gives me a bunch of plants to ask about. I suspect she knows a lot about plant use, and I hope she will realize what I’m looking for – i.e. not things she has read in books.²⁰

At the same time, though, her notes also gave insight into her methodologies for learning these details from local people:

Three cans of liquid commercial dye were sitting in her tent with split spruce roots in them: green, blue and a light red. Other spruce roots were hanging from tent pole rafter (central). We stayed about 1 hour. OP did not want to be taped when she was

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Anna Leighton, “Field Notes and Diary Recorded during a Study of Ethnobotany of the Saskatchewan Woods Cree,” 1980, 17, *Ethnology Archives B329, f11*, Canadian Museum of History.

talking about medicine, but didn't mind when talking about other things. I asked her what she would like in return – a micky she said...but I gave her, with her consent, \$7.00 instead.²¹

Leighton and her interviewee alike understood that this knowledge exchange was also a business transaction, initiated but not wholly dictated by Leighton's interests. Although Leighton and other academics sought out specific kinds of knowledge, Leighton was asking her questions in the early 1980s, a time when the idea of tradition had become a valuable one, as evidenced by some of the political and social changes in Ile-a-la-Crosse discussed in Chapter 6. Paying community members for sharing their time and expertise also provided an illustration that such contributions were tangibly valuable. Engaging with the "micro-economy" of knowledge that academics' work fostered was not an acquiescence to artificial definitions of authenticity; rather, it was an example of changing processes of making and interpreting handmade things over time.

The paradox of tradition is that although its definition and usefulness changes according to the argument being made about the past and its role in the present, the topics that are often discussed as traditional are portrayed as ahistorical or static. Although Ile-a-la-Crosse and the region has not been a site of much concerted ethnographic work, the 1970s and 1980s saw an increase in such work across northern Saskatchewan, perhaps due to the easier access from urban areas, combined with the sense, from academics, but perhaps also from northerners (as Ile-a-la-Crosse's commemorative history book suggests, for instance) that that increased access meant that existing lifeways needed to be studied under the salvage ethnography paradigm. Jarvenpa's, Brumbach's, and Leighton's discussions of processes of making things reveal how, despite quests for traditional items that adhered to a specific, museum-dictated and somewhat atemporal version of authenticity, seeking to rein in a specific definition of tradition was complicated by makers' actual needs, goals, and knowledge. Anna Leighton's fieldnotes reveal a snapshot of the ethnographic process that helped to define what authenticity should look like in the context of making and using things. Of an anonymous informant, she wrote:

She is a mixture of things, abilities and deficiencies. She can write Cree, both in our alphabet and in syllabics, but her writing in our alphabet is illegible and she often leaves syllables out...I am not sure how many plants she knows because sitting in an

²¹ Ibid., 66–67.

office is the wrong place to find this out. Going through *Edible Wild* by Berglund and Bolsky, looking at the pictures and names. This anyway gives me a bunch of plants to ask about. I suspect she knows a lot about plant use, and I hope she will realize what I'm looking for – i.e. not things she has read in books.²²

While Leighton used books to inform the questions she asked of community members, she was clear that she did not consider such learning processes to be authentic knowledge on the part of her informant. Yet, as community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse noted at the time via local history research and later memories of that time period, they considered local knowledge to be under threat from various forces of rapid change, and were eager to preserve and share it in as many forms as possible. Learning this knowledge from books was indeed a goal of the centenary history project, as well as Max Morin's more informal interviewing project discussed in Chapter 6, and such knowledge was intended to reinforce the value and content of tradition in Ile-a-la-Crosse and other communities. Ethnographers' involvement in the process of defining authenticity in terms of specific tangible or material activities meant that tradition, as an expression of a search for authenticity, also required a connection to those same activities. Nevertheless, in the context of community members' interpretations of the value of the past that changed over time, tradition itself involved making arguments about the past that included but were not limited to visible markers of a specific point in time. Even though ethnographers and community members alike sought to define authenticity in part through specific processes of making, community members' own historical accounts also complicated that process.

Although it is not clear whether community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse directly took part in such economic transactions within ethnographic work, the overall scholarly work that took place in the surrounding region nevertheless shaped the climate and market for Ile-a-la-Crosse people's handmade items, since, as Eliza Aubichon noted, they often had to look outside the town to sell their work. The methods of ethnographers like Brumbach, Jarvenpa, and Leighton in the 1970s and 1980s also help to show that the economic conditions that women, especially, faced in the 1950s and 1960s while raising young families persisted decades later. Although, as suggested by the political demonstrations that Jim Durocher described, some economic conditions were driven by legal status and community needs, not just the regional conditions of "the north" that Quiring has discussed,

²² Anna Leighton, "Ethnobotany of the Woods Cree," 1979, Ethnology Archives B305, f2, Canadian Museum of History.

ethnographers' field notes nevertheless offer insight into the overlapping economic engagements in the region. Leighton, for instance, described an exchange that she made with an elderly medicine woman in Stanley Mission, on the east side of the province:

I guess from what the interpreter said, she would like 3 yds of purple cotton for a dress which since I only had one dollar to repay her with, I said I would bring her a present next time. She expressed a need for some money to play poker this evening, and since she had shown me a great deal, I felt obliged to give her as much as I could spare (\$1 –? the rest being for the interpreter in the form of a 10). She understood this was all I could give her and said it was okay.²³

Leighton's ethnographic interest easily became part of this woman's economic context, showing where her specific needs and interests lay, and how much it would cost to fulfill them. Although it is unclear whether there were opportunities for similar transactions to take place in Ile-a-la-Crosse around the same time, Leighton's relationships with knowledge and handmade items on the east side offer a methodological reminder that even without the institutional resources of a museum like Brumbach and Jarvenpa had, researchers carry with them institutional or class affiliations that can easily create power differentials between them and the people they work with. In the context of this dissertation, individuals' work and relationships carried economic implications, whereas for me, their knowledge did not directly affect my economic circumstances. Even as a student with limited resources, then, my work has been part of disparate power and economic dynamics. While the economic conditions in which people made things have changed over time, they have remained bound by institutional dynamics that have been shaped by intersections of racial, regional, gender, and class privilege.

Anthropologist Victor Buchli has explored ways that “material culture” has a long history of “materializing nationhood” through collecting and displaying material items to make arguments about colonizers' work and successes.²⁴ In this case, Buchli refers to the colonizers' nationalism, but Ile-a-la-Crosse community members' engagements with processes of making things have shown that the same approach has sometimes helped colonized people to reinforce their own interests. The same narrative format, of identifying and displaying specific items, has at times allowed community

²³ Leighton, “Field Notes and Diary Recorded during a Study of Ethnobotany of the Saskatchewan Woods Cree,” 20–21.

²⁴ Buchli, “Introduction,” 4.

members to critique colonial practices using the same strategies of “packaging” tangible items into specific arguments about place and history. Bringing material items into specific political narratives of need or dispossession, like the ones that Jim Durocher and his contemporaries began to foster in the 1960s, allowed community members to create a tangible comparison between loss and prosperity. This strategy mirrored Buchli’s description of material culture as a way to consider loss and consumption of culture.²⁵ As this dissertation has discussed, the complex historical, social, and political relationships that make up understandings of culture cannot be summed up comprehensively with a catalogue of objects. However, community members and academics alike have supported binaries within these complexities to communicate a compelling narrative with a specific political aim.

Yet although handmade items have sometimes become part of what Buchli calls “materializing nationhood”²⁶ — that is, the use of specific objects to communicate an overarching political narrative — on an individual level, the role of handmade items in twentieth-century Ile-a-la-Crosse has been more complicated. For individuals living within the economic contexts that larger political actions sought to critique or ameliorate, their handmade items may have found a market because they visibly matched buyers’ expectations of what an authentic or traditional item should be. But the economic market may not have directly matched their own motivations for making the items. For those who supplemented their income by selling handmade items, financial necessity was sometimes a more immediate motivator than specific historical or political arguments. Buchli has argued that for collectors and makers alike, the value of material culture has tended to depend on how much of an identity it can exemplify or “prove.”²⁷ It is the definition of value, then, that varies: in some cases, material items have had political or argumentative value; in other instances, their economic value has been most significant.

Anthropologist Karen Tranberg Hansen has noted that scholars have tended to discuss fashion in terms of capitalism in the West, creating a divide between fashion and “traditional” clothing.²⁸ While the material items that community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse have made and used have helped to complicate binaries, Hansen’s argument suggests a one-way process of acculturation, rather than a process of negotiating tradition locally, sometimes in reference to larger colonial and

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Buchli, “Introduction,” 7.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Karen Tranberg Hansen, “The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (1 January 2004): 372.

economic constraints. For some makers in Ile-a-la-Crosse, they expected that their completed items would help them to engage with capital and larger economic systems precisely because buyers considered their items traditional. When Eliza Aubichon needed to supplement her income after being widowed in the mid-1950s, she looked to her own skills as well as to larger markets to seek opportunities. While she knew how to prepare hides, sew clothing items, and decorate them with beadwork, people from outside the community helped to connect the finished items with larger markets. Eliza explained how a group of women would gather to learn about and practice particular skills:

I used to help in the school too. I even trained some ladies — moosehides. It was really interesting...About ten ladies I trained for the moosehide. After I lost my husband I had nothing to do, so I went to that class. I told them I could do it, they were looking for someone to train women, girls. I said I could do it, I could do it. I know how...It was nice, training them. I even joined Mary Morin, Marianne Kyplain, they were doing beadwork, I joined them. But I knew before eh. I trained myself how to do beadwork...It went better and better. Now I could do anything now...That one's okay, that one I could sell.²⁹

In an era when economic possibilities and social supports were shifting, Eliza and other women in similar situations re-evaluated their existing skills to find not only a sense of community but also economic opportunities. Such opportunities relied on the women's skills, but also their connections to a market for the items that they made. Although CCF policy and programming had disrupted large-scale economic patterns in Ile-a-la-Crosse, it had also afforded Eliza's group links to resources beyond their local community. When I asked Eliza whether the group had worked together to sell their items, she replied:

Oh yes, we did. Let's see, Mrs. Gibson, her husband, Don Gibson, was a DNS [officer] here, so she helped us. She helped us, and she come to our class, helped us to sell all those things. Took them out, and then sell them there. And that money went to our beads, our thread and everything. She brought them back. It was really nice, nice of her to do that for us. Yeah, mukluks, jackets, mitts, and slippers, and

²⁹ Aubichon, interview.

wraparounds too. But there was no beads on them, just plain hide. I helped them, though, I helped them — how do you call it — uh, sew them together. I was capable of doing everything I could.³⁰

DNS presence in Ile-a-la-Crosse therefore helped to connect makers to buyers of their work, but this did not take place through direct policy initiatives. Instead, Mrs. Gibson's voluntary work bridged the women's completed items with the demand that existed for them when Gibson "took them out [of the community]."

At first glance, the role of DNS in marketing the women's work could be seen as confirmation of Valentine's analysis that by introducing social programs "there is the possibility of developing dependent individuals who must always be governed paternally."³¹ Yet Valentine's work also acknowledged that the current fur regulatory system had helped to create the need for state assistance,³² and furthermore, focused almost entirely on men's labour in trapping and fishing occupations. Even his recommendations for educational changes assumed that mainly men would continue to populate the workforce; he suggested that skills like engine repair be taught in school, so that fishermen could make their own repairs to more efficient boats.³³ The work of the women in the moosehide sewing group, then, was marketable because it matched buyers' expectations of authenticity. But from the perspective of the provincial government, even though their work took place within the same economic conditions and the same expectations that Valentine highlighted that people in Ile-a-la-Crosse should undertake traditional occupations, their financial needs and responses were largely invisible.

The 1976 community history of Ile-a-la-Crosse, which had a generation's worth of time to reflect on the period in which Eliza first worked with moosehide to support her family financially, took a more black-and-white stance on consumerism than makers themselves did. The author Longpre suggested that there had been major changes to local self-sufficiency as a result of increased access to goods from outside Ile-a-la-Crosse:

Expansive windows exhibit the latest of dress fashions and serve to attract customers to the modern and large building now housing the venerable Hudson's Bay

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Valentine, *A Social Anthropological Study of the Metis Population of Northwestern Saskatchewan*, 9.

³² Ibid., 10.

³³ Ibid., 11.

Company. Roy Simpson and his staff happily serve the demanding tastes of growing consumerism. Inside, canoes, wood cook-stoves share space with colour televisions, stereos, and electric ranges. Clothing fashions of Saskatoon, Regina, and metropolitan Canada vie for the shopper's attention. Another section of the store offers grocery goods as to be found in any retail market in the South.³⁴

Even today, Longpre's assessment of the availability of goods is not quite as straightforward as he described; in Ile-a-la-Crosse, many people still routinely travel to Beauval, Meadow Lake, Prince Albert, or Saskatoon (between one and five hours away) for better prices and selection of fresh foods and household items. But all the same, when considering the work of groups like Eliza's that undertook traditional skills for contemporary financial support, engaging with consumerism was not a moment of cultural decline or of a break from tradition. Rather, consumer markets were precisely what allowed Eliza and the others in her group to maintain the activities that the author and researchers of the 1976 history deemed traditional.

The contributors to the 1976 history were, as Chapter 6 has described, mainly younger men with specific political perspectives that were reflected, at least subtly, in the book. Although their depictions of the community continue to resonate with many community members today, their depictions of the town did not take into consideration the economic relationships that underpinned the maintenance of the traditions they celebrated in their writing. Jim Durocher, a contemporary of Longpre, used narratives of authenticity to highlight his grandfather's success: "He come from a traditional family as well. He was a hunter, trapper, fisherman, and he lived very good in the bush. Couldn't read or write, but survived very well in any given environment, in the bush, from that point of view."³⁵ He equated his relationship with his grandmother by linking specific material things — bannock, especially — with a specific lifestyle and the knowledge associated with it:

I remember we'd be sitting around a campfire, and she'd come out there and make fried bannock, and this was my favourite time was when she'd make fry bannock in the evening, and then syrup. Put syrup in the bowl and we'd be able to dip our fried bannock in there, and that was nice. I liked that. And then she'd sit down and then she'd tell stories, you know about *Wísahkihcahk* [a Cree trickster figure in many

³⁴ Longpre, *Ile-a-La-Crosse 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial*, 66.

³⁵ Durocher, interview, 6 October 2010.

stories], you know, those kinds of things. And there was always an element of trying to teach you a lesson for example. Like the moon, you can see a little boy there with an axe, like this, that's trying to chop wood, but you see what happened was that little boy was chopping wood on a Sunday. See and this is where the religion kind of gets mixed up in there. And you're not supposed to do that on a Sunday. So what happened is the Creator took the little boy from earth and put him in the moon to teach everybody else that you don't chop wood on a Sunday. That's a lesson!³⁶

Jim explained this to me and a colleague the first time that we had met him, meaning that his depiction of his family history was curated to communicate the most essential elements that he felt newcomers to Ile-a-la-Crosse should know. Describing his grandparents' knowledge in terms of tradition, Jim connected authenticity to specific material knowledge, to give their knowledge legitimacy in his own arguments about Ile-a-la-Crosse's history.

But beyond that, the conditions that allowed the activities that Jim deemed authentic to continue were supported by less visible work. Because Jim's grandfather's trapping and hunting was sufficient to support the family, his grandmother had the time and resources to cook for the family and tell stories. For the women like Eliza who marketed their leatherwork through the craft collective, though, their connections to ideas of authenticity involved engaging with institutions from beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse. Gaining a positive reputation for possessing traditional knowledge was therefore not simply a process of acquiring specific skills or producing specific things; especially in the era of rapid economic change in the mid-twentieth century, individuals also required the resources to either make those skills and objects financially viable, or to afford them spare time to maintain knowledge that no longer had direct economic gain.

More recently, the financial gain of handmade items was a motivator for makers in Ile-a-la-Crosse, even when the objects were no longer crucial for survival. Norma Malboeuf took up beading as a hobby after she retired, mainly motivated by the interests of her grandchildren, who, having grown up around customized beaded mittens made by Ile-a-la-Crosse women, wanted some of their own. The price that the makers charged needed to account for their labour as well as their materials, and since Norma felt she could not afford that price, she decided to learn to make the mittens herself, asking Eliza for assistance with getting started. In so doing, Norma affirmed the reputation that Eliza had acquired, as an expert maker and someone who was actively maintaining the

³⁶ Ibid.

traditional skills that had become valuable as local statements about histories, rather than for their financial or practical uses. Eliza's status as a knowledgeable maker had resulted from her own responses to economic and personal circumstances over time, in addition to the specific knowledge that she had and shared with other community members.

As a result of changing power and economic dynamics in Ile-a-la-Crosse, the ethnographic process itself sometimes became a constructor or definer of ideals of authenticity. Even when material items were not the direct focus of conversations, the involvement of anthropologists and scholarly institutions held sway in defining the scope of authenticity. Thus, while the idea of tradition began to gain traction as a political argument in Ile-a-la-Crosse in late 1960s and 1970s, authenticity began to be defined as a marketable set of traits that community members could build on to reinforce their connection to meaningful tradition. Alternatively or additionally, they could capitalize on outsiders' expectations of authenticity to find a market for their handmade work.

As a result, ethnographic work and community members' interests were not always opposed, even when community members critiqued government or scholarly initiatives that did not serve their needs. At the same time that Valentine critiqued Ile-a-la-Crosse community members' "failure" to adopt CCF initiatives like co-operatives, community members themselves adapted their material skills to suit their individual needs, though they sometimes worked together to do so, including joining co-ops dedicated to their specific skills. Valentine's analysis of community members' activities did not reflect the ways that local people worked and interacted with one another, but it also did not completely acknowledge the support that some community members found from newcomer institutions in terms of making a living from the items that they made. Valentine argued that "The population being dispersed never experienced the benefits of co-operative living. There are no public services, each family unit believes itself to be self-sufficient. It was frequently brought to my attention that from a moral point of view the people living in outposts in family units were better than those living in the often-over-crowded settlements."³⁷ Although community members today certainly remember with fondness the time they spent living across the lake as young people, the resistance to CCF initiatives that Valentine described was the result of economic disruption, not an inherent propensity towards individualism. In fact, community members' own histories of making things to support themselves and their families offer evidence that some programs and institutions were accepted, adopted, and seen as valuable. For those makers, engaging with institutions and programs from outside the community were ways to re-evaluate existing skills to

³⁷ Valentine, *The Métis of Northern Saskatchewan*, 4.

make a living, by demonstrating, promoting, and communicating local knowledge to a broader market.

In Ile-a-la-Crosse, the most noteworthy example for the makers I spoke with was the handicrafts co-op, a branch of the Northern Handicrafts Co-op that the CCF had begun to set in motion in 1949, but that was not strongly underway until the mid 1950s.³⁸ The handicraft co-op program began as an all-women organization, receiving financial support and advice from the province, and by 1962 around 80 people from across the north had participated.³⁹ In Ile-a-la-Crosse specifically, Eliza Aubichon, who was a member of the co-op, estimated that about a dozen women were involved at various points. Thus, although some CCF policies – notably the fur marketing changes – had significant detrimental impacts for community members, initiatives stemming from the CCF were not universally uninteresting to northerners; rather, if the programs were responsive to local needs, and allowed local people to tailor them to more specific circumstances, some marketing programs, like the handicrafts co-op, left space for community members to make a living within existing gender and social dynamics. The patchy success of CCF programs is reminiscent of Sarah Carter’s analysis of nineteenth-century federal governments’ push for First Nations people to become farmers, while simultaneously taking active steps to prevent their farming success.⁴⁰ These common features of colonial control – even across several decades and different regions – reinforce the fact that when community members were able to making a living by making things, it was because governments and institutions adapted to makers’ needs, and not vice versa.

Because processes of making things acted both as opportunities for individual economic gain, and as symbols of tradition or political legitimacy, making things to make a living was sometimes a way of responding to the institutions that had disrupted existing economies. But it would be an oversimplification to equate making things with subsistence, versus other forms of work as wage labour or engagement with a broader economic system that stretched beyond the Ile-a-la-Crosse region. In a 1976 interview with the Northern Saskatchewan Archives, Nap Johnson (whose perspectives I first discuss in Chapter 6) recalled opportunities in the 1920s in the fishing industry. Somewhat in contrast to the way that labour in the region existed and was characterized throughout the twentieth century and beyond, Nap noted that most of the work in fisheries went to Norwegian immigrants rather than people who already lived in the region:

³⁸ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, 164.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

I remember there was a lot of fish in these lakes...there was some white guys, mostly big fishermens; they used to come from Norway -- course Norway all fishermens. So they used to come here and hire guys...\$40 a month...Oh, oh that was a lot of money, then, you know. So the freighters up to 70 teams in one swing...they load these fish boxes, they used to pack them to 120 pounds of fish...they were big, you know, those frozen fish boxes. But the fish was so big, I remember I seen 17-pound jumbo whitefish in this lake.⁴¹

The presence of Norwegian immigrants, just like the presence of French and Scottish fur traders in previous generations, did not make their families “inauthentic” or “outsiders” — for instance, fiddle player Einar “Bunny” Pedersen from Buffalo Narrows, whose father was one such immigrant, is well-regarded across the west side for his ability to play music that resonates with northerners. But the prevalence of newcomers in the fisheries industry points to the beginnings of a shifting economic climate in the north, in which making things, whether to facilitate activities like fishing, or to sell directly, were becoming less directly relevant to subsistence, and instead began to facilitate economic opportunity through broader, wage-based economies.

Dorothy Dubrule recalled that her father “took really good care of his means of transportation, since that was the way we got to the trapline and got home from the trapline,” by sewing canvas and hide booties for each of his sled dogs to wear when the snow was crusty.⁴² Even thirty or so years after the influx of immigration that Nap Johnson described, many community members’ occupations remained relatively the same, as Valentine’s report and general CCF policies in the north had suggested. For many people, though, there remained a distinction or a divide between the economic possibilities that newcomer institutions identified, and the activities that community members actually engaged in. Dorothy Dubrule drew comparisons between the contexts in which her parents made things for their family, and the contexts in which people make things today. These comparisons illustrated histories of economic activities that, while sometimes concurrent, were also sometimes quite separate from each other. This disparity was especially the case for community members who increasingly lived permanently in town, as trapping opportunities became scarcer. Dorothy explained:

⁴¹ Johnson, interview, 1975.

⁴² Dorothy Dubrule, interview by Katya MacDonald, 27 November 2015.

There's a lot of women that were dressmakers, like many wedding dresses for the ones getting married. Most of the time when someone was getting married, there'd be one or two wedding dresses floating around town that the women would share the wedding dresses, so families, like cousins, sisters, whatever, they would share a wedding gown. But bridesmaids' dresses were practical, they would make the bridesmaids' dresses and then maybe wear it for Easter or Christmas or whatever. So a lot of the women made those. They were handy with their fingers and with their machines.⁴³

Hoping to clarify whether dressmaking was a money-making occupation as well as simply a feature of community relationships, I asked Dorothy whether it was a lucrative pursuit. She replied:

Yeah, there was two or three women that did it really well, so people paid them to make a dress for them for Christmas or whatever, or maybe it was that time of the year when you needed two or three new dresses, and you'd go out and buy your material and give it to them, and bang, there they are. I know two or three women that did that.⁴⁴

These cottage industries like dressmaking contributed to individuals' income by taking advantage of the increasing geographical proximity of community members (and their major life events) to each other as the town became a more permanent settlement. As Quiring has noted, DNS saw northerners' labour as consisting of specific occupations or jobs like fishing or trapping, and indeed expected that northerners were unsuited to other kinds of labour available in the north, like mining or forestry.⁴⁵ But when considering cottage industries like those in Dorothy's stories, it becomes clear that community members continued to need diverse means of surviving. Making things on a small scale not only supplemented incomes; it was also a process of circumventing provincial government assumptions of what work should look like, especially in a context where, as community members and DNS employees alike noted, few waged jobs existed.

Irene Gardiner, a near-contemporary of Dorothy's parents, reinforced this idea when she

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks*, xvi.

described the limited jobs that were available when she first entered the workforce, especially for women, and more particularly for those women who were also raising families with limited familial or financial support.⁴⁶ In the mid-1950s, wage-paying employers were scarce in the community, and in general, mostly employed men; it was also not clear how many positions were full-time. Valentine identified six employers: the co-op fish plant (employing six men and no women), the mission and hospital (employing ten men and thirty women), the training farm (employing ten men in summer and three in winter), the HBC store (employing five men and four women), the co-op store (employing two men and one woman), and DNS Resources (employing four men).⁴⁷ For nearly all community members, then, surviving in an increasingly cash-based economy still required self-sufficiency through producing items that were either marketable or immediate household necessities. I had briefly met Irene while undertaking oral history research towards my MA thesis, and was able to ask her a few questions about my thesis topic. Since then, however, I began to work on other projects, and did not stay in touch with Irene, in part because I had assumed based on our first conversation years ago that her perspectives would offer context rather than specific detail on my dissertation questions, particularly when I was working within a compressed time frame. This was clearly a short-sighted assumption, given that another interview, in which Irene spoke with GDI in 2001, suggests ways that intentions behind making things have shifted over the latter part of the twentieth century. The items that Irene recalled being made by family members when she was young were predominately the result of the skills required for daily life; the makers of the items did not intend for their objects to move outside of those contexts, in the ways that other items, like beadwork, knitting, or sewing found audiences outside of Ile-a-la-Crosse who were interested in paying for those items as consumer goods.⁴⁸ When Irene described her family's activities surrounding making things, she depicted them in the context of other family experiences, rather than as commercial activities:

Q: Was there any ah before a long time ago when you grandpa use to go were there any laws for hunting?

A: No nothing. we were just free, yes.

Q: They went anywhere hey?

A: Kill anything. Kill bucks to eat.

⁴⁶ Irene Gardiner, interview, 17 August 2001.

⁴⁷ Bone, "Community Profile of Ile-a-La-Crosse, SK."

⁴⁸ See for instance the personal experiences of Eliza Aubichon and Norma Malboeuf mentioned in this chapter.

Q: The house. the house you lived in over there...did he build it?

A: Yes, he built it himself.

Q: What was it made out of?

A: First it was a log house then he built one with plywood after. First we had a log house with an upstairs that's where: we always had one big family; everybody was there. She adopted a lot of kids that's why eh; I guess there was a lot of adoption in my family. Not adopt them but keep them here and there when there were orphans. She was good hearted.⁴⁹

In the context of family activities like food provision, child care, and assistance with community needs, making houses, in accordance with available materials and general building trends in the community, were processes that were intertwined with other everyday historical experiences: ones that were shaped by but not necessarily directly tied to commercial activities.

These activities formed a benchmark against which subsequent generations would compare their own experiences and observations, as exemplified, for instance, by Dorothy Dubrule's reminiscences. The construction of Irene's houses was not only a means of providing for family and community needs at the time that it was built; the process of making these dwellings was also integrated into later discussions of contemporary needs and even ethics, exemplified in one instance by Dorothy's observation that much more food, clothing, and other materials get wasted today than it did when she was growing up. Even though, unlike the cottage industries that Dorothy described, Irene's memories were not explicitly part of stories about making money, the activities offered context and complexity to DNS assumptions about the nature of work in the north. Working to make a living was not necessarily separable into discrete tasks, occupations, or processes of making. Nonetheless, the limited opportunities — particularly for some community members — for participating in broader economies became increasingly significant as opportunities for self-sufficiency declined in the latter half of the twentieth century. Local politician Max Morin's survey of economic opportunities in Ile-a-la-Crosse in the early 1970s found that in addition to trapping, the most common ways of making a living were berry-picking and fishing, and working at the hospital, HBC, and mission (with mainly women employed at the hospital and mainly men at the HBC and mission).⁵⁰ He also noted that usually, whole families went trapping, with male heads of families

⁴⁹ Irene Gardiner, interview, 17 August 2001.

⁵⁰ Morin, "History and Culture, Ile A La Crosse."

making the deals. In such circumstances, labour was not necessarily divided along strict gender lines; economic opportunity also depended on the configurations of individual families and their geographical locations. These features dictated economic circumstances, as well as processes of making things, and the financial viability of those activities.

The paradox remained that while making items was less necessary for immediate subsistence, it remained a means of surviving in a challenging economic climate. Valentine placed partial blame on community members themselves, stating: “Without question, the greatest problem facing Ile-a-la-Crosse is that there is no real economic base and little opportunity. There is some fishing, trapping, and logging, but these resources are not utilized to potential. A large percentage of the population exists on welfare.”⁵¹ But the memories of community members who were working at that time speak to decades of hard work and economic innovation that was required to survive at the time, suggesting that if available resources existed, there were barriers to local people’s involvement. This idea was reinforced in community members’ reminiscences of the peak years of the fur trade. Roy Simpson, HBC manager since 1959, recalled in an interview published in the 1976 community history book:

We had our trappers. We had a book which had the trapper’s name in, and the furs that we bought from him during the winter. We added it all up during the spring. The man who was a very good trapper, he brought in four to six thousand dollars worth of furs in a winter. On the strength of what he produced, we were prepared, in the fall to give credit in goods knowing that he would come back and give us all that he had and straighten up his bills.⁵²

In response to these changing conditions, community members sometimes sought the help of institutions or programs beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse, not only for direct aid, for instance through social welfare programs, but also for assistance with developing marketable skills or developing ways to convert existing skills into marketable creations. Rose Fleury from Duck Lake noted that the Metis Society of Saskatchewan sponsored a series of craft training programs; she had taken a drafting course while she was recovering from cancer,⁵³ and later learned home repair and helped to organize a large handicrafts program: “It was a handicraft, ceramics, sewing, and beading. It was an altogether

⁵¹ “Ile-a-La-Crosse, Saskatchewan - Statistical Outline,” 2.

⁵² Longpre, *Ile-a-La-Crosse 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial*, 59.

⁵³ Fleury, interview.

program. And we had a great big sale and display. And then Regina, at Regina...they took pictures of that. And it was a very extensive program.”⁵⁴ As other parts of this dissertation have noted, Rose’s connections and ability to participate in these larger organizations was the result of a certain amount of regional and economic privilege that, for most northerners, was not accessible until a decade or so later, when the MSS, and its later iteration, the Associated Metis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS), and some Ile-a-la-Crosse community members worked together on political actions. But the existence of these Metis political programs suggests a general awareness that there was a disconnect between individuals’ skills and the economic opportunities into which those skills could fit.

More informally, northerners also paid attention to trends and market demands when making their items, whether intended for subsistence or cash gain. Brumbach noted that the HBC store “sells knitting wool of the type used for siwashes.”⁵⁵ The cost for 4 oz of pure wool yarn is \$1.49.”⁵⁶ The trend for the sweaters had spread across the north; I had asked Dorothy Dubrule to follow up on a previous conversation we had had about making a living by making things, and she commented that her contemporaries around the time that Brumbach was working in Patuanak also sometimes knit items to sell: “And then there were others with wool, and knitting, knitting siwashes and socks and toques and mitts, and those were sold. It was a busy time.”⁵⁷ The market (in terms of financial gain, or simply local demand) for these items was therefore based on a knowledge economy as well, or at least depended on relationships that communicated about the knowledge required to produce things. When I spoke with Jim Durocher in 2010 about Ile-a-la-Crosse histories, he described knowledge as a process of making, noting that the ways that families transmitted knowledge intergenerationally also supported their relationships with each other. He explained:

I used to depend on my grandmother for example, if I didn’t know anything about something. I remember one time I asked her something, and she said you should ask the teacher, that’s what they’re there for. Oh, okay. Well there, for me to think about that moment now, was a change, you see. She felt that, well, she might not be able to answer these questions, but she was pushing it onto somebody else, you know. And

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Now more accurately known as Cowichan sweaters; on the west coast, the word “siwash,” from the trade language Chinook Jargon, is a pejorative term for an Indigenous person.

⁵⁶ Brumbach, “Hetty Jo Brumbach Fieldnotes.”

⁵⁷ Dubrule, interview, 27 November 2015.

so there went that communication, and that closeness, and family unity kind of thing you know, and it started to go.⁵⁸

In Jim's view, tradition was supported by knowledge transmission within families and among generations. For makers themselves, though, the motivations for their work were multifaceted. They wanted to ensure that their work was not a wasted effort, especially in the contexts that community members like Dorothy Dubrule have remembered with fondness, in which hard and constant work was necessary for survival; whether by making a coveted clothing item that would be appreciated by its recipient, or by selling an item to make a profit, makers who used commercial services like the local store to buy supplies for their work interacted with multiple forms of knowledge to achieve their desired outcomes.

Their work did not necessarily fit tidily within the channels for communicating tradition that Jim Durocher described, but neither did it always match the expectations that outside buyers held. Brumbach's and Jarvenpa's descriptions of items and makers show how northerners' tastes did not always fit with ethnographic or museological tastes for authenticity. Jarvenpa wrote of one encounter with a Patuanak craftswoman, whose work he expected to purchase:

[He] called for his mother who quickly appeared with two beaded vests of commercial hide, and a 'brief case'...also of commercial hide. On all items the beadwork was very sparingly applied and done with translucent, iridescent type beads. This was a somewhat embarrassing situation as we did not care for the beadwork or the commercial hide.⁵⁹

Rather than consider the implications for interpreting processes of making things that this situation had highlighted, Jarvenpa extricated himself from the encounter by telling the maker and her son that he had very little money left in his budget. Makers, then, navigated among the expectations of local and broader markets, even when local people and outside buyers alike did not necessarily recognize the overlapping economic and social contexts in which the work was produced.

Thus, although community members in mid-twentieth-century Ile-a-la-Crosse engaged with diverse processes of making things, only some items became marketable beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse.

⁵⁸ Durocher, interview, 6 October 2010.

⁵⁹ Jarvenpa, "Robert W. Jarvenpa Fieldnotes."

Dorothy had described dressmaking as one activity that allowed some local women to supplement their incomes, but she also commented on her family's processes of making things to make a living when she was growing up. Aside from clothing and household items, Dorothy's parents also worked together to make canvas toboggans, "la carriol" in Michif:

I think my dad may have made them. But for sure, my mother would have gotten canvas and sewed the canvas, so the canvas sides would be up, so they'd run the string or whatever right around the sled, and then Mom made the canvas so that they could store things. You never see that now, you know, you don't see that. There might be one or two people that make boats in town, but I never see them make the canvas toboggans.⁶⁰

Although the sleds represented local history and tradition to Dorothy, she noted that they had not received much attention despite those associations. Furthermore, other processes of making things existed largely as occupations or practical activities, with fewer explicit additional meanings attached. Dorothy explained that her father was a carpenter; "he did a lot of houses for people, a lot of renovations. But he also did homes, he built homes for people. And every once in a while he'd make furniture, like a table or chairs or a bench. I know the beds, the frame would be of wood."⁶¹ Following her description of carpentry, our conversation lost momentum for a moment, so I replied, in affirmation of what Dorothy had just told me, "Lots of resourcefulness, it sounds like." Dorothy agreed,

Oh for sure. Hardly anything was thrown out. If they saw a use for it, they put it aside, and sure enough, something would be used. Things were hard to get. Lumber — sometimes you had to plane down a tree and do something with it. Old lumber was stored for somebody's porch or shed or whatever — you didn't take it to the dump like we do now.⁶²

Considering the above exchange with Dorothy, although my response was a leading one, it also reflects the context of the conversation. My response to Dorothy was an effort to affirm the stories

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

that she was telling and the direction that the conversation took. My intention in speaking with community members was to allow their interests to drive the conversation, even though the conversations were initiated and framed, at least initially, to benefit my dissertation topic. Affirming and rephrasing Dorothy's story was my effort to keep the conversation moving, without interrupting Dorothy's ideas. I may not have been wholly successful at this, because my response to her was itself an interpretation of what she had said, but conversely, it provided an opportunity for her to expand on the ways that community members interacted with processes of making things in their families and communities.

Because processes of making things occupied so many facets of individuals' and communities' lives in the time periods that they discussed, Dorothy was able to continue the conversation in terms of resourcefulness rather than specific references to tradition, without losing the significance of either of those themes. After reflecting on the resourcefulness that her father used when making children's toys or in conserving materials, she described the work that was required to construct a new home:

I remember watching my dad make houses. And some of them were our own homes. But he would go to the bush and get the logs, and he'd drag the logs into town, I don't know how because we didn't have vehicles, so I'm thinking all by hand, and then he'd stack them and leave them for a little while...and he would strip them, you know, take the bark off. I remember helping him do that. And then he would level off the knotty stuff, like smooth it out, and then he'd take the more straight ones and make a cabin with logs. But all of it was hauled in. Sometimes it took him the whole summer to do that. They needed to do their own thing. They didn't order their logs in from BC, that's for sure. They used the resources right around them.⁶³

For Dorothy's father, carpentry was not necessarily a marketable skill beyond the community, and it was not the most immediate activity that came to mind when I asked about histories of making things in the community. The ability to make things to market beyond the community was therefore not solely based on skill; the marketability of items also relied on the ways that the objects were perceived by buyers.

Even though most of the lucrative employment opportunities in Ile-a-la-Crosse were mainly

⁶³ Ibid.

available to men, especially after the restructuring of economic relationships in the 1950s, most of the opportunities to sell handmade items outside of the community were available to women. In one of my conversations with Dorothy, I asked directly about whether people had been able to make a living by selling items that they made, since the bulk of our previous conversations had been focused on traditional lifestyles that Dorothy defined and described. Immediately Dorothy recalled one woman, Alice Aubichon who had become renowned for her beadwork, or, as Dorothy noted, “they [buyers] call it artwork.” Dorothy described the scope of Alice’s success:

Her beadwork is I think in Regina, in the legislative building, but also in Winnipeg in one of the museums in Winnipeg. And these are, I don’t know what she made, if it was mitts, a coat, or moccasins or mukluks — something, but the artwork is made by her, and Alice was one of the ladies of our community who worked many, many years making hundreds of moccasins and mukluks and gloves and jackets and mitts and I don’t know what else, and sold them throughout Canada probably. That was her money-maker, that’s how she survived, and fended for her family. She used her craft.⁶⁴

The widespread appeal of Alice’s work was not only a mark of her skill; it also had direct economic impacts for her family, as Dorothy observed. While the economic benefit was perhaps the most immediate concern for Alice, Dorothy also reflected on the fact that the items were marketable and popular “because they were all handcrafted. They didn’t run through assembly lines. She took it from one at the beginning right to the end.”⁶⁵ Although Alice Aubichon found widespread success in her work through the uniqueness that buyers valued, she was not the only one to do so; the craft co-op in Ile-a-la-Crosse allowed a group of women to take advantage of the enthusiasm of buyers from beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Today, by contrast, while some people continue to make moccasins and other beaded leather items, most are not able to do so as a lucrative pursuit.⁶⁶ Mary Morin, Dorothy noted, is one exception, as her work is well known and she often has a queue of orders awaiting her. In general, though, what made Alice Aubichon’s and the craft co-op’s work popular was that it represented a

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

marketable idea of tradition or exoticism⁶⁷ that buyers who were not personally familiar with the makers could still latch onto. Even though other activities, like Dorothy's father's self-sufficiency through carpentry, were considered traditional by community members, that work did not have the same broad appeal or market because it was not always visibly or tangibly connected to buyers' expectations of what an item from an Indigenous community should look like. Markets and economies may have overlapped, therefore, but tastes and the lucrativeness of making things did not.

Within Ile-a-la-Crosse Robert Longpre's 1976 community history described the handicraft co-op as a means of maintaining tradition:

Down a flight of stairs, in the basement of the convent, a group of elderly women are busy with scissors and needles. Moosehide is cut to form the traditional clothing and footwear of long-buried ancestors. Beads sparkle on the fawn-coloured leather in a rainbow of colour. Designs and patterns tell tales and legends that have today lost most of their words. Two of the women guide younger apprentices through the traditional arts of their special handicrafts. Mary Ann Kyplain and Margaret Caisse patiently teach and create. Each day passes and their work travels to distant parts bringing a special fame to Ile-a-la-Crosse. Welcome to the handicraft shop of the Ile-a-la-Crosse Women's Cooperative.⁶⁸

The 1976 community history book took a melancholy tone when describing the work that relied on historical or traditional skills: "The pungent odour [of tanned hide] reminding the wearer of the days when all lived by the hand of nature...But, the body grows weak and the hands begin to ache at these tasks. Will anyone follow in their tradition?"⁶⁹ Community members today notice similar patterns, but have described it to me in more practical terms than Longpre; Eliza, Dorothy, and other community members have remarked to me that although there are some younger people interested in learning these skills, they are by necessity hobbies rather than ways of making a living. But as

⁶⁷ Emma Tarlo has discussed in the context of colonialism in India that clothing can symbolize savagery, yet to mimic Western clothing is insufficient or even absurd in the eyes of the colonizer. Yet in other settings, made goods associated with Indigenous people and colonizers' attitudes towards them became symbols of fashion status among wealthy Canadians. See Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁶⁸ Longpre, *Ile-a-La-Crosse 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial*, 72.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Eliza has noted, when she was involved with the craft co-op, her primary motivation was not maintaining tradition, but rather making a living to support her family.

Other differences in interpretations among community members have been maintained as skills in making things have been maintained as well. Some of these practical skills have remained gendered — Eliza noted that it was mainly girls and women who took sewing and beading classes that she and local educator Nora Corrigan taught — and therefore so have their economic outcomes. While during the years that the craft co-op was operating, women’s work had a broad market beyond the community, when that market contracted, there were fewer opportunities to continue the necessary skills. By contrast, the Ile-a-la-Crosse Men’s Cooperative that operated at the same time to assist with making cabinets, shelves, and other household fixtures along with snowshoes and skiffs, supported at least some skills that remain broadly applicable today.

In the public and individual conversations I have had with school elder Tony Laliberte, he has often cited his carpentry abilities with helping him to not only build and maintain his house, but also to begin to recover from the anger and unhealthy habits that were a result of his experience in residential school. Today several carpentry businesses operate in Ile-a-la-Crosse, which is currently undergoing somewhat of a housing boom. But for those who make leather and beaded items, they continue to function mainly within hobby or cottage occupations that cannot offer full-time income for makers, not only because of an increasingly limited market, but also because of the increasing difficulty of securing supplies. Norma Malboeuf orders most of her materials online from a supplier in Edmonton, even though her husband George traps, and Eliza Aubichon uses suppliers in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, which she or a family member has to visit in person. After factoring in time and materials costs, Norma noted, the \$350 that she charges for a pair of mittens does not turn a profit.⁷⁰ The challenges of both supply and demand have meant that makers of these items have therefore experienced much more fluctuation in the last forty years in terms of the economic viability of their crafts.

Historian Joan Sangster has commented that in women’s history it is important to draw on women’s experiences without being essentialist or deterministic.⁷¹ Particularly when considering these histories within broader discussions of tradition, a single narrative should not automatically speak for all experiences. This reminds us to consider the dialogue among perspectives, rather than seeking out a singular authority. Those who made other items in Ile-a-la-Crosse besides beaded or

⁷⁰ Malboeuf, interview.

⁷¹ Sangster, “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” 142.

leatherwork garments had different economic experiences, in part because their activities engaged with ideas of tradition in different ways. Since some makers began to market their work consciously to outside buyers, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, there has been a tension between wanting to attract a market to Ile-a-la-Crosse, rather than sending work to markets that have existed elsewhere. In 1975, Nap Johnson advocated for a growth in the tourism market in the north:

Now we got all this north country worth a lot of money to the tourists, they want to come! They want to drink that good, clean water, hey? They always have a cup beside them when I got them in the boat fishing; when we go moose hunting in a canoe they always have a cup. 'Oh, that's good! I wish we had this water in the south!' It's all that, and good fish, water is not polluted; lot of moose, lot of caribous, bears...oh boy, they just enjoy that; they would give anything for that kind of life, they want to come. I got about 600 names every two weeks, tourists; I couldn't find place for them because I didn't get not enough equipment, hey? Lot of these people in the north, they know; they live here. They know how they can give these guys good service. But just because not enough money...⁷²

But since then, the west side of the province has not experienced the influx of tourists that other parts of northern Saskatchewan have experienced, especially around Prince Albert National Park and the Churchill River around La Ronge and Stanley Mission. Instead, there is a growing local market for iterations of tradition, within occupations that have been consistent opportunities for employment in Ile-a-la-Crosse for most of the twentieth century.

In particular, cooking and catering were first formal jobs within newcomer institutions: the hospital, mission, and fur trade posts. But as outside demand for handmade items from Ile-a-la-Crosse has diminished, and community members have not experienced the financial benefits of an influx of tourists that Nap Johnson hoped for, making traditional foods has become an activity that some local people are willing to pay for. In the course of speaking with community members about various projects, people have consistently recommended Tanis Laliberte as someone I should speak with, citing her extensive knowledge of activities that they regard as traditional. Indeed, I got to know Tanis primarily in her role as a bannock-making instructor, both with groups of children and youth, and with me and a fellow PhD student friend. Tanis explained to me that in the last couple of

⁷² Johnson, interview, 1975.

years, she has had to consciously scale back her catering and instructional work, because the demand was becoming too strenuous for her. As an example, she told me about the work she had done for the grand opening of the new hospital in Ile-a-la-Crosse a few years earlier. She had cooked for 800 people, using entirely bush food that she and her husband Marcel had caught, and with only two other people hired to assist her. For this work she was paid \$2,500, which she felt was a barely appropriate amount considering the amount of work involved.⁷³ Tanis' catering experiences speak to a demand for traditional foods, and the skills required to procure and prepare them, suggesting that economic opportunity through making things is increasingly located in Ile-a-la-Crosse and not with outside buyers or consumers: tradition has become marketable at home.

Making things in Ile-a-la-Crosse illuminates the relationships between economic ability and ideas of tradition, especially as these relationships changed over the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond. While ethnographic description – either through scholarly institutions, or more casually through the residential school curriculum – created expectations of static authenticity among those who studied communities like Ile-a-la-Crosse, those same expectations also formed the basis of a market for community members' handmade work that met buyers' wants. Taking advantage of those expectations was not a sign of assimilation or a loss of local knowledge; rather, selling work to outside buyers was a way to work within colonizing institutions to address local, family, or individual needs.

Furthermore, by making things at home, for instance in cottage industries, community members circumvented, critiqued, and complicated DNS understandings of labour and economies in the north. Making things to use and sell locally did not fit within the specific, closely-defined occupations that DNS had identified, but formed an important part of household economies, especially in families where there was no one (generally a man) to participate in the fishery, hunting, or trapping industries that DNS assumed were best suited to northern Indigenous people's abilities. But as markets for handmade items declined, tradition itself became marketable idea, as exemplified by historical skills. The idea of tradition had been shaped by institutions and by community members, but it resonated most strongly with those who used tradition to communicate ideas about the past. In other words, the idea of authenticity created a market, while the idea of tradition motivated community members to keep working at these skills, even once the market for them had changed or diminished.

⁷³ Tanis Laliberte, conversation with Katya MacDonald, June 2014.

Chapter 8: Institutions and Making Things in Sliammon

Returning to the ceremony held at Sliammon in 2014 to repatriate the remains of ancestors that had been housed at Simon Fraser University for archaeological study, community members spoke about the significance not only of objects in relation to important community moments. In their public remarks, they also commented on the relationships between their tangible, handmade things (and people) and the newcomer institutions that had become a part of their community particularly in the last 150 years. Chief Clint Williams,¹ for instance, used his own official capacity to highlight the institutional involvements that young people in the community would have: “No matter how modern we get, we still have to acknowledge and be proud of where we come from.”² A group of Sliammon youth had been involved in the project to bring the remains home to the community, and Chief Williams explained that some of the ways that they could continue to remain involved with their culture and histories was to maintain relationships with historical objects and knowledge.

These histories of relationships among people, objects, knowledge, and institutions were not histories of wholesale accommodation – becoming “modern” – nor rejections of newcomer institutions. Within Sliammon community members’ experiences with processes of making things within newcomer institutions, the role of community members’ own needs has been central. As the precise nature of involvement of newcomer institutions shifted over the course of the twentieth century, the institutions have been subject to reinterpretation. The Western art market, museums, and ethnographic study created broad expectations for what tradition and authenticity in the twentieth century should look like for Indigenous peoples, especially on the west coast. Makers of objects in Sliammon sometimes complicated and sometimes embraced these definitions to highlight their resilience and autonomy within colonizing institutions. Processes of making things within these institutions therefore also contribute to histories of colonialism in Sliammon and for Sliammon people.

On the northwest coast of North America, some of the first newcomer involvements with Indigenous people beyond trade relationships was in the realm of ethnography. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnographers paid particular attention to carving and

¹ Since the implementation of the Tla’amin treaty in 2016, the leader of the community is now known as Hegus (meaning “leader”) rather than as chief, since the latter was a term and a concept imposed by the *Indian Act*.

² *Sliammon Repatriation Ceremony*. 2:20.

other decorative work undertaken in some Indigenous communities,³ but it was not until the 1950s and beyond that anthropologists, notably Wilson Duff of the University of British Columbia, began to make concerted efforts to define this work as art that should be taken seriously in larger collectors' and commercial markets. The process of defining this work as art included, at least to some extent, creating expectations for what authenticity should look like in this context. When art met those definitions, it was marketable, a fact that Indigenous carvers took advantage of. In Sliammon, some makers intentionally shaped their work to meet outside expectations of authenticity to facilitate making a profit. Beyond carvers themselves, though, narratives of authenticity resonated with many community members, because they demonstrated resilience and continuity in a time when Indigenous people's interests were often ignored or misunderstood. By the 1980s, the vocabulary of tradition and authenticity was well ensconced in community discussions, and led to community initiatives in Sliammon like repatriation of historical objects and human remains.

One of the most lasting threats to Indigenous people's autonomy and wellbeing was, of course, the residential school system, whose effects had motivated much of community members' discussions of the need to maintain and reclaim aspects of tradition. Particularly because some residential schools, including ones that Sliammon people attended, created their own initiatives to define Indigenous tradition and abilities, to define authenticity oneself was to resist the efforts of residential school systems. Paradoxically, though, some of the skills that community members learned while at residential school would later help community members to define their careers as well-reputed makers who were connected to notions of tradition. Makers and community organizers were then able to draw on these skills to develop community programs in the 1970s and 1980s that responded to the impacts of residential schools by teaching skills like carving and basket-making to connect participants with earlier generations' lifestyles.

Despite these responses to colonizing institutions, the ability to make things for leisure or personal interest was a relatively recent development in Sliammon. For much of the twentieth century, particularly in the earlier half, despite their proximity to the mill town of Powell River, Sliammon people were excluded from the wage economy or experienced barriers to accessing it, at the same time that the economy driven by the mill and other commercial entities made access to the

³ From what is now the Canadian Museum of History, for instance, ethnographers during this time period who visited and sought to document coastal Indigenous communities included Diamond Jenness, Harlan Ingersoll Smith, and Marius Barbeau. Their work was based in part on person-to-person encounters with Indigenous informants, but the relationship that gave their work its greatest visibility was its affiliation with the institution, based as it was on western paradigms of research and authority.

wage economy necessary for survival. For Sliammon people on the geographical and economic outskirts of these environments, making objects that appealed to Powell River tastes offered a way to acquire necessities, and to form some personal relationships between the two communities. Most often, women's basket work found interested takers in Powell River, which facilitated Sliammon household work, but also sometimes offered inroads for these women's husbands or children to make connections with work opportunities in Powell River. At other times, making traditional items facilitated and supported Sliammon people's economic ability, for instance by creating baskets for clam digging and selling. From around the 1960 onwards, although employment levels remained disparate in part due to ongoing discriminatory hiring practices, Sliammon people began to find more employment opportunities, which on one hand diminished the direct practical need for making things. On the other hand, though, better access to the wage economy allowed for tradition itself to become a commodity, so that those who were skilled makers could also become teachers within the wage economy, in a process that bridged newcomer and local institutions both past and present.

Art and Museums

Establishing west coast Indigenous made things as art or collectible items was a process that took place largely outside of Indigenous communities, spearheaded by anthropologists, museums, and collectors who either saw appeal in the exoticism of the items, or acted out of a desire, motivated by "vanishing Indian" tropes, to acquire or save items before their makers disappeared forever. These actions and conversations took place in the public eye and did not necessarily reflect the nuances of Indigenous makers' own engagements with objects and processes of making in their communities. Tracing items, through the perspectives of community members themselves, through the newcomer institutions and ideas that they entered, shows that these institutions at times disrupted community members' existing relationships with the objects that they made, but at other times represented tools for maintaining the relationships that community members saw as important for their community needs, particularly for young people. When Indigenous items became museum pieces or artistic works, first in the eyes of anthropologists and collectors and then in the eyes of community members seeking to reclaim the meanings of those objects, they referred not only to the histories of those objects, but also to their perceived value in the future.

An anthropologist at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (MOA) for several decades, Bill McLennan straddled the gap between museums' histories of collecting — at

times without the consent of Indigenous communities — and their growing push towards including makers’ and communities’ contexts for the objects in MOA’s collection. In 1992, he spoke with Gilbert Joe of Sechelt, a community where many people from Sliammon have family connections, who reflected on one of the first relationships between Indigenous objects and newcomer institutions: “When Sechelt allowed itself to be confirmed Roman Catholic, the Bishop ordered everyone to gather all their regalia, all their arts and crafts including their artifacts, and pile them all in the middle of the reserve and burned the whole thing.”⁴ Gilbert Joe’s analysis of his community’s conversion to Roman Catholicism is not one that has been universally shared by Indigenous people on the west coast, but it nevertheless points to a relationship between Indigenous objects and newcomer institutions that has at times been antagonistic. It is this antagonism that has underpinned the bulk of scholarly analysis of the relationships among Indigenous people, made goods, and institutions.⁵

Antagonism or binaries have not been the only types of relationships in which Indigenous handmade things have existed, particularly in places like Sliammon where, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have existed in close proximity to each other, and whose relationships have therefore been individual and interpersonal as well as institutional or official. In a study of “Modern native [sic] reaction to traditional and current art forms in the Prince Rupert area of the Pacific Northwest Coast,” art teacher and ethnographer Judith A. Stenn argued in 1985 that since the 1880s, Indigenous art production had relied on a commercial market.⁶ She did not expand this statement, however, to note that the commercial market had in fact created a particular definition of art that matched Western collectors’ expectations of aesthetic value and collectability. Instead, she commented that from the 1960s

⁴ Bill McLennan, n.d., Bill McLennan fonds 67-1, Salish 4, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

⁵ Robin Fisher’s *Contact and Conflict* constructed the “enrichment thesis,” which argued that the quality and complexity of Indigenous people’s material goods increased with the introduction of European tools, thereby helping to set them up for greater material and social wealth. While, as this chapter discusses, Indigenous people’s experiences with newcomer institutions was neither wholly destructive nor wholly beneficial, Fisher’s thesis largely ignores the harmful impacts of Europeans’ relationships with Indigenous peoples. Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977). Even iconic scholarship that has sought to add nuance to ideas of antagonism has still tended to focus on binary categories of “Native-newcomer” relationships; Richard White’s *The Middle Ground* and J.R. Miller’s *Compact, Contract, Covenant* fit this description, for instance. See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada*. Discussions of communities and institutions therefore still benefit from historical analysis that seeks out the paradoxes of such relationships, in an effort to highlight Indigenous people’s own shifting perspectives and experiences.

⁶ Judith A. Stenn, “Modern Native Reaction to Traditional and Current Art Forms in the Prince Rupert Area of the Pacific Northwest Coast,” 1985, 4–5, CMC Ethnology Archives B384 f2, Canadian Museum of History.

onward, Indigenous west coast art had experienced a “renaissance.”⁷ This term implies that the commercial art market was somehow inauthentic to Indigenous people’s engagements with handmade items, particularly since, in Stenn’s analysis, it is not clear who is defining what was being reborn in that renaissance, or who was defining that authenticity. It is also significant that Stenn’s study focused on the Prince Rupert region: a region that had become a hotbed for Indigenous made goods in a style that received a considerable amount of non-Indigenous attention. Sliammon, being a small First Nation and one where, as I discuss in more depth later in this chapter, not all community members have considered iconic works of art to be part of the community’s history, has never been the subject of such outside interest or critique. Exploring Sliammon community members’ relationships with handmade goods therefore helps to show where and how definitions of authenticity can originate, and adds nuance to existing narratives of Indigenous people’s efforts to maintain authenticity in individual communities, in ways that have changed over time according to changes in labour, economic, and educational conditions.

Around the same time that some priests, as Gilbert Joe described, advocated for the destruction of Indigenous handmade items, ethnographers also sought to document those same objects. In 1905, a team working with ethnographer Harlan Smith photographed in Comox (a community adjacent to Homalco, with close family and linguistic connections to Sliammon) what he noted was the last totem pole in the village.⁸ The underlying narrative of this photo was a narrative of disappearance or decline: a narrative supported by a commercial desire for handmade goods, even at the same time that the commercial market supported, at least in part, the fact that Indigenous people continued to make those items after all. In the 1950s and 60s when anthropologist Wilson Duff visited west coast Indigenous communities known for their carving, he measured changing making in terms of anthropological “eras:” when recording the number of new poles in each community that he visited, he counted the number constructed since the anthropologist Marius Barbeau visited in the 1930s.⁹

Since both men worked, at least in part, on the mandate of museums, their goals included collection and preservation of specific items, a curatorial process that required a definition of what was most worthy of protection. Duff in particular delved deeply into philosophical and practical

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ M. Pickford, *Coast Salish Village of Comox: Last Totem Pole in the Village*, photograph, 1905, Bill McLennan fonds 67-1, Salish 4, collection GAA NA 1141-7, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

⁹ Wilson Duff, “Site Visits: Kitwanga 3-7,” n.d., Wilson Duff fonds box 3, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

definitions of which types of Indigenous objects should be considered art: “A work can embody qualities of art (Whale housefront) but not be a work of art, because it does not bring it all together into a new gestalt, a new iconography, an overall beauty...”¹⁰ These were definitions that he hoped carvers and other community members would adopt for themselves, as he was dismayed that the art world did not value these styles sufficiently.¹¹ On one hand, Duff’s work, along with that of a group of west coast carvers and other academics, did bring particular forms of west coast Indigenous carving to the world stage, On the other hand, somewhat controversially even in Duff’s own mind,¹² the work formed the basis for MOA’s collections, a process that involved removing poles and other carvings from their original physical and philosophical contexts and placing them in the atemporal setting of a museum. Because of the public nature of made items that Duff dealt with, his work shaped the climate in which Sliammon makers have operated since then, even though he did not ever work in that region. When made items moved into the larger public eye and became objects of commercial demand, the idea of authenticity became a question to be answered by a much broader scope of people. Sliammon, as a place that outside observers did not consider to be a place of iconic craftwork, nevertheless found it necessary to respond to those narratives, by asserting local histories of making things that sometimes sought to add nuance to existing definitions, and at other times employed those definitions to reinforce their place and viability in the region.

Considering Sliammon’s role in these narratives reveals a depiction of handmade goods that was more complex than the paradox between disappearance and demand. An article in the *Powell*

¹⁰ Wilson Duff, “Individual Styles in Northwest Coast Art,” n.d., Wilson Duff fonds, 46-20, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

¹¹ Duff, “Site Visits: Kitsquala 3-5.”

¹² Although on one hand, Duff’s scholarship was rooted in the ethnographic paradigms of his era, his fieldnotes, housed at MOA, also contained his deeply conflicted thoughts on the ethics and morality of removing totem poles from their physical, cultural, and spiritual contexts: contexts that he identified with so closely that he began to see himself as a part of those spiritual histories. The anguish that he felt at violating those histories was at least a partial precursor to his suicide. Duff’s relationships with objects reinforced the arguments that Indigenous scholars and community members have made about research relationships: that partnerships can have mutual benefit, but also carry real risk, even when scholars have good intentions, as Cree scholar Winona Wheeler and Tla’amin scholar Michelle Washington have both argued for their respective local contexts. See Wheeler, “Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories”; Washington, “Bringing Traditional Teachings to Leadership.” Following Duff’s death, a group of his friends composed and eventually staged a performance of an opera about his life. Then, in 2012, lawyer Leslie Hall Pinder published a novel, *Bring Me One of Everything*, based on her own experience of learning about Duff’s life to prepare for the opera. Pinder’s writing, though ostensibly a fictionalized account, contains direct excerpts (though they are not explained as such) from Duff’s fieldnotes and is based on a series of real-life characters who were involved with Duff’s work and life; Pinder even invents words in the Halqemeylem language and attributes them to Indigenous characters, and describes deeply private winter dance ceremonies. In this context, Duff’s spiritual encounters became tangible commodities via Pinder’s book: an indication that processes of making things have not always been restricted to categories of tangible or intangible things. The institutions with which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike have interacted have helped to reinforce these institutions as formative – for better or for worse. See Leslie Hall Pinder, *Bring Me One of Everything* (Grey Swan Press, 2012).

River News argued in 1958 that there were “no true totem Indians in Vancouver or the B.C. interior. They are confined mainly to the Alert Bay area, along the Skeena River and in the Queen Charlotte Islands.”¹³ In fact, in that same year, the newspaper ran an ad for the Bank of Montreal that featured “Twentieth Century Totems: symbols of British Columbia’s century of progress,” with a “totem pole” featuring an airplane, a man with a chainsaw, and a man with a military helmet and rocket, ensconced on a stone base with “Bank of Montreal” carved on it.¹⁴ Considered together, the article and the ad undermined Sliammon’s presence in the region, even at the same time that community members from both Sliammon and Powell River were interacting with local Indigenous handmade items. Even as markets for items, both close to home and further afield, created demand for Indigenous people’s craftsmanship, commercial markets also reinforced narratives of Indigenous people’s irrelevance.

Sliammon community members’ histories of interacting with their handmade items in the contexts of art and museum interests indicate that they were aware of these paradoxes and complexities, and put them to work for their own benefit. At times, the ability to do so was based on the educational or social privilege of an individual maker; Judith Stenn’s research reveals a methodological question that she did not consider, but that can shape the ways that makers have communicated their perspectives. Commenting on her interview with west coast carver Dempsey Bob, who since the interview in the 1980s has gone on to carve items for display in the Vancouver airport, Stenn stated: “Dempsey is the most articulate person I have met [in Prince Rupert], and probably the one with the widest and most comprehensive view of the Indian situation and its relationship to North America and the world as things now stand in the 80s.”¹⁵ Particularly given Dempsey Bob’s continued career success, it is worth considering whether those whom outside observers deem particularly “articulate” are better placed to market their items as art, particularly in a commercial climate in which art, rather than practical objects (such as the cedar baskets historically popular as handmade items from Sliammon), have been the most lucrative for their makers. At the same time, though, makers in Sliammon have raised similar concerns in their own community to those that Duff did when he described Haida art, specifically, as a point of B.C. pride, given the “near-tragedy of its close brush with extinction.”¹⁶ This apparent fragility of tradition in the face of

¹³ “Totem Indians Confined Mainly in Alert Bay Area,” *Powell River News*, October 1958, Newspaper articles 1874-2012, Powell River Museum and Archives.

¹⁴ “Powell River News Centennial Edition,” *Powell River News*, 1958, 14, Powell River Museum and Archives.

¹⁵ Judith A. Stenn, “Judith A. Stenn Field Notes,” n.d., Ethnology Archives B369, f7, Canadian Museum of History.

¹⁶ Wilson Duff, “Sense and Nonsense on Haida Pipes,” n.d., Wilson Duff fonds, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

newcomer institutions has been a concern in Sliammon as well, and in such contexts, salvage approaches to tangible things have resonated for community members, for instance in the TUS interviews discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, in which processes of making things were directly tied to negotiations about land base and a treaty.

As Duff's and Stenn's respective work suggests, ethnographers were helping to ensconce public ideas about authenticity at the same time that community members were embracing those ideas of authenticity to communicate permanency and resilience. Paradoxically, though, some academics also depicted as inauthentic the precise activities that community members mobilized to achieve success or recognition on a broad scale. In a 1980 study on Salish weaving, nearly concurrent with Stenn's work, Paula Gustafson recounted a conversation she had had with a Squamish blanket weaver, Mrs. Johnnie. After providing a detailed description of the ways that Mrs. Johnnie's weaving was inauthentic (because, Gustafson argued, the design was too generic to have originated locally), Gustafson gave an "anecdote [that] puts the photos in their proper perspective. When Mrs. Johnnie was asked by her nephew Domenic Charlie what such a blanket meant to her, she replied, 'Oh, about a twenty-dollar bill.'"¹⁷ The implication — in a study housed in the Sliammon Treaty Society's collection that sought to define Sliammon histories and cultural characteristics — was that making things for economic gain was the most inauthentic pursuit of all.

By contrast, economic initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s helped to create markets for Indigenous work. Alongside public interest in "getting back to nature" (an idea with which Indigenous people were closely associated), a public interest in seeking symbols of larger Canadian identity, and new government spending for the arts, Indigenous makers had more resources at hand to market their work.¹⁸ For some community members in Sliammon, putting their handmade work into the commercial market was precisely what allowed them to define tradition in the public eye: activities that took place concurrently with Stenn's and Gustafson's assertions about authenticity. Community makers' goals were not dissimilar to these academics', but their processes could not have been more separate. Sliammon carver Jackie Timothy, who now makes a living as an artist in Vancouver, built his early career success on relationships with commercial entities. In 1986, he was hired to restore two 1920s totem poles owned by MacMillan Bloedel, the company that ran the Powell River pulp mill. The poles had been made by Capilano band member Joe Mathias and had either been sold or given to the company, but had begun to disintegrate once the mill guest house

¹⁷ Paula Gustafson, *Salish Weaving* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980).

¹⁸ Stenn, "Modern Native Reaction to Traditional and Current Art Forms in the Prince Rupert Area of the Pacific Northwest Coast."

that they had stood in front of was no longer in use.¹⁹ In the context of narratives of erasure or disappearance of Indigenous peoples, the mill's acquisition of totem poles both ignored the presence of Sliammon nearby, and reinforced the town's and mill's unofficial "brand" as an emblem of progress in a remote or exotic locale.

For Jackie Timothy, by contrast, the poles came to mark his visibility as a talented carver, regardless of the mill's motivations in restoring the totem poles. A few years later, Jackie Timothy was engaged in a process of intentionally expanding his reputation. In the early 1990s, he and his family visited Knott's Berry Farm in California on holiday, where he noticed that the attractions featured art from midwestern American Indigenous cultures, but had no representation from Coast Salish territories. He decided to leave a portfolio with the amusement park, and a few months later they contacted him to arrange a contract to carve a piece for display in the park.²⁰ Whereas Jackie Timothy's work with the mill totem poles as part of a longer history and narrative driven largely by the mill, the Knott's Berry Farm piece was a way to shape a particular narrative in the public eye, well outside the community or region where the work originated. In Sliammon in the 1980s and 1990s, local concerns about young people's access to traditions, individuals' economic needs, and the perceived usefulness of ethnographic depictions of authenticity for addressing those concerns all converged. As a result, Sliammon makers were able to turn narratives of exoticism or authenticity for their own or their community's benefit.

As demonstrated, for instance, by Paula Gustafson's work on Salish weaving that was published around the same time that artists like Jackie Timothy were employing narratives of authenticity for their own interests, discussions of Indigenous people's made goods often expected authenticity to be static. Gustafson argues in one example that ethnographies and objects produced in the early nineteenth century were "relatively free from the overt white influence that would come later."²¹ Focusing on the local and temporal specifics of twentieth-century Sliammon helps to complicate linear depictions of progress or of diminishing tradition. The making and implications of objects, rather, are historical and interpretive processes, both creating and responding to narratives about the past.

At first glance, some community members' narratives have paralleled the same themes of culture loss that Gustafson, among others, have put forth, often concurrently with community members' own increasingly public engagements with handmade items. In 1986, Sliammon's cultural

¹⁹ "Jackie Timothy Restores Old Totem Poles," *Powell River News*, 7 July 1986, A5.

²⁰ "Jackie Timothy Takes Totem, Canoe to Knott's Berry Farm," *Powell River News*, 20 May 1992, 1.

²¹ Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*.

education coordinator visited a powwow in Vancouver, and found it a striking experience, which she reported on in Sliammon's community newsletter *Neh' Motl*: "I always thought that we were a cultural people, but watching these people made me realize how far behind and how much we have lost over the years. It made me realize that we have to try much harder to make sure that whatever culture we have left is preserved."²² For her, the engagement with historical practices was more significant than their precise authenticity (powwows being originally Plains Indigenous events, which have since become quite pan-Indigenous). In this instance, tradition was a value or system of values, rather than a precise iteration of specific items or practices:²³ somewhat in contrast to other community members like Jackie Timothy who were making objects at the same time, underpinned by a quest for establishing reputations for themselves or Sliammon as sites of authentic Coast Salish work.

Some makers in Sliammon also concluded that selling their work was at odds with their moral, ethical, and spiritual understandings of what it meant to be a Tla'amin person. While many of the community members I spoke with cited the needs or interests of their community as a broad entity, to make individualized or diverging histories as explicit as possible, given the voices that have been most prominent in shaping my understandings of Tla'amin histories, it is also important that those who spoke about histories of made things in less "orthodox" ways also contribute to the conversations I consider in this dissertation. When I began to approach people in Sliammon to discuss my dissertation questions, my advisors and contacts such as Betty Wilson and David Louie mentioned Don Wilson as someone to approach, as he had spent time learning about Tla'amin traditions as he understood them. When I met with Don, he highlighted in detail the spiritual underpinnings of his learning process as he attempted making bentwood boxes for the first time:

I'd been at it for a little while, and I was starting to get it, but I remember the first time that the wood actually bent in my hands, when I steamed the darn thing and it became pliable, almost like soft rubber. Just bent it — that's how they did it in the old days, somewhat. I remember the feeling of the wood bending in my hands, I remember thinking whoa, this is how our ancestors must have felt — because you can feel it, the kinaesthetic part of learning, of actually feeling the wood bend. I had this experience, just in awe of how our elders must have felt when they were doing

²² *Neh' Motl*, 26 May 1986, *Neh' Motl* 1984-1987, Powell River Museum and Archives.

²³ That is, in contrast to Ranger's discussion of tradition as a site of tangible, visible iterations of history. Ranger, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions."

this. And after that I became very respectful in regards to the tradition, the methodology of how they made these west coast Native bent boxes. And what was I going to do, I was going to capitalize on it by commercializing the box, you know. Once I had got the basic knowledge, the know-how of how to do it, then it was possible to get in contact with a B.C. resource-based firm that was funded by the government, and...if I made a request that I wanted to mass-produce these things, then they would come up with how to do that. Even though I didn't have the skills, all I would have is the know-how and the business knowledge to back it up, to carry the business forward. I graduated from BCIT in administrative management, so the business end of it was there, and the traditional know-how of learning how, of actually doing it was what I was seeking. However on feeling the bend of the wood in my hand, I thought with consideration to my ancestors that the traditional method would probably be preferred, and that the spirits probably wouldn't want me to be doing that [commercializing the items]. The spirits of our ancestors wouldn't want me to be doing that. It wouldn't be proper to commercialize the ability to take advantage of that. So I stopped the project.²⁴

Through his processes of making, Don critiqued the economic development initiatives that characterized much of the relationships between Sliammon and provincial and federal governments, particularly in the period prior to treaty negotiations.²⁵ Indeed, these pushes for entrepreneurship were the focus of charitable organizations as well as government initiatives particularly in the decades after World War II. Initiatives that sought to address what they saw as universal issues in Indigenous populations often identified traditional crafts — whether or not people in individual communities viewed those crafts as traditional or not was another question — as one of the few skills that Indigenous people could excel in and capitalize on. For Don Wilson, to commercialize ancestral and spiritually-informed knowledge would be to detract from its significance. For him, then, not selling his work was as much an act of resistance to colonial ideas as selling their work has

²⁴ Don Wilson, interview by Katya MacDonald, 24 January 2014.

²⁵ Concerns about economic development tended to underpin relationships among Indigenous communities and provincial and federal governments across much of B.C. For several decades after the 1920s, for instance, provincial wildlife regulators sought to institute a province-wide system of trapline registration, a process that in many cases ended up restricting Indigenous trappers from their traditional harvesting territories. Processes of making and marketing traditional things therefore fell tidily into these existing channels and relationships.

been for some other makers. Commodifying his handmade items was not only ethically questionable, but also spiritually dangerous.

He was not the only person I spoke with who cited spiritual experiences connected to making things, but the action he took in response was a noteworthy reminder that community histories are not necessarily synonymous with individual narratives. In the 1990s, Don had taken a basket-weaving class — likely one taught by Mary George — with an eye towards selling the baskets commercially, not unlike the way that his parents' and grandparents' generations sometimes did when finances were tight. But during this process, he experienced the discontent of ancestral spirits, as he explained to me:

For example, when I was doing the weaving class, I would get these, from time to time I would get these spiritual attacks. It has to do with cleansing, the cleansing of the soul, cleansing of the spirit. What I needed to learn, what I do need to learn, are the basics, not the intimate details of things, so much as learn the basics and get the basics down right, and with knowledge of the basics I should be able to do well. So I don't need to be into the language, I don't need to be actually a professional weaver, I don't need to be a carver or a doctor or lawyer or Indian chief sort of thing. I just need to know the basics of what life is meant to be like for us, so we can live it right, so I can live it right. So when I went to the river and brushed with the cedar, and asked the creator to help me, and simply that, without realizing, that I found out later on, of course the creator is all-knowing, and you don't really need to tell him what it is you need help for, because he already knows. So I didn't know what kind of help I was asking for either, I just knew that I needed help. So what happens is, as a result, the help I get is intended to help me become the person I am meant to be, to become who it is that God created me to be.²⁶

While the basket-making classes had been instigated by basket-makers and supported by the band office, with the intention of preserving and sharing traditional knowledge as defined by community members' own temporal markers, Don's experience responded not to physical histories of made goods, but rather to his experiences of spiritual practices that he had sought to revive personally. His response to the spiritual attacks was so profound that he not only adopted the practice of spiritual

²⁶ Wilson, interview, 24 January 2014.

cleansing at the river, but also began to disperse all of his earthly possessions, “like a potlatch, a gifting.”²⁷

Unlike officially-supported iterations of tradition, such as the weaving and carving classes that the band office has supported for at least three decades, Don became uncomfortable with potential ethical or spiritual outcomes of such classes and rejected the focus on marketing these iterations of tradition. Rather, the traditions that emerged from Don’s experiences of making things were more directly spiritual in nature, and he drew tangible things into spiritual narratives and histories while rejecting their most directly tangible elements. Don’s discussions of personal histories of made items are reminders that even within participatory spaces where traditions have been collectively defined and supported by local institutions, those definitions cannot be universally applied to individuals’ motivations or understandings of the past.

A third approach to claiming agency through tradition and authenticity, and one that was just beginning in the 1980s, was that of repatriation. The process involved rejection of the motives that had underpinned newcomers’ collection of objects from Sliammon, whether locally in nearby Powell River, or further afield in provincial, national, or even international museums. Beyond the argument that collecting objects removed them from their rightful owners and most meaningful contexts, museums themselves pointed out that interest in collecting had its roots in European intellectual history; the act of collecting was the result of ideas about culture, just as the repatriation of those objects was. Regarding a major repatriation undertaking among European museums, (what is now called) the Canadian Museum of History, and several First Nations in Canada, one report noted:

The phenomenon of collecting exotic curiosities is an old and distinct part of the European cultural and intellectual history. Combined with the role of the American Indian as a symbol of everything noble and ‘natural,’ Indian-made objects became desirable subjects of marvel and contemplation during the age of exploration and colonial expansion. They provided a significant stimulus for the development of a less prejudiced view of other people’s achievements, anthropological thought, and the tourist industry. Nearly everyone connected with the early exploration and the European settlement of the New World collected examples of native arts and crafts, and sent them back to the old country, North America then being a frontier without

²⁷ Ibid.

museums.²⁸

The result, for Indigenous peoples seeking to repatriate their objects, was therefore not only a conflict of ownership, but also a matter of competing histories and intellectual traditions involved in making, acquiring, and commodifying items. Inspired by other communities' efforts at repatriation, Sliammon undertook its own study in 1997 as part of the first stages of research towards the eventual 2012 treaty. The research team began by evaluating how the community had been described in historical ethnographic records, making a list of alternate spellings, prominent names, and possible locations of items originating in Sliammon.²⁹ While their communications with museums proved largely fruitless — if the museums they contacted had objects from the region, which most of them did not, it was not always clear — with a few exceptions — whether they came from Sliammon precisely.

Instead, the repatriation team opted to follow up on other leads that presented themselves around the same time. Coinciding with a greater visibility of Indigenous people's rights and perspectives fostered by wide-ranging initiatives like the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the local publicity surrounding the beginnings of Sliammon's treaty discussions, non-Indigenous owners of Sliammon baskets began to contact the First Nation to arrange their return to their original owners. In the case of many of these baskets, the circumstances of their removal from Sliammon was less circumspect than for many museum pieces, particularly those that were collected in the nineteenth century for major museums. In the case of Sliammon baskets, makers had generally sold or traded them to tourists and Powell River residents. Nevertheless, Sliammon cultural and historical researchers were pleased to be contacted, and to have the opportunity to bring baskets back to their makers' families, where they were often a point of pride that also helped to reinforce narratives about Sliammon's historical and contemporary agency.

One particularly public effort by the 1990s Sliammon research team was to bring back a set of baskets from Portland, Oregon from collector Margaret Claire, who had written to Sliammon regarding baskets that her husband's grandparents had purchased in the 1910s and 1920s. Selling or trading baskets was common practice for Sliammon women for several decades, as Leslie Adams explained in a TUS interview: "As far as my grandmother used to set the net and walk to Powell River, sell door-to-door, money was very hard in them days. To do the fish, basket or whatever she

²⁸ "Speyer Collection," n.d., Ethnology Archives, Box 798, f6, Canadian Museum of History.

²⁹ "Repatriation Research: Looking for Sliammon Artifacts (Vol 1)," 1997, Sliammon Treaty Society.

had to sell. And then the people in Wildwood [an area of Powell River], if they had no money and they'd trade for clothes depending if the person needed it, take the cloths and give them the fish."³⁰

Margaret Claire's initiative was by no means the only instance of baskets from Sliammon being returned; since the 1980s, individuals from Powell River and from further afield have contacted the First Nation to return baskets that, as Sliammon councillor Denise Smith noted in a local newspaper in 2008, were often important heirlooms for the people who had bought or traded for the baskets as well.³¹ In the case of Margaret Claire's baskets, she had originally thought that the baskets had come from Sechelt or Campbell River, but upon reading a 1992 B.C. tourism magazine featuring Sliammon weaver Mary George, Margaret Claire felt that her baskets closely resembled that style. She spoke of the affinity that her family had had for the baskets, but noted that "if you appreciate them and can use them to reclaim or appreciate your heritage or any other way I will be very satisfied."³² After corresponding for several months regarding arrangements, and consulting with expert weavers in the community to ensure that the designs and techniques were from Sliammon, Sliammon elder Elsie Paul and her daughter travelled to Portland to collect the baskets, which since then have been housed in a display case in the Sliammon treaty research office.³³

The repatriation process was not only a discussion of ownership; it was also a conversation within Sliammon about how tradition should be communicated. While cultural coordinator David Louie commented to me, nearly twenty years after the baskets returned to Sliammon, that storing the baskets in such an artificial environment was not their first choice, he also noted that because it had been such a long time since the baskets were made, and given the intervention of colonizing institutions in the meantime that disrupted families' knowledge about their relatives' work, it would be close to impossible to trace who these baskets should rightfully belong to.³⁴ As a result, Margaret Claire's suggestion that the baskets might be used to "reclaim or appreciate your heritage" was the role that Sliammon leadership felt was best for the baskets as well. Reclaiming these baskets was in part a compromise between their own agency and ownership, and needing to adopt a museum-style display despite its drawbacks. The display case of repatriated baskets was on one hand a result of knowledge that had been fragmented, but at the same time, it also became a public display of the ways that objects defined as traditional could be redefined to bolster local arguments about agency.

³⁰ Adams, interview.

³¹ Bill T., "Sliammon in the Twentieth Century: An Incomplete History Gleaned from Local Publications," April 2008, STS SR052, Sliammon Treaty Society.

³² "Repatriation Research: Looking for Sliammon Artifacts (Vol 2)," 1997, Sliammon Treaty Society.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ David Louie, conversation with Katya MacDonald, July 2013.

To highlight the references to tradition that the baskets' return represented, a group of elders organized a ceremony, to which Margaret Claire was invited, to thank her for the baskets and to celebrate their return home. The organizers decided to fly Margaret in "at Treaty expense,"³⁵ suggesting that the treaty negotiation process had, from its inception, been closely linked with ideas and ideals about Tla'amin culture. Repatriating the baskets was an event that upheld political ideals, so that even though the baskets themselves were finished items, they continued to be constructed in ways that would reflect contemporary interests. The result was an act of repatriation that, even while it contained elements, like the display of the baskets, that did not appear to differ from museums' portrayal of the objects, was the result of community members' intentional claiming of tradition for themselves.

Repatriation processes were not simply matters of negotiating between collectors and the First Nation. Negotiations also took place within the community, as people concerned with the portrayal of tradition in particular ways sought to arrange ceremonies in ways that reflected general agreement among contemporary elders' perspectives and various historical accounts of ceremonies that, of course, could not yet have been concerned with questions of repatriation. Arranging these ceremonies was therefore a process of consultation, speculation, and interpretation. For the ceremony acknowledging the return of baskets from Margaret Claire, the committee first had to consider how the elders felt about receiving the baskets: was it a cause for celebration, a reminder of the community's experiences with colonialism, or something in between? To make the decision, they looked to similar ceremonies that had taken place in recent years in Sliammon and in neighbouring communities, as a way to not only reference appropriate protocols, but also to get a sense of how to acknowledge the complexities of the situation. Eventually, they decided that the ceremony would include acknowledgement of Margaret Claire's decision to return the baskets and the work of community members who did the research and legwork to bring the baskets home, to be followed by a presentation about the baskets and their histories, and a community dinner.³⁶ The structure of the ceremony included key components of most Sliammon ceremonies, particularly hosting people from near and far and bringing them together to be part of an important event or idea.

Yet despite these common elements, the ceremony was not an automatic result of a collective understanding of tradition: questions that were expanded further when, around the same time, some Tla'amin human remains were repatriated from the Royal B.C. Museum in Victoria.

³⁵ "Repatriation Research: Looking for Sliammon Artifacts (Vol 2)," 2.

³⁶ Ibid.

Community members arranged for several representatives to travel there to arrange for the remains to be transferred to handmade cedar boxes, blessed both with hymns and older Tla'amin spiritual practices, and accompanied home. Like the basket ceremony, the details of these actions required contemplation and decisions about the nature of tradition. Community members debated whether someone would need to stay overnight with the remains while they were housed in Victoria awaiting transfer, and whether the (Catholic) priest should be invited to the reburial ceremony.³⁷ Even though these repatriation ceremonies were initiated and carried out by community members who were keen to enumerate and record “essential” markers of Tla'amin culture in ways not dissimilar to earlier ethnographers, the “tradition” component of traditional ceremony was not certain or automatic. Negotiating tradition was also a process of negotiating against colonialism, with objects like previously-collected baskets or symbolic cedar boxes providing an opportunity to make and illustrate those arguments.

Negotiations about the effectiveness or relevance of newcomer categories were not limited to large or public events like ceremonies, however. Discussions of mid-twentieth-century objects and their uses were not limited to questions that could inform land use, treaty negotiations, education, or community programming. Those makers who had experience with handmade items being part of daily household life sometimes drew a distinction between those “ordinary” uses and the decorative and commercial purposes of carving as art: questions that, prior to the development of a commercial art market, were not relevant. Leslie Adams, who served for many years as chief of Sliammon, compared a gift he had received from another Sliammon political leader, Bill Mitchell, with the canoes that he remembered being used for everyday transportation:

Karen Galligos (interviewer): Did you ever build your own canoes?

Leslie Adams: Yeah.

KG: Do you still build them?

LA: No, I gave it to Joe Paul, it didn't last very long. In fact, I got one in the yard right now, I'm working on it but I haven't worked on it for two years now, a dug-out?

...

KG: So did you make anything else besides your dugouts?

LA: I don't know.

³⁷ Ibid.

KG: Your own oars?

LA: Yeah, I used to have my own oars. What do you call them? Herring rakes.

KG: Don't see them anymore.

LA: I've got one.

KG: We don't have them anymore. I'll have to go over and take a picture.

LA: In fact, Bill Mitchell made it for me, it was a souvenir. I have some, in fact, I bought a pair of oars from him, that's a souvenir as well. It's beautifully made, you'd think it was machine made, it's the way he carved it. I'll show you.³⁸

In the realm of Tla'amin leadership, made goods could also occupy a diplomatic role, even if not an official one; the relationship between Leslie Adams and Bill Mitchell, both of whom came from prominent families in twentieth-century Tla'amin politics, included a mutual admiration of the handmade items of others. Yet these others, in Leslie Adams' discussion here, were either of previous generations or from other communities. Karen Galligos had prompted this conversation by asking about "masks or any art," and the participants' responses indicated that Sliammon traditions did not necessarily include the most visibly commercially-appealing carvings or other items that became prominent in other northwest coast Indigenous communities. In these interpretations, art was a phenomenon from elsewhere. The exception that Leslie Adams noted, the well-carved souvenir oars given to him by Bill Mitchell, had no need to be practical items because the skill that went into their making, as well as their status as a gift, designated them as items for display and admiration. While Tla'amin makers have likely always admired each other's skilled handiwork, the input of newcomer commercial categories sometimes shifted the underlying intentions of such admiration. To have art in addition to practical items was to be able to demonstrate more diverse viability of Sliammon histories, traditions, and political relationships.

Negotiating ideas of tradition has not always been a straightforward or uncontroversial process. Discussing categories or markers of authenticity have been challenging for community members; because they are by nature interpretive ideas, they come under scrutiny, and in a climate where adhering to external colonial expectations of authenticity can lead to commercial or political gain, there is also pressure on community members to interpret ideas in the "correct" way. I spoke with Elsie Paul, a prominent elder in Sliammon, shortly before her life history was published by UBC Press. She noted that because of the publicity surrounding her book, more people than usual

³⁸ Adams, interview.

have come to see her, and she had begun to feel “like a broken record sometimes.” She was also clear about her concern that some people had written about or quoted her inaccurately without consulting her, and as a result is increasingly keen to remind researchers that individuals can only really make statements based on their own experiences.³⁹

Based on this conversation, I should note that since my initial conversation with Elsie and a few brief encounters at community events, I have not had the chance to speak with her in more depth. Elsie’s comments serve as a reminder that recognition as an expert comes with its own challenges for interpreting the past. Communicating history, even or perhaps especially from a position of authority like Elsie’s, comes with pressure to convey those ideas in an accurate light, yet communities are complex entities that make total agreement difficult. These difficulties and cautions are magnified when writing from an outsider, non-expert position like mine: my role is to bring perspectives together that may not have previously been in conversation with one another. It is not to make authoritative pronouncements on Sliammon histories on behalf of Sliammon community members. The distinction between the two can be blurry, which is why Elsie’s comments are particularly crucial.

The treaty negotiation process in Sliammon, for instance, has illustrated this especially vividly, but community members’ own discussions of the ways that they have embraced ideas of authenticity also show how tradition has been negotiated among institutions and individuals. In one conversation I had with carver and instructor Charlie Bob, he told a story illustrating the relationship between status in the community and expressions of authentic “Sliammon-ness.” Charlie mentioned someone in the community who had asked him to carve a headdress like the ones “up north” — that is, in the region that Wilson Duff had helped to characterize as a place where Indigenous art was of the highest calibre. Charlie agreed, but was entertained and a little frustrated when the person wore it to all of the meetings and ceremonies he attended in Sliammon “like he was a chief.” When Charlie asked why he never took off the headdress, the man joked, “I’m the big man here now!”⁴⁰ In this case, Charlie questioned the man’s authority on the basis of his claims to authenticity, as illustrated publicly by his headdress that alluded to more iconic Indigenous symbols. Yet Linda and Eugene Louie, who have been active in Sliammon political leadership, commented that carving for decorative or ceremonial purposes was recent in Sliammon, and that Charlie Bob’s work was the result of learning from further afield that he had brought back to his teaching and selling in

³⁹ Elsie Paul conversation with Katya MacDonald, July 20, 2013.

⁴⁰ Charlie Bob, interview, 20 January 2014.

Sliammon:

Eugene Louie: [Charlie] is getting into paddles now, but years ago I don't remember seeing too many people carving other than doing canoes.

Karen Galligos (interviewer): I know Dad used to make paddles, dug-out, sling shots for the birds.

EL: I was always amazed that some of the people in Sechelt, guys that you never suspect who would be a good carver, as I was growing up some of the work they used to do, beautiful work, that type of carving I've never seen here before. I have seen carving all over the Coast but never individuals do really fine art as they do.⁴¹

The interpretive nature of authenticity, in response to community needs and questions, has been diversely embodied by the objects that community members have made. In the case of Charlie's carved headdress, the kind of visible authenticity that resonated with the general public also underpinned Charlie's customer's claims to authority. While Charlie himself was skeptical of those claims, his reputation as a carver in Sliammon was also built on incorporating knowledge from other places, since those places had wider reputations for skilled work: reputations forged, in part, by commercial art markets and ethnographic descriptions.

Community members' comments about authority are also a reminder that the intended audience of historical interpretations filters the way that ideas about authenticity and tradition have been presented. Betty Wilson, who has worked closely with Elsie teaching basket-making and documenting Tla'amin language, discussed her involvement with processes of making things in methodological and didactic terms to me as well. She explained that it was best to speak to elders in situations where we could have a natural conversation, so that I would know that what they say is "authentic" and not forced from a series of questions.⁴² Certainly, Betty and I agree that my conversations with community members should be undertaken sincerely, and with deference to community members' priorities and perspectives, though our definitions or expectations for the idea of authenticity may diverge.

⁴¹ Louie and Louie, interview.

⁴² Betty Wilson conversation with Katya MacDonald, July 17, 2013.

As a newcomer to Sliammon, community members have sometimes reinforced to me that their histories are primarily their own jurisdiction. Corinne Mitchell, for instance, spoke with me about her family's collection of handmade items from previous generations, including regalia and baskets each with a story connected to them. Perhaps because this conversation took place on only the second time I had met her, and because I had explained that my dissertation would focus on histories of handmade items, Corinne also noted that she has plans to create a museum in Sliammon with the help of her niece, who, she planned, would record the stories associated with the items.⁴³ I understood this commentary as a discussion of research ethics. Although I was asking similar questions to those that community members have asked about their histories, as someone connected to an outside institution, my role was not the same. By noting her niece's role as researcher and recorder of histories, Corinne also reminded me that she expected me to defer to the work of Sliammon people. While I might work towards "authentic" conversations in the sense that Betty meant — that is, conversations that developed naturally out of relationships — the most public or directly beneficial work would be done by community members.

Community members have forged their own agency in defining themselves partly in reference to newcomer input like ethnographic or commercial definitions of authenticity. Yet their motivations for seeking agency have not emerged in a vacuum. Colonizing institutions had systematically sought to remove Indigenous people's ability to work towards their own needs, and individual processes of making things, as well as community members' discussions of the challenges of embracing and communicating tradition have referred to the impacts of colonialism in those discussions. Even for community members who make things they recognize as traditional primarily as a hobby, the references to tradition are also statements about the reasons that community members have felt it necessary to state tradition publicly or tangibly.

I got to know more makers in Sliammon, several of them suggested I get in touch with Jeanette Francis, who is well-known for her beadwork. Jeanette grew up in Powell River, but explained that she had been spending time in Sliammon since she was thirteen years old. She had learned beading from Charlie Bob, who in turn had learned the skill when he attended residential school in Chilliwack, B.C. For Jeanette herself, she enjoys beading because it is relaxing. Although she also embroiders, knits, crochets, and hand quilts, she prefers beading, while also wryly recognizing that unlike the baskets her friends have made, beading is not especially practical.⁴⁴ For

⁴³ Corinne Mitchell conversation with Katya MacDonald, August 2, 2014.

⁴⁴ Jeannette Francis, interview by Katya MacDonald, 24 February 2015.

other community members, though, Jeanette's beadwork does serve particular functions. Her work, which has adorned bags, walking sticks, and diverse other items, is in demand because it represents aspects of the past that community members seek to reinforce or return to; as Jeanette noted to me, beadwork was not a craft that was native to Sliammon, but regardless, it was knowledge that had been disrupted by decades of residential schools.⁴⁵ Even though Jeanette's work does not strictly meet the ideals that some older makers have set for their baskets for instance (that they be used and appreciated on a quotidian level rather than set on display, distanced from their original uses), on the other hand, it mirrors the role of the baskets that Margaret Claire had returned to Sliammon: for some community members, it represents a reclamation of historical skills from assimilative practices and disruption of knowledge.

Residential Schools

Within discussions of tradition and agency are themes of teaching and learning of traditional skills, which community members have cited as ways of maintaining their community's viability in the face of historical and contemporary colonialism. For Indigenous people, the legacy of residential schools is of course a looming presence in discussions of reclamation and learning about the aspects of culture that community members have deemed most important. Processes of teaching and learning have become ways to maintain particular narratives about community needs, in response (at least in part) to the legacy of residential schools. While it is not the focus of this chapter, the general climate and consequences of residential schools for Sliammon is important context for the discussions of making things that came both concurrently and later. Experiences of assimilation and discrimination, both at home and at school, reinforced community members' later sense that historical skills and knowledge needed to be preserved, in direct and tangible response to their and their families' experiences of residential school. This process of reclamation took place at first by individuals seeking out knowledge that they remembered their parents and grandparents possessing, and then later creating ways to teach those skills to others. Yet even though residential schools were institutions specifically designed to recreate Indigenous people in the image of Euro-Canadians, at times they also defined pupils' traditions in their own ways, so that children would sometimes take these ideas back to their home communities and adapt or build on them to address local or individual needs.

Until around the 1960s, when Powell River portrayals of Sliammon began to include more

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Sliammon people's perspectives, in local news reporting for instance, Sliammon's public image included two main themes: their performance in local sports matches, and the fines and sentences doled out for intoxication at a time when it was illegal for First Nations people to consume alcohol.⁴⁶ These were not images of a community with its own extensive systems of knowledge, though ironically, at the same time, some families opted to send their children to residential school instead of the day school at Sliammon, because for a time, the (white) teacher employed there was an alcoholic. Corinne Mitchell's family had done exactly that with her and other family members her age.⁴⁷ Beyond that, day school teacher Basil Nicholson kept a diary in the 1920s, in which he recounted the ways that he either reinforced the Indian Agent's authority, or at times acted as de facto law enforcement himself, following up on complaints from the Indian Office of dancing occurring at individuals' houses, or ensuring that fines were paid. In other words, even when they were not separated from their families, children's experience of education in Sliammon was one in which their own families had little sway or autonomy.

Corinne Mitchell's granny and aunties had therefore come to their decision after considerable discussion, deciding that even though she would be far away, she would have cousins at the school and would know others there as well. Although they hoped that it would be a safer environment for her, Corinne recalled that as the bus pulled away, she saw her granny sitting in the church with her shawl pulled over her head, stricken by her decision and unable to watch her granddaughter leaving.⁴⁸ Corinne's own main memory of school was of being punished for comforting younger children who were upset because they could not understand English.⁴⁹ As borne out by the recent findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the experience of fear and dislocation for children, families, and communities was a common feature of residential schools. Given the lasting impacts of assimilative and coercive educational practices, making things that were tangible and visible, and the result of deep historical knowledge became an effective tool for community members to reshape the image of their community.

Corinne Mitchell's own children attended local schools in Powell River. After the day school on the reserve had closed in the 1950s, Corinne and her husband Joe, along with Elsie Paul and her husband and several other community members campaigned successfully to have their children be

⁴⁶ T., "Sliammon in the Twentieth Century: An Incomplete History Gleaned from Local Publications."

⁴⁷ Corinne Mitchell conversation with Katya MacDonald, July 21, 2013.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

allowed to attend James Thompson Elementary⁵⁰ and Brooks High School. Mary George, one of the advocates for local schooling, recalled in a documentary produced by the Sliammon Treaty Society:

That was the hardest part, when the [Fathers?] wouldn't let us send our kids to public school. We send them to Sechelt or Mission or whatever. And we say no, can't send them there. We went to a meeting; we tried to get the two boys to go to school in Brooks. We had to fight for it. So, went to meetings. We don't want him to go to residential school. So keep on going, seeing the principal, going to meeting. We did this to open it up. I remember that because I had to fight for it.⁵¹

The change towards local schooling, while never repealed, was nonetheless subject to several decades of discussion; in 1971, schoolteacher Jeannie Albin suggested that an “all-Indian” school be established, because she felt that her students from Sliammon did not identify with white society, nor with the teaching materials that had been developed with white pupils in mind.⁵² When asked by the *Powell River News* for his commentary on the matter, then-chief Leslie Adams' first response was to ignore the question completely, presumably finding the proposition absurd, and drew the reporter's attention instead to a more interesting and visible concern: “There's a three-foot totem pole, hand-carved by a genuine Indian -- none of that Japanese stuff -- selling for \$60 out here. See if the *News* can do anything about selling it.”⁵³ When further prompted, he explained, “We feel we are part of the Powell River community...We feel that any school started on the reserve, designed to segregate the Indian from the white community, would be a retrograde step.”⁵⁴ For Leslie Adams, the push for inclusion in Powell River life and institutions did not mean avoiding being visibly Tla'amin; instead, he argued for ways that Powell River interest in goods made in Sliammon could help to foster inclusion and good relationships, as well as economic benefit for the carver.

While the first and vastly most significant impacts of residential schools that community members have sought to communicate were the breakdown of family and community knowledge and relationships, in the context of making things or promoting particular narratives, some community members acknowledged that they had learned some important skills in school as well.

⁵⁰ Susan Biagi, “Sliammon in the 20th Century: Brief History: Trials, Tribulation and Triumph,” 1999, Powell River Museum and Archives.

⁵¹ Evan Tlelsa Adams and Jan Padgett, *Kla Ab Men*, DVD, 2004.

⁵² “Another View: All-Indian Reserve School a “Retrograde Step”.”

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Eugene Louie, who has been involved in Sliammon politics for many years, commented in a TUS interview that his residential school experience was not generally a good one, but that it had at the same time taught him leadership and strength:

EL: When you reflect upon what happened, you can adapt to a certain life style, but also in retrospect you don't really understand at that time what was happening as far as that assimilation that they were pushing you into. I'm sure some things were noticeable, like my language I couldn't speak, that was sort of a given, that was the philosophy they had, you don't talk to your own sister in there, those were rules that were established that those were the things you couldn't do. I guess, probably what turned me off the most is when my grandmother died, I was home when my grandfather died. I distinctly remember the day he died, the type of day it was, it was a beautiful sunshiny day, I was sitting outside on the porch and my grandmother come out of the house and said "come here son," so I went running down and he was on his last breath then. I kick myself because I didn't come up and get mom and dad because they were home at that time. There was so much emotion at that time. His last words were look after your mom and dad, son. Not that I wasn't close to my grandfather but I was a lot closer to my grandmother, really close and it was six or seven months later that she passed on, I was in school and they wouldn't let me come home for the funeral, that shattered me. That's what I say, you reflect upon what happened long time ago. There's things you really don't like what happened in residential school but then you also can take the good of it. It really taught me leadership.

KG: It taught you how to be strong.

EL: It taught me how to be strong, got me educated and to accept things in life and that you make the best of it because I couldn't change where my parents told me to go to school. If I were to try to change that I would be disrespecting what my mother's wishes were sort of thing because that was the type of teaching that's has always been there, you always respect what other people have to say and especially your mother, if she feels it's the best for you then you make the best of it. Like a

whole family there are other things, external things that made it bad being there, you know, the abuses and all of that. You heard stories of other abuses with other people, but other than just making allegations, which you think are really true but what can you do about it, you can scream blue murder and still not be heard...⁵⁵

Because some community members have cited their residential school experiences as ones that informed their current passions and occupations, it would be a simplification to state that residential schools universally caused a wholesale decline in community knowledge. The community- and nation-wide detrimental legacies of residential schools have been significant, and by complicating these narratives I do not intend to diminish the trauma experienced by many individuals, families, and communities in ongoing ways. Rather, I hope to elaborate on the complex and paradoxical ways that newcomer institutions have become entwined with Sliammon's, and draw attention to the ways that community members have asserted their own narratives within disruptions to existing ways of life.

Charlie Bob's occupations as a carver, beader, weaver, and teacher offer insights into the complex relationships among community and government or institutional narratives of making traditional things. On one of my first meetings with Charlie, he gave me a tour of his most recent work, most of it done upon request or commission, and consisting mainly of Coast Salish cedar bark hats, talking sticks, ceremonial rattles, and wall ornaments. His best-selling items at the moment were, however, beaded earrings and necklaces. While Charlie had learned carving from a carver he sometimes visited while he was attending residential school, the skill of beading had been taught in school itself.⁵⁶ The decision to teach Indigenous pupils beading was a decision based on stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, or the school's lack of familiarity with the kinds of handmade items that pupils from western B.C. would recognize; beadwork that is iconic in plains and central Canada Indigenous iconographies largely did not exist on the west coast until it became synonymous with broader images of indigeneity. These images were precisely what underpinned the school's push to teach beading to students, as well as the later market for beaded items that Charlie was able to tap into. Despite the institution's primary goal of assimilating Indigenous students, the role of residential schools in Charlie's beadwork was, in this case, a formative one as well. Learning the skill of beadwork in school later helped Charlie to incorporate those skills into his reputation as a skilled

⁵⁵ Louie and Louie, interview.

⁵⁶ Charlie Bob, interview by Katya MacDonald, 20 July 2013.

maker of items relevant to Sliammon narratives of history and tradition, as evidenced both by the recognition he has received for his crafts, and by the marketability of the specific items that he makes.

Furthermore, even though institutions like residential schools were overall destructive forces in many communities' and individuals' lives, they also played a role in building up the historical significance of handmade items, either by creating ideas of authenticity, as in the case of beadwork at the school that Charlie attended, or by being an entity that community members sought to respond to. Charlie's personal history of making things serves as an illustration of how such processes occurred. Although he had learned carving and beading as a child, as a young adult he had largely abandoned those activities. His wife struggled with alcoholism, while Charlie himself was rarely home due to his work in the logging industry. After ten years of difficult marriage and raising of children, his wife died suddenly at home, and Charlie was deeply shaken by the event. He started drinking as well, and often slept outdoors because he did not want to come home. Eventually, after about three years, he decided he needed help, and one night walked to the hospital in Powell River (about ten kilometres from Sliammon) in the pouring rain. After his release from the hospital, he gave up drinking and smoking, and instead took up carving, which he has worked on steadily ever since.⁵⁷ In these early years of Charlie's rediscovery of making things, carving was a hobby or even a survival tool, rather than a specific reference to histories. While his skills had originally been created in a particular image of tradition defined, in part, by the residential school, other community members helped to refine those notions of traditional objects by citing Charlie's work as an example of tradition that they sought to reclaim from assimilative institutions.

Charlie Bob's experience of learning "traditional" skills (as understood and defined by school administrators) in residential school was not an isolated occurrence. In response to the economic challenges of the Depression and Second World War, schools redoubled their efforts to teach skills that were marketable, yet within what they paternalistically perceived to be the limited or "niche" capabilities of First Nations students. Spearheading some of these efforts was Alice Ravenhill, who founded the Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts in 1939. Along with a handful of residential school principals, she aimed to develop a curriculum of arts and crafts for residential schools that would appear suitably exotic or Indigenous to be marketable to the general public, and to develop public interest in those creations; whether the crafts were familiar or specific to the communities and cultures that the students belonged to was not a concern.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

While the Society's aims mirrored those of ethnographers working in the same era — “our Committee is formed to endeavour to arouse more interest in the public in the revival of Indian Tribal Art in this Province”⁵⁸ — their goal was not to document authenticity, but to create and market it; Alice Ravenhill corresponded with several residential school principals about the types of work they felt would sell best. Alice Ravenhill was concerned that the “Latent Gifts among the Indians of this Province”⁵⁹ were in decline, though she interpreted this decline to be the result of Indigenous people's own lack of capability, and expected that institutional training through residential schools would draw out what she presumed to be inherent traits, rather than citing artistic skill as the result of the knowledge and community and historical significance that had maintained the skills she now deemed as marketable.

The kinds of art undertaken by residential school pupils was largely the result of a generic image of Indigenous people that was fostered by teachers; one of the Society's exhibitions of student art featured motifs that their teachers had encouraged, based on their expectations⁶⁰ for what an Indigenous child, regardless of what they would be familiar with from their home communities, would be capable of conveying: “horses, singly or in groups; mountain goats, chipmunks, skunks, porcupines, squirrels, deer, wild geese, eagles, bluebirds, robins, doves, quail, etc.”⁶¹ Society member and school administrator Anthony Walsh even critiqued the marketability and authenticity of colours that children had used in their work: “The Alberni School has a number of basket designs done on sacking, many of them are the wrong colours, but one can see great possibilities in this work, if only the correct colours are used.”⁶² Residential schools did not only create specific images of authenticity, they also helped to create the larger markets that made those specific ideas financially viable and therefore useful for Indigenous makers, even at the same time that the generic or stereotyped images drew attention away from local skills and knowledge. Schools' and organizations' portrayals of authenticity, as communicated through their students' work, was first and foremost an economic endeavour, connected to other contemporary notions that Indigenous people were

⁵⁸ Alice Ravenhill to Major Bullock Webster, 16 January 1940, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 1, Correspondence 1939-40, BC Archives.

⁵⁹ Alice Ravenhill to Community Drama Branch, Adult Education Department, 12 June 1940, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 1, Correspondence 1939-40, BC Archives.

⁶⁰ I use the word expectations here in the sense that Philip Deloria does: to describe the preconceived notions of authenticity that Indigenous people have been expected to adhere to.

⁶¹ Alice Ravenhill to Miss Browne-Cave, 29 July 1940, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 1, Correspondence 1939-40, BC Archives.

⁶² Anthony Walsh to Alice Ravenhill, 29 October 1943, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 9, Correspondence, Oct-Dec 1942, BC Archives.

dependent on newcomer institutions or required paternalistic aid,⁶³ and underpinned by the expectation that Indigenous people “rehabilitate” or assimilate.⁶⁴



⁶³ Alice Ravenhill wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1942 that “As you know, these Indians are children in many respects; they want leadership, sympathetic supervision, and dare I write, a school curriculum more adapted to their temperaments, their really valuable innate qualities and teachers fitted to understand them not despise them.” Alice Ravenhill to Mr. Hoey, 7 July 1943, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 9, Correspondence, Oct-Dec 1942, BC Archives.

⁶⁴ In 1944, for instance, the Society expressed official support for a proposal under discussion, that a new *Indian Act* be created that even more explicitly provided for assimilation of Indigenous peoples by removing all “tribal organization.” Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, 1944, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 17, Miscellaneous papers, BC Archives.

Image 5: Linocuts created by Lytton residential school students, referring vaguely to Interior Salish stories of Coyote, to illustrate the school's admonitions for "proper" diet and comportment. BCA MSS 1116, Vol 1 File 17.

Despite one of the stated aims of Ravenhill's organization being that of economic inclusion for Indigenous makers, the lived experience of makers around the same time suggests that their sense of inclusion was not complete. Another member of the Society, A.E. Pickford, wrote to Indian Agent F.J.C. Ball cited two potential outcomes of the organization's work: "lightening the burden [on government institutions] of carrying an indigent people [and] also in the help given to the advertising of our Province to tourists and others. The colour and quaintness of Indian art are exactly what is needed to emphasize the individuality of our Province's attractions:"⁶⁵ an idea that Duff also advocated two decades later. On one hand, both aims were intended to draw Indigenous people into the working life of the province as a whole. But as makers in Sliammon have emphasized repeatedly since the 1940s, their expectations for inclusion have often not been matched. Some makers in Sliammon have specifically noted that they intend their handmade items to be, at least in part, agents for promoting dialogue among Sliammon, Powell River, and communities beyond the local. The interrelationships among makers, users, and observers of objects depicted in Chapter 2 have reinforced the expectation of dialogue, and official actions like repatriation efforts have ensconced in ceremony the kinds of reciprocal relationships that community members have envisioned. Makers' and institutions' interactions with handmade items have therefore been calls for more effective dialogue, rather than agents for change in and of themselves.

Given the close relationship between official teaching and narratives of authenticity that were reinforced by residential schools and their supporters,⁶⁶ it is unsurprising that community

⁶⁵ A. E. Pickford to F. J. C. Ball, 2 May 1941, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 2, Correspondence January-March, BC Archives.

⁶⁶ It is noteworthy, however, that the Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts was divided on the residential schools question. Although they, like many people at the time, felt that Indigenous people should rightfully be wards of the state until they could demonstrate "sufficient" capability, they also spoke out against the fragmentation of families that residential schools caused: "In the days of Dickens that was the accepted thing. Now social and educational workers know that the home is the place on which to base the responsibility for bringing up the child. The breaking up of family life has wrought great damage among the Indians and means for repairing it cannot be taken too quickly. It is surely against every principle to take children of seven and eight years away from their parents, and, in the north, keep them away for perhaps seven years." The emphasis of "Indian" arts and crafts was in part a stop-gap measure to alleviate the ill effects of residential schools even while the system remained in place. Okanagan Society for the Revival of Indian Arts and Crafts, "Native Canadians: A Plan for the Rehabilitation of Indians, Submitted to the Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment, Ottawa," 1944, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts,

members in Sliammon have revised residential schools' discussions of tradition to incorporate into their own local teaching of values and skills to youth. Whereas residential schools generally had



larger societal goals for their teaching, community members teaching skills in making items they have identified as traditional have focused on local and sometimes individual needs. One of the undertakings of the Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, for instance, was a system of proficiency badges offered to students by the Indian Affairs Branch for mastering skills like woodworking, knitting, poultry and cattle husbandry, sewing, metalwork, and housekeeping.⁶⁷

Image 6 (left): Carpentry badge, emblazoned with the insignia of the federal Department of Mines and Resources that oversaw Indian Affairs. BCA MSS 1116, Vol 1 File 16.

The badge program was an illustration of the kinds of skills that administrators deemed most valuable, and in response to these narratives community members began to assert narratives of their own. Rather than asserting their knowledge and skills as antidotes to a “problem,”⁶⁸ organizers and leadership in Sliammon, for instance, began to publicly assert the values of those skills within their own community, beginning with a few vocal leaders and makers in the 1960s and 1970s; by the time the Powell River newspaper the *Town Crier* ran a feature in 1977 on Doreen Point’s social studies classes on Tla’amin culture, in which students took field trips with elders to harvest cedar and practice its uses,⁶⁹ the relationships between Powell River and Sliammon had already begun to shift from ones grounded in the trade of objects (such as the baskets that Margaret Claire returned)

Vol 1 File 17, Miscellaneous papers, BC Archives.

⁶⁷ Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, n.d., BCA MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 16, Proficiency Badges for Indian Schools, BC Archives.

⁶⁸ “As further opportunities for work must stem from what is already there, occupation and conditions therein in 1941 are quoted in full from the Indian Affairs Report. From this it is obvious that given equal opportunity with the whites in such matters as proper education and health facilities together with adequate vocational training, the question of Indians becoming absorbed into the economic life of the nation need no longer constitute a problem.” Okanagan Society for the Revival of Indian Arts and Crafts, “Native Canadians: A Plan for the Rehabilitation of Indians, Submitted to the Committee on Reconstruction and Re-Establishment, Ottawa.”

⁶⁹ “Indian Culture Goes into the Classroom,” *Town Crier*, 6 June 1977, sec. B4. Cited in Bill T., “Sliammon in the Twentieth Century: An Incomplete History Gleaned from Local Publications.”

between disparate communities, to relationships in which exchange of ideas was more possible. This is certainly not to diminish Sliammon people's experiences of institutional and individualized racism — as Melvin Mitchell has noted, Powell River is sometimes “still like cowboys and Indians” — but the gradual shift in relationships did reflect Sliammon people's own more public discussion of their histories.

These smaller-scale educational responses to residential schools, through processes of making things, did indeed become more public — and publicly accessible — in subsequent decades. By extension, then, community members' arguments against the assimilative efforts of residential schools and other institutions became more visible as well, even if their public engagements handmade items did not explicitly address the histories to which they were responding. By the 1980s, individual efforts like Doreen Point's had consolidated and expanded into community clubs and classes, art shows, and a community-run store in Powell River that sold community members' handmade items. Some classes were, in part, an effort to replicate the processes of making things as well as the finished items that previous generations had established. In my conversations with the weaving group operating in Sliammon today, participants recalled how making baskets had always been a social and collective undertaking, a place for the women who made them to converse while working. In seeking to reinforce those older processes of making things, a basketweaving club that operate in Sliammon in the 1980s invoked those same gender and labour dynamics. An advertisement in the March 7, 1988 issue of *Neh Motl* called for new and experienced basketweavers to join: “Ladies, if you are already doing baskets on your own, you are welcome to come and weave with us. Come on out and join us. It's fun and it's something valuable to learn. Just think, in a few years you will be able to teach your own children and this valuable part of our culture won't be lost.”⁷⁰ The organizers expected that experienced weavers, at least, would be women, and that they would be the ones taking on the bulk of the responsibility for teaching new weavers not only the skills of basketmaking, but also the histories and community responsibilities that underpinned that knowledge. In this instance, using teaching and learning to address threats to historical knowledge was a process of referring to historical labour and gender dynamics.

During my trips to Sliammon, my accommodations were the elders' lodge, a house that community members use for small gatherings, storing teaching materials for carving, cedar weaving, and language classes, and as a day-to-day workspace. Language and culture worker Betty Wilson worked there on many days while I was there, and so she was often able to offer small pieces of

⁷⁰ ~~THE KORO~~ March 1988, *Neh Motl* 1984-1987, Powell River Museum and Archives.

advice, or respond to my initial impressions of a meeting or interview. On one occasion, when I returned to the lodge after meeting with Charlie Bob, Betty contextualized his work and reputation in the community as an expert in diverse areas: carving, weaving of both cedar bark and cedar roots, painting, beading, and knowledge of medicinal plants. Although many organizations in Sliammon are quick to consult Charlie — Sliammon Health has employed both his carving skills and his general knowledge on several occasions — Betty also noted that some of his knowledge is unusual. She commented that it is mostly women who weave, because men are “protective of their masculinity,” and in general, only older men like Charlie are confident enough to buck existing expectations; men in general may be interested in cedar bark weaving (certainly at the hat-making class I attended, about half the participants were men), but hesitate to do the root weaving technique used to make baskets, a historically feminine task.⁷¹ As the 1980s basketweaving class suggests, teaching and learning of skills helped to reinforce gendered definitions of tradition. The presence or absence of particular skills from Sliammon was a matter of concern for interested community members regardless of gender, but enacting those skills relied on understandings of historical gender roles and dynamics, not only the tangible objects themselves.

Seeking to make Sliammon histories more public and accessible to community members was therefore an overarching aim of those who deliberately responded to the way that their histories and knowledge had been discussed in the residential schools system. Margaret Vivier, for instance, who along with her late mother Mary George was involved for several decades in teaching Tla’amin language and basketweaving classes, speculated that her and her mother’s passion for maintaining these skills came from the fact that neither of them had attended residential school.⁷² While most of her students are from Sliammon, Margaret has also had visitors from Europe take her classes as well, which she is glad for; she noted that it makes her happy to hear the language spoken, and to know that people are taking an interest in it, regardless of where they are from. At the same time, though, like the weaving classes that the First Nation offered in the 1980s, Margaret’s language classes were also places to reinforce gendered definitions of culture and tradition. Margaret was glad to hear the language spoken, because otherwise she feels as though “there’s nobody to talk to,” and elaborated that in her observation, when men in particular made this comment, it was because they feel there is no opportunity to converse with other men.⁷³ The teaching and learning of tradition has been underpinned by specific and often overlapping definitions of authority as well: despite Margaret’s

⁷¹ Betty Wilson, interview by Katya MacDonald, 20 January 2014.

⁷² Margaret Vivier, interview by Katya MacDonald, 18 July 2013.

⁷³ Ibid.

community-wide expertise as a language teacher, the knowledge that students gained from her classes did not necessarily reconstruct gender dynamics that community members felt were familiar or traditional.⁷⁴ As Margaret's language classes suggested, teaching tradition in response to the effects of colonialist institutions could reconstruct knowledge but not necessarily its original contexts. Even when community members felt that their knowledge of traditional skills was declining, their awareness of historically- and gender-defined understandings of tradition continued to shape the ways knowledge has been used in the community.

As community members' handmade items interacted with shifting expectations and environments over the course of the twentieth century, they also encountered histories of colonialism that created definitions of authenticity or expectations for Indigenous people's behaviour. Ethnographic work, especially in the early twentieth century, but in ongoing ways into the 1980s, tended to depict processes of making things as declining skills or losses of culture. At times, Sliammon people shared those concerns, but also adapted narratives of loss to make arguments for local autonomy and illustrate their resilience in the face of colonizing institutions. Especially from the 1970s, as fewer restrictions were placed on Sliammon people's relationships with Powell River, and as they began to advocate for further inclusion, making things became a way of not only reclaiming tangible symbols of culture, but also an opportunity to capitalize on definitions of authenticity to make arguments for their autonomy and resilience.

Repatriation efforts and community programming alike relied on these redefined relationships with newcomer institutions, especially locally and regionally. Similarly, residential schools and their vocational expectations for their students assumed that Indigenous communities and individuals were static, and developed educational techniques that were not connected to students' own existing knowledge. As these children became adults in the 1960s and 1970s, community members used processes of making things – including skills that they had learned in residential school – to reclaim authenticity for their own benefit. Residential schools were severe disruptions to the ways that knowledge was shared, transferred, and maintained, and in response, community members began to seek ways to take control of their own education, or at least to have a role in shaping narratives about them in Powell River and other local contexts. In particular,

⁷⁴ This adaptation of tradition to suit contemporary needs has been commonplace in late-twentieth-century Sliammon. Discussing research she had undertaken for the Sliammon Treaty Society Research Department, Siemthlut Michelle Washington noted that cultures have changed, and ideas that had functioned well pre-contact, such as a highly hierarchical society that even included slaves, would not be “helpful in today's world when we are trying to build a system based on equality and fairness.” Washington, “Bringing Traditional Teachings to Leadership.”

education about making things appeared on one hand to be a way of embracing colonial narratives about static communities or a “checklist” of externally-defined authenticity. But tangible nature of making things offered community members a way to trace the education of younger generations, and enabled them to make concrete arguments about their own autonomy and resilience. Sometimes, this meant replicating historical dynamics, especially in the realm of gender, but making things also became way to show how histories – including of community relationships – were reinforced over time. For Sliammon people, making things has become a tool for understanding how the past has been interpreted and communicated, not only preserved in static forms or defined by colonizing institutions.

Chapter 9: Making Things and Making Economies in Sliammon

While teaching and learning traditional skills provided community members with tools to respond to invasive institutions like residential schools, some community members have also responded to other newcomer institutions to publicize, propagate, and ultimately supplement their income through the wage economy. Since Powell River's origins were based on specific types of labour, the relationships between Sliammon and Powell River have been, in part, economic ones since the town's inception in 1909. This chapter explores the ways that community members in Sliammon have been able to engage with the wage economy through handmade things. In perhaps the most visible example of this engagement, I discuss how they have been able to use those relationships to make a living from their handmade items, particularly during the decades when Indigenous people's participation in the wage economy was limited. I then explain that while doing so, they have also used those items to reinforce public definitions of tradition that would, in turn, help to support the market that makers relied on to create demand for their work. I also explore how, in the experiences of individuals and families in twentieth-century Sliammon as they encountered the expanding wage labour economy, handmade items offered inroads to economic connections that other forms of labour could not, especially for women. Finally, I discuss how the teaching of traditional skills became more formalized in Sliammon, allowing some makers to participate in the wage labour economy through the teaching of tradition. For many makers, the wage labour economy alternately restricted and expanded opportunities for those seeking to support their families or their own reputations.

People in Sliammon were proactive in seeking out connections to local economies as they evolved with the growing involvement of newcomer institutions. Regardless of community members' skills in occupations that newcomers viewed as being largely for subsistence, the decades of disease and other hardships that community members described (and that I have discussed further in Chapter 4) required them to advocate for their own economic needs wherever possible. TUS elder Louise Bob recounted a story from the 1940s about a council member, Aupel, in which it was evident that the economic opportunities available to Sliammon people were not sufficient:

Aupel was not afraid of anything or anyone. He spoke his mind when there was a meeting, scolding Mr. Powell, he wouldn't get scared of him. I remember going with him, I was about 10 years old. They were giving the Tishosem [a Sliammon village]

people \$25.00 before Christmas. He told the Indian Agent “that is not enough. There are lots of kids and \$25.00 is not enough.” He demanded \$35.00 and they gave it to him and San Pol Yan’s wife, she used to help Aupel, her name is Tollissott. She was good, she was always talking and helping people and Henry’s father spoke Indian, he did not understand very well. Aupel spoke English to Mr. Powell.¹

Because the relationships between Sliammon and federal Indian Agents were in many cases based on financial concerns, Sliammon people’s economic status was closely tied to the way that they were perceived by newcomer institutions, both locally and federally. Their economic status also defined the skills and activities that were most crucial in making a living. Thus, even though the *idea* of tradition was not necessarily directly marketable at the time that Aupel was advocating for his community, Sliammon people relied on their existing skills at making things to make a living, as well as on other financial channels available to them.

Nonetheless, connections between ideas of tradition and the ability to make a living were by no means foreign in Sliammon when the emergence of Powell River began to define local economies. In a 1996 TUS interview, Joe Mitchell (the late father of Melvin Mitchell and husband of Corinne Mitchell) noted that when he was younger, people had been willing to pay for the services of people who knew traditional medicine:

Connie Wilson (interviewer): Was there any Indian doctors?

Joe Mitchell: I hear there used to be really strong ones before, from my grandfather, he knew how to XaX t’aum. If he XaX t’as, you would just die. Then he’ll pull his power out, sometimes it’s a snake or sometimes it’s a branch, takes out of your throat. But I caught up to that old lady that lived by the church, my mom used to massage stomachs if you were carrying a baby. She used my stomach if I wasn’t feeling well, did that to all Sue [Pielle, Joe’s sister] and them. Even my wife, she did that to her too. She used to try and show me, how to use these two fingers, all the way down with warm oil heat up the oil, my granny did it. She can tell you all about where your liver is, where your kidneys are or oh yeah, it’s a block I can feel it, your

¹ Louise Bob, interview by Kerri Timothy and Karen Galligos, transcript, 6 May 1996, TUS.9.10.11, Sliammon Treaty Society.

intestines. But they used to pay this elderly lady money in Squirrel Cove, \$5.00, I remember seeing people used to come from Church House to come and see her.²

In such instances, community members working with traditional skills (defined as such partly through the TUS interview process, as I have discussed in Chapter 2) sought compensation in the form that would be the most versatile and useful for them in the context of larger economies: cash payments allowed people with particular skills and knowledge to participate in further economic transactions beyond their specific skills.

The TUS interview process also highlighted continuity within community members' economic interactions. While the precise circumstances of their economies shifted with the birth and growth of neighbouring Powell River, community members' definitions of tradition also included particular values that reinforced makers' work and wages. Stella Timothy, for instance, drew a direct connection between making things and traditional values:

Something different for the women, and something different for the men and not too lazy when you get big. If you sleep when you are a man, that's how he is going to be for the rest of his life if a girl too, if you are working all the time when you get, you work, like to clean but if you are lazy she said you will always be in bed, they didn't like that they always got you up, no sleeping in, its like power to them. They tell you "wake up" that's why your [interviewer Kerry Timothy's] grandmother was like that, Molly Timothy, remember her, her tradition was so powerful you could never sleep you have to be up at 5 am. You have to be doing something you have to be baking, canning, that was the strongest thing, canning, baking, cooking, everything you cook everything right, uncle. So powerful, canning, pick everything, your berries, strawberries. All your apples, she did everything, blueberries, made your own jam. Jam was never store bought. Women long time ago were never lazy and they did their blankets in the river. When it gets warm like this, they wash blankets in the river.³

Diligent work, according to Stella Timothy, directly informed whether or not a person held

² Joe Mitchell, interview by Connie Wilson, 24 July 1996, TUS 38, Sliammon Treaty Society.

³ Paul and Timothy, interview.

traditional values. Making things was therefore not simply a survival or economic skill; when subsequent generations interpreted these skills, the activities also became moral arguments about what tradition should look like and how it should be enacted publicly. Makers in twentieth-century Sliammon have therefore gained a twofold benefit from their work: individually, their handmade items have supplemented their income and afforded them connections to larger economies. From the perspective of other community members, makers have also gained reputations as traditional and therefore respectable.

Placing a value on handmade items was not a consequence of a capitalist economy, however. In TUS interviews, community members described trade economies in efforts to establish inter-community networks that existed prior to contact. Thomas Albert August described trade systems as activities that supported “your everyday wants and needs,” like baskets, clothing materials, medicines, and yellow cedar from higher up in the mountains.⁴ The Kwakwaka’wakw, for instance, had seaweed, cranberries, and crab apples that were valuable in the Sliammon region, or could be transported further into the interior to trade with the Ulkatcho and Tsilhqot’in.⁵ These were items that were either made or facilitated making, and because trade networks were designed around processes of making new things, connections among communities could easily absorb new participants.⁶ Once a Hudson’s Bay Company post had been established in the nineteenth century across the strait from Sliammon in Comox, Sliammon people paddled there to trade directly with the HBC as well as with existing trading partners.⁷ Economies of handmade items were flexible and able to adapt as specific circumstances changed; trade networks were integral parts of the process of making things, so that as economic systems shifted in the twentieth century, community members found opportunities to adapt their items and processes to new markets.

At the same time, to depict these late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century environments for making things simply as opportunities overlooks the direct impacts of colonialism on Sliammon. Making things to trade was not always a matter of opportunity; on many occasions, it was a necessity for survival. Sharing stories with TUS interviewers about Sliammon’s early experiences with Europeans, Agnes McGee pointed out that disease epidemics had direct effects on the tangible

⁴ August, interview.

⁵ Evan Adams, Maynard Harry, and Laura Roddan, “Sliammon Traditional Use Study Overview Report,” 31 October 1996, SR001, Sliammon Traditional Use Study Project Background Documents, Sliammon Treaty Society.

⁶ John Sutton Lutz has elaborated on this process through his discussion of the Chinook Jargon word and concept of *makúk*, suggesting that labour can also be an object in cross-cultural transactions, and that exchange is an intercultural encounter that goes beyond the economic. See Lutz, *Makúk*.

⁷ Adams, Harry, and Roddan, “Sliammon Traditional Use Study Overview Report.”

quality of handmade items:

Sandy Timothy, my dad, was real young at the time and my grandfather, first they were making coffins with cedar, splitting cedar, and cedar this long, splitting it, somebody dies, they would put them in there, dig the grave and everybody was so sick, they couldn't get up, vomiting and their eyes started to, you know can't see, it was real bad. Pretty soon my dad was saying, my grandfather was saying that they would make the boxes not that good because they had to work fast, great big ones, two or three at a time would die and they put them together in a box. They were just busy doing boxes; sometimes they were two of them doing the coffin and the other two would go from house to house giving people, all they wanted was water, water, they won't eat, just drink water till they just die one after another.⁸

In contrast to the carefully-made burial boxes that Sliammon commissioned from Melvin Mitchell to repatriate remains in 2014, the coffins made during disease epidemics reflected the desperation that families experienced. Accounts of epidemics reinforce the fact that although makers in Sliammon found markets for their items and used new connections to their advantage, these new environments were also accompanied by new threats not only to way of life but to survival. Makers who operated in economic contexts that followed the epidemics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were working in part for survival. The opportunities that they found had grown out of the same power structures that had brought European diseases to Indigenous communities, and their reputations as keepers of tradition were motivated by those earlier histories of devastating loss.

Powell River and Sliammon interests became more entwined once transportation between the two communities became quicker with the building of roads; in other words, the canoes that community members had identified as being “genuinely” traditional to Sliammon were of less use as cars became the primary mode of transportation. Leslie Adams, who served as chief for many years, questioned earlier political or infrastructure decisions that had been made, but that explained a great deal about Sliammon people's experiences with federal and local efforts to define Indigenous people's lives: experiences to which subsequent, intentional, community-sponsored processes of making things sought to respond. Leslie Adams regretted how community leadership understood (or perhaps did not) non-Indigenous involvement in Sliammon:

⁸ McGee, interview, 21 July 1998.

Johnny Bob and all them would come visit me and we'd start talking politics. Anyway, when they were building the road through the village, I don't like this story because it sounds so foolish. It's just that D.I.A [Department of Indian Affairs]. Old Johnny Louie, Freddie Louie's grandpa now, I guess he was part of the council. He refused to let the road go through the village, so the construction was stopped right at the entrance of the village there. It was stopped there for a long time. Then the D.I.A. had a lot of meetings with the band trying to convince them to get through. What changed their minds is that D.I.A.s promised Sliammon people when the road was going through, every car going through here would be like your car. That's how the agreement was made.⁹

Leslie Adams' story is one of some embarrassment, as he referred to the council's decision as "foolish." Adapting to change was not seamless, nor did efforts to regain or maintain agency always work smoothly. Within these difficult and complicated contexts, then, narratives about tradition, as expressed through official channels like Charlie Bob's carving classes, Mary George's basket-making workshops, or the current weaving group, were not able to be wholesale solutions to Sliammon people's experiences of discrimination and racism. First contact and interactions with late 19th century federal Indian Agents subsequently led to more immediate, local racism, as Thomas Albert August explained:

It seems like the reason that we didn't keep up with the white societies education and stuff like that is because there was too much racism. They didn't want us to be equal to them and in the white schools it doesn't matter if you were smart, they were jealous. If you were smarter than them, you got picked on and if you were better looking than them you got picked on too, so everybody was jealous all the time so the native people had a hard time dealing with that, they all dropped out. They were real smart people, they just dropped out of school because of that.¹⁰

While, as Mary George explained, Sliammon people were at times able to circumvent unhelpful

⁹ Adams, interview.

¹⁰ August, interview.

structures, as in the case of nineteenth-century trading with the HBC, as Sliammon people's lives became more closely intertwined with those of Powell River residents, reliance on local knowledge was not only a form of resistance, but also a survival skill: it did not appear to have a place outside of Sliammon.

Sliammon people's participation in the wage economy did not immediately give rise to a market for handmade items or items that represented tradition; the need for physical survival took precedent when Sliammon people were marginalized from the more lucrative work that existed, for instance at the mill in Powell River. Day school teacher Basil Nicholson discussed in his early 1920s diary the kinds of economic activities that people in Sliammon undertook, and that Nicholson was tasked with monitoring (though whether he was self-appointed to the task is unclear). A new church was under construction after the previous one had burned in a fire in 1919, and some local people were involved with cutting logs to sell to the church. Others sold bread made from the flour they received as food aid, something that was not strictly permitted, which was why it had reached Nicholson's attention. Other Sliammon people were able to secure small loans from Nicholson to travel to Vancouver to sell skins.¹¹ Epidemics, closely followed by the introduction of residential schools, shaped how Sliammon people married, made and spent money, and transferred knowledge.¹² Making things within those contexts was primarily an effort at survival and providing for one's family; questions of tradition or revitalization were secondary and often not immediately pressing until several decades later.

In general, the most visible economic activities for Sliammon people in the decades immediately following the most major epidemics were activities that brought them into contact with their Powell River neighbours. Until the 1970s or so, when local and federal restrictions on Sliammon people's activities loosened, the value of handmade items was determined mainly by their buyers rather than their makers or sellers. One of the most common instances was in the realm of basket-making and -selling, particularly in the early twentieth century. Women constructed baskets to trade for clothes or food, and while they were able to barter for more attractive clothing or a small cash supplement,¹³ makers of baskets, particularly in the early and mid-twentieth century, typically made items that buyers requested, like hampers, shopping baskets, and serving trays; even

¹¹ Basil Nicholson, "Basil Nicholson Teacher's Diary, May 1921-23," December 1921, Powell River Museum and Archives.

¹² Adams, Harry, and Roddan, "Sliammon Traditional Use Study Overview Report."

¹³ Bill T., "Sliammon in the Twentieth Century: An Incomplete History Gleaned from Local Publications."

while makers also sought to showcase skill in constructing these items,¹⁴ ultimately, the baskets were luxury items for buyers but economic necessities for sellers. Particularly in the case of Sliammon, where Powell River served as a particularly nearby non-Indigenous influence, community members' contemporary discussions of baskets are in part histories of adaptations to local markets and observations of who used or needed which items.

Because of market shifts during these decades, basket-making techniques themselves underwent changes, in response to the availability and price of materials. Because of its proximity to Powell River, though, Sliammon's specific circumstances were distinct even from other nearby communities; an exhibit on baskets by the Museum at Campbell River in 2008 argued that the isolation of Indigenous communities in the region until the postwar period gave them less access to the wage labour economy, forcing them to travel to canneries or hop yards in southern B.C. and northern Washington to find work.¹⁵ Inhabitants in Sliammon certainly took part in such activities¹⁶, but the community also had closer access to the wage labour economy than, for instance, Klahoose or Homalco. The need for marketing baskets was therefore driven by class- or race-based isolation from economic opportunities, rather than geographical isolation. For community members, and for women in particular, baskets offered one of the only opportunities to access personal or individual relationships not only with wage labour, but also with other people in neighbouring Powell River.

Basket-makers in Sliammon also found their local markets in distinct ways from other Indigenous communities in the region. The demand for baskets from outside Sliammon was driven in part by the same forces that fostered basket's popularity in the broader region: the growth of the Arts and Crafts movement, which rejected mass-produced goods, the trend that began in the late nineteenth century for tourists to display their collection of Indigenous goods, and the general uptick in tourism to the Inside Passage during that time period.¹⁷ But for Sliammon specifically, tourism did not have as significant an impact as the establishment of the mill in Powell River. In contrast to the tourists passing by Campbell River, Sliammon basketmakers experienced the permanence rather than the transience of their buyers. This permanency of economic relationships helped to ensconce the power dynamics of those relationships. With the establishment of the mill

¹⁴ *Museum at Campbell River Musings*, Vol 28:2, 6–7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ When I met with Don Wilson, for instance, he recounted a story of a family member who had travelled to hopyards in Washington, and was surprised to understand the language being spoken by some of the other workers, even though they were not from anywhere near Sliammon. As they tried to solve this mystery, they determined that a myth-age flood around Sliammon had forced some people further south, where they continued to speak a similar language.

¹⁷ *Museum at Campbell River Musings*, 6–7.

and its employees' families, access points to wage labour for Sliammon people had lasting generational consequences as well: while Sliammon men sometimes became mill employees and developed connections with Powell River men that way, women continued to rely on baskets to forge similar economic relationships well into the twentieth century.¹⁸

In some instances, these long-term economic relationships extended beyond the makers themselves. Belonging to a family that had reflected across generations about the significance of making things, Corinne Mitchell recalled how some people had suggested that she give a basket to her husband's boss, but she disputed this idea: she felt that it was simply his job to be a good boss and he should not need an extra reward for doing that job, and furthermore, being treated with decency was the minimum that an Indigenous worker could expect.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the idea illustrated how women's work facilitated men's ongoing engagement with wage labour, as well as supplementing women's or families' own income.

As the economy around basket-making and -selling suggests, the contexts that created specific markets for handmade items also created larger contexts for interpreting handmade items in the wage labour economy. Handmade items were not only representatives of tradition (as understood by buyers, sellers, or later interpreters); they also formed part of community members' discussions of local economic needs and circumstances. As a significant part of his work as a community support worker, John Louie teaches men who have struggled with addictions or who have been convicted of crimes about Tla'amin spirituality and value systems. In a conversation with me, he connected historical attitudes towards work to what he saw as contemporary dependency on welfare. He commented, for instance, that the "old values" included honour and respect; in the past if you needed a house, you would have to build it, which gave it greater value.²⁰ John was quick to reinforce that colonialism had introduced harmful systems that had significant negative impacts on Sliammon, but that at the same time, the paradox was that to be successful, community members needed to be able to live and succeed within the demands of those introduced systems.²¹ In John Louie's interpretation, processes of making things were also processes of expressing a desire for success despite barriers. To engage with the wage labour economy through making things was an

¹⁸ It is also worth noting that baskets did not necessarily forge productive relationships, either at the time that women were selling their baskets, or later. In more recent years, baskets have become valuable collectors' items, fetching several thousand dollars in the 1990s, which has sometimes led to conflicts within families if a family member decides to sell a basket that other family members want to keep as an heirloom. See for instance Louie and Louie, interview.

¹⁹ Corinne Mitchell, interview, 21 July 2013.

²⁰ John Louie, interview.

²¹ Ibid.

adaptation of Tla'amin values to the introduced economic system.

By extension, histories of making things to participate in the wage economy did not only result in specific items like baskets; as those markets were established, it also became important for community members to make things that would facilitate their participation in the wage labour economy in other ways, and that would help them to adapt to life in more sedentary European dwellings, and to survival within new systems as John Louie described. Joe Mitchell told a TUS interviewer about how his family had adapted their hunting habits to ensure that they had enough duck feathers to make mattresses and pillows. He also explained how, although harvesting cedar was sparked by spiritual needs, the process facilitated many aspects of daily life, including the ability to engage with wage labour:

And that's the same thing, they used the whole tree, right from our spiritual need, you used cedar branches and you use the cedar branches for collecting herring eggs. Then you use the branches also to make basket. We just call it a clam basket because it's got a lot of holes in it and you can just rinse the clams out in the basket. All the sand washes through. And we used the bark for bailers, rope, or mats or even for clothing. They make hats out of it, the inside bark for rope and the sap wood, they used that for basket. And after that, it's the inside part of the cedar. They split that for putting little stick across the fish, Chet'os tan, or the little sticks the Qowach tan, the fish hang off. There's not one part of that cedar that our people didn't use.²²

Although clam digging was a subsistence activity, it also became a means of supplementing income that many Sliammon people today continue to practice. Although they now use commercial equipment, Charlie Bob noted that it is not as efficient as the baskets made by previous generations for the task. Given that community members only stopped using these baskets regularly twenty or thirty years ago, it is evident that people made items to support their users' participation in the wage labour economy. These items were not sold directly like the baskets of the mid-twentieth century, or the carvings of more recent decades, but rather were ways to gain entry into the wage labour economy through other means. Harvesting spiritually important materials like cedar was not only a way to maintain or construct tradition; it was also a way to incorporate tradition into the general economic success of the community. Melvin Mitchell, Joe Mitchell's son, told me a story of his

²² Joe Mitchell, interview, 24 July 1996.

parents' meeting with a DIA official for a day. They took him into the woods to explain their knowledge and share food from the forest. At the end of the day Joe Mitchell gave the official a cedar bark bailer that he had made, and explained that everything he had learned that day was contained in the bailer: that each idea and piece of knowledge is connected, making it impossible to separate out one single topic.²³ This story, intended as Melvin's lesson to me as well as a recollection of his parents, reinforced the necessity of making things for Sliammon people's ability to benefit from the wage labour economy.

Even once fewer official restrictions limited Sliammon people's ability to access the broader economy, they continued to face local barriers to economic success, which in turn underpinned some community members' approaches to making things. As the workforce began to open to Indigenous people in the 1950s and 1960s, some Indigenous leaders worried that their community members had been cut off from the skills necessary to succeed in those environments. Klahoose chief Bill Mitchell (Melvin Mitchell's grandfather) commented to the *Powell River News* in 1967 that neither Indigenous nor white people were prepared for people from his community to enter the work force: Indigenous people because they did not have the necessary skills, and white people because they had not "let go of their prejudices."²⁴ When considering this perspective in relation to a common cross-cultural transaction at the time, the sale or trade of baskets, the role of making things reinforces dynamics both within and beyond the maker's community. Making baskets allowed women to supplement a family's income in an era when most wage labour (mainly at the Powell River mill or in forestry) was available only to men. The transactions between basket-makers and -buyers were also possible because of the sense of separation between the two neighbouring communities: baskets did not transgress the divisions between people that Bill Mitchell observed, because both buyer and seller remained in the role that those in positions of power expected. A generation or so later, community members in Sliammon continued to combat similar systemic inequality, but the circumstances and motivation for making things had changed. A 1994 Powell River newspaper article appealed to global events to highlight local injustices, as reporter Darrell Bellaart wrote: "Apartheid is dead. Try telling that to Lorne August. He lives in a run-down three-bedroom, 1,100 square foot home on the Sliammon reserve, along with his wife Cecilia and four children ages 11, 10, four and 20 months. After years of neglect, his home is badly in need of work.

²³ Melvin Mitchell, interview, 24 February 2015.

²⁴ "He Paces the Floor Worrying about His People," *Powell River News*, 19 August 1967, Powell River Museum and Archives.

He just wants the living conditions most Canadians take for granted.”²⁵ These conditions remained more than twenty years after a 1973 survey that found that eighty percent of Sliammon homes were condemned.²⁶ Yet while there may have been a growing awareness of problems of racial discrimination in a general sense, less than a year later, the same newspaper expressed incredulity that racism could continue to exist in Powell River: “Racism exists here in Powell River? You’ve got to be kidding. Believe it, say two Sliammon residents who spoke at a symposium on racism last week. Powell River may not be a hotbed of racial strife, but racism certainly exists, says Lindsay Louie, who coaches soccer at Max Cameron Secondary School.”²⁷ The gaps in Powell River people’s awareness of Sliammon concerns indicated an ongoing breakdown in communication between the two communities. For people in Sliammon, one way to bridge communication barriers was through making things, and furthermore, by making those things available for purchase in Powell River. This allowed people in both communities to access familiar economic transactions to facilitate at least a few moments of conversation about the needs of local people.

Both newspaper articles were published ten to twenty years after Sliammon had first undertaken economic projects specifically designed, at least in part, to facilitate connections between Powell River and Sliammon. Many of these projects were not specifically designed to capitalize on ideas of culture or tradition — they included a drive-in theatre,²⁸ home renovation and construction, and improved water and sewer hook-ups²⁹ — but they coincided with initiatives that drew upon more fluid connections and movement between Sliammon and Powell River. In particular, the First Nation operated a shop, *Texem Ay*, in a Powell River mall that sold local carvings and other craftwork.³⁰ The community also compiled a directory of “Individual Businesses, Crafters, Hobbies & Talents,” comprising everything from “traditional” crafts like cedar bark work or carving, to forestry contracting, knitting, bike repair, and catering, to tourist outfitters.³¹ Both the directory and the shop represented a convergence of economic need and opportunity: makers continued to seek ways to supplement their income, but could now appeal to narratives of equality and justice to

²⁵ “Housing: Rotting Floors, Leaking Roofs Not Uncommon,” *Town Crier*, 6 June 1994, 1, Powell River Museum and Archives.

²⁶ Biagi, “Sliammon in the 20th Century: Brief History: Trials, Tribulation and Triumph.”

²⁷ Darrell Bellaart, “Racism Exists Here, Natives Say,” *Town Crier*, 11 December 1995, sec. A3.

²⁸ “Drive-In Theatre Opens This Week,” *Powell River News*, 25 July 1974, sec. B5, Powell River Museum and Archives.

²⁹ The band council specifically asked construction companies not to send workers from Powell River and instead hire locally, thereby creating 184 jobs from 1982 to 1984. Sliammon Band Council, “Sliammon Council Annual Report,” 22 January 1984, Powell River Museum and Archives.

³⁰ “Sliammon Band Store Features Works by Coast Native Artists,” *Powell River News*, 3 July 1991, sec. A6, Powell River Museum and Archives.

³¹ “Directory of Individual Businesses, Crafters, Hobbies & Talents,” n.d., Sliammon Handouts/Pamphlets, Powell River Museum and Archives.

expand their customer base, while also addressing local questions of tradition that had become increasingly central in discussions about Sliammon's needs.

At the same time that selling handmade items offered some makers the chance to highlight the reach of their own traditional knowledge, others interpreted aspects of the wage economy to be antithetical to tradition. Defining tradition in the context of the 1990s Traditional Use Study, Linda and Eugene Louie commented that in other communities, people share readily with one another, but, as Eugene stated "our people used to be like that years ago but now I see that it has changed."³² Linda elaborated that people who had an abundance of deer or elders would now sell them, even to elders, whereas Linda felt that elders should simply be given a share.³³ More recently, Melvin Mitchell has stated that he will not sell his carvings, but is willing to trade for them (though he joked that he would be willing to trade "for a picture of the Queen or some of her friends" — that is, a picture of the Queen that happens to be printed on a twenty-dollar bill).³⁴ Because Melvin frequently visits local schools to teach carving as well as general Tla'amin history and knowledge, his conversations with me have been focused on explaining the content and significance of tradition. Citing elders he knew growing up, Melvin recounted to me that he felt his wealth was his patience and his caring for others, and so he tries to live up to that.

In part, this takes place for him through carving, since carving allows him to reflect on the value of the process of making it: to carve even a miniature decorative paddle, his grandfather would have had to walk three days up the mountain to collect yellow cedar. While there, it would have been practical to hunt, gather medicines, and process the wood for future use. In the meantime, the children and Melvin's granny would be at home, putting in work to look after the household and other elders in the community. All of that work, Melvin explained, was embedded even in the smallest carving. The value of the objects, then, was not in their monetary worth or their finished form, but in the relationships and knowledge that helped to create them.³⁵

These perspectives, the use of traditionally-made items for economic gain in earlier decades of the twentieth century represented the separation and subjugation that Sliammon people experienced; it was a necessity rather than an opportunity to be pursued when others were available. For most community members, though, the distinction between personal gain and adherence to tradition is not so clear-cut. Charlie Bob, for instance, spent most of his conversations with me not

³² Louie and Louie, interview.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Mitchell, interview, 13 July 2013.

³⁵ Mitchell, interview, 21 July 2013.

discussing specific ideas of tradition, but rather the quality and marketability of his own work. Recalling a Coast Salish elders' gathering where he had a table to sell his cedar bark hats along with other vendors, he described: "I make [the hats] real thin, and that way they don't wear out. [Customers] find mine really good, and my table just went out right away. They bought all my hats."³⁶ Regardless of his commercial acumen or desire to "move product," Charlie Bob's reputation as a knowledgeable carver and resource harvester is not damaged by the fact that he also accepts payment to clean and process community members' summer salmon catch, or to carve a sign for the newly-built health centre, as evidenced by several chief and councils' offers over the years to pay for Charlie to attend craft marketing classes like the one that Don Wilson attended.³⁷ For Charlie, the commercial aspects of his work have never been antithetical to the other purposes and outcomes of that work. The affirmation from people beyond Sliammon — his learning of beadwork at residential school, his Powell River customers, or the government programs that offered funds for him to teach carving -- of Charlie's authenticity as a Tla'amin carver have therefore not been inventions of tradition, but rather have allowed him to carry greater authority as someone who understands Sliammon definitions of tradition.

As Charlie Bob's history of making things suggests, even when institutions like residential schools sought to market ideas of authentic indigeneity in specific ways, makers themselves instead adapted those narratives for their own autonomous economic endeavours.³⁸ Alice Ravenhill discovered this herself over the course of her organizing; in a series of correspondence with Indian Agent Robert Howe, the two discussed how they might reconcile their goals of maximum publicity for makers with makers' own interests in determining for themselves how to market and sell their work. Howe commented to Ravenhill that although this was the preferred sales model for DIA, the makers he knew were hesitant to send their work to stores on consignment, because it removed the items from their physical and financial control.³⁹ Ravenhill replied that makers also felt that their handmade items would not receive as high a price as other kinds of work, but also that the hesitation she observed was due to Indigenous makers being "intermittent in their periods of industry needing sympathetic supervision and understanding of their temperaments to stimulate them to work to

³⁶ Bob, interview, 20 January 2014.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Paige Raibmon has discussed how Indigenous people in other parts of B.C. undertook these endeavours during the nineteenth century, particularly in the realm of politics and pageantry. Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*. It is evident from tracing Sliammon and other Indigenous makers' work through the various institutions that it encountered that Indigenous people have continued to portray themselves in particular ways for particular gain in ongoing contexts.

³⁹ Robert Howe to Alice Ravenhill, 9 April 1941, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 2, Correspondence January-March 1941, BC Archives.

order.”⁴⁰ The organization’s economic goals did not necessarily fit with makers’ own goals for their labour and income. Dealing with their own business autonomously allowed makers to juggle other work, family, and community responsibilities while supplementing their income with handmade items, as Charlie Bob did after his release from the hospital. They were able to tap into the narratives about authenticity that organizations like Ravenhill’s helped to reinforce, to find audiences for their work, but by circumventing the precise structures that organizations suggested, they were able to take precisely what they needed from the narratives of outside institutions.

One avenue for bridging traditional values and economic gain has been through teaching traditional skills for pay. As discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 2, recent decades have seen a push to reinforce ideas of tradition in Sliammon, in efforts to address what many community members see as change for the worse. As part of that process, some have developed or renewed an interest in making traditional items like baskets or carvings. For a few makers, developing these skills has allowed them to sell their items to supplement their income. For most, however, undertaking these skills has been a largely personal endeavour. This has meant that since the 1980s, a body of learners and would-be learners of traditional skills has emerged, seeking instruction and ongoing guidance. By extension, then, those makers who had gained reputations as skillful in their crafts also had the opportunity to gain income from teaching their skills. Teaching tradition became a means of accessing the wage labour economy.

Although it is only in the past thirty years or so that the teaching of tradition as a paid skill has become common in Sliammon, such work builds on earlier knowledge transactions. In earlier decades, wage economies around knowledge had sometimes been created and fostered by visiting ethnographers who sometimes paid community members to share their knowledge. At other times, it was not clear whether the ethnographer paid cash, but the interviewee gained authority with future readers of the ethnographic work, from having been ensconced as a knowledgeable person. When anthropologist Homer Barnett visited Sliammon, Klahoose, and Homalco in 1935, his key informant in Klahoose was Rose Mitchell, who was 32 years old at the time.⁴¹ The choice to rely on a younger person was somewhat at odds with ethnographic methods of the time that recommended speaking with elders to gain the most long-term (or “authentic”) perspective. Yet in subsequent decades, Rose Mitchell and her family gained renown as advocates for tradition. Her husband, Bill Mitchell, was

⁴⁰ Alice Ravenhill to Robert Howe, 18 April 1941, MSS 1116 Society for the Furtherance of Indian Arts and Crafts, Vol 1 File 2, Correspondence January-March 1941, BC Archives.

⁴¹ Dorothy I. D. Kennedy and Randy Bouchard, “Utilization of Fishes, Beach Foods, and Marine Animals by the Tl’uhus Indian People of British Columbia,” December 1974, CH013, Sliammon Treaty Society.

chief of Klahoose in the 1960s. Her son and daughter-in-law, Joe and Corinne Mitchell, worked in politics and community advocacy in Sliammon. Her grandson, Melvin Mitchell, teaches carving and other Tla'amin knowledge in local schools. It was not Rose's work with Homer Barnett that directly granted her family authority; they drew upon their existing knowledge and connections to take on community leadership roles. But several decades later, when Sliammon began the task of negotiating a treaty, Rose Mitchell's knowledge, as published by Homer Barnett and later by Kennedy and Bouchard, became a key part of that process, and allowed a broad scope of community members to access knowledge that was previously unavailable to them. For her descendants today, they are able to build their own reputations, including in as teachers of tradition, in part on Rose's established authority, which in turn allowed them to make a living from that knowledge.

A little over ten years before Homer Barnett visited the Sliammon area, Alfred Carmichael, who in addition to writing a celebratory settlement history of Powell River also collected "Indian legends" on and around Vancouver Island, found that following the visits of anthropologists like Edward Sapir, stories had taken on commercial value. Potential informants would ask to be paid the two dollars per story that Sapir had offered, and Carmichael eventually agreed, finding that the price was a good bargain for him, "as several stories took more than one day to tell."⁴² Based on this description of methodologies, it is reasonable to assume that Homer Barnett also paid Rose Mitchell, at least nominally, for her input into his research. As a woman with a young family living in the somewhat isolated community of Klahoose, such opportunities would have been valuable for Rose not necessarily because of their long-term impacts, but because of their immediate financial help. Sharing knowledge via the wage economy has deep roots for Sliammon people today, and has developed into consistent opportunities for holders of specific types of knowledge.

Charlie Bob is one of the most consistent beneficiaries of the economic benefits of teaching tradition. On several of my visits with him, he has shown me the photo albums he keeps as a record of the classes he has taught. He explained that he receives phone calls most days to teach for Sliammon Health, the treaty office or band office, the on-reserve daycare, or in private homes. The band also funds and maintains workshop space for him and his weekly carving classes.⁴³ Despite his high demand, Charlie maintains that the prices he charges are magnanimously reasonable. As an example, he cited the sign he made for the new health building on the reserve, for which he was paid a thousand dollars. He recounted the bargaining process with the band, in which he had insisted that

⁴² Carmichael, "Indian Legends of the West Coast of Vancouver Island."

⁴³ Charlie Bob, interview by Katya MacDonald, 20 July 2013.

they not pay him more than that even when they pushed.⁴⁴ While Charlie has made the bulk of his living from teaching and other work related to ideas of tradition, part of the reason why his services continue to be in demand is his habit of charging lower prices than others undertaking similar work. His advertising brochures, prepared by a family member, reflect his appeal to as broad a market as possible; the brochure signs off, “From my culture to yours, enjoy!” suggesting that at least part of his public audience is from beyond Sliammon. By extension, then, his teaching work has not simply been an opportunity; it has also grown out of his reading of the ways that demand for his work has changed according to not only community interests, but also interests of visitors and passers-by.

These shifting interests have been evident in the ways that classes and instructors have moved in and out of popularity. In addition to the basket-making classes that Mary George taught in the 1980s for new and experienced weavers, in the 1980s the band funded diverse other initiatives, with the idea that the finished items would attract attention from beyond Sliammon, or would build capacity for community members to move further with their work. The basket classes had received inquiries from gift shops in Vancouver that were interested in purchasing items from the class, while another group of community members had worked to produce a children’s book based on the Tla’amin story of Mink and Cloud to sell at Expo ‘87.⁴⁵ Both of these possibilities arose partly because makers could capitalize on a marketable idea of tradition, but also because there was a market for the more educational or didactic aspects of tradition that makers sought to foster. Even within teaching pursuits that were not directly intended to be traditional, community members found ways to place relative or monetary value on traditional items: a 1987 boys’ soccer team held a fundraising raffle, in which the first prize was a mask carved by Jackie Timothy, second prize was a \$100 gift certificate for a sporting goods store, and third prize was a cord of wood.⁴⁶ By comparing a carved mask to a concrete monetary value, the fundraiser’s organizers made an explicit statement about the value of tradition in concrete terms. These patterns that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s of explicitly valuing and teaching tradition have continued into the present day in Sliammon. When the teaching of tradition became an opportunity for economic gain for instructors, alongside growing availability and interest in learning, processes of making things moved from being individual pursuits to community-sponsored programs that were intended to reflect local values.

The cedar bark hat-making class that I attended in 2015 reinforced the relationship between teaching as wage labour, and local interests in ideas of tradition. For the community members in the

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ ~~THEKORV06~~ May 1986, Neh” Motl 1984-1987, Powell River Museum and Archives.

⁴⁶ ~~THEKORV07~~ July 1987, Neh” Motl 1984-1987, Powell River Museum and Archives.

class, this visual expression of local connections to resources like cedar has grown out of motivations that referred not only to historical antecedents, but also more recent history in which those traditions have come under threat from colonial institutions. The class was taught by Ivan Rosypskye from Bella Bella, a community further north where some Sliammon people have extended family connections, who had learned to make cedar hats on a pan-Salish organized canoe journey in 2001. He now makes a living largely by teaching. In other words, he has been able to capitalize on a relatively recent trend in made items. This is not to say that cedar bark's growing popularity is not also meaningful to Ivan and to others who work with it; rather, the fact that it has become possible in recent decades to earn a living from the teaching of newly widespread traditions highlights a history of tradition that is shaped by changing uses of the past to meet contemporary needs.

Along with teaching tradition as wage labour, though, some community members have also cited teaching *as* an aspect of tradition, and therefore an opportunity for community members to ensure that their own institutions responded to local histories as well as histories of encounter with outside institutions. Some community members have cited knowledge of ideas of tradition as a linear process or even progress narrative. Melvin placed these ideas into a twentieth-century temporal context when he explained to me that he had grown up in a “sweet spot” of learning from elders: people ten years older than him had attended residential school, while people ten years younger were born after many of the elders in Melvin's life (those with the closest connections to the early-contact era) had died. This, he felt, was why people much older than he are just now becoming interested in learning carving: “it took them this long to catch up.”⁴⁷ Just as some twentieth-century ethnographers depicted Indigenous cultures as being in a state of decline, Melvin saw the reclamation of culture or tradition as a measurable process as well.

In a similar vein, Betty Wilson observed that some elders do not see older items like family members' baskets as valuable, and when asked about items that they remembered older family members having, these elders did not know where they had ended up.⁴⁸ They were not inherently valuable items, but accumulated meaning over time, in response to community members' perceptions of change in Sliammon. Teaching and learning tradition, then, have become ways of institutionalizing ideas of tradition, as they have sought to recreate authenticity as well as wage labour. The skills that community members have taught do not necessarily represent wholesale

⁴⁷ Mitchell, interview, 24 February 2015.

⁴⁸ Wilson, interview, 21 July 2013.

definitions of what is traditional, but rather, they serve as tools for deciphering how historical relationships have shaped the narratives of today.

Handmade items in Sliammon reveal and reflect the complex nature of relationships among Sliammon people and the newcomer institutions that they have encountered throughout the twentieth century. Histories of handmade items within newcomer institutions show why particular community responses to colonizing institutions have developed. By adopting ethnographic or commercial definitions of art and marketability, community members helped to create markets for their own work: a twofold process that on one hand sought to unseat the power of outside institutions in Sliammon, but at the same time used those channels to reassert ideas of tradition or authenticity that allowed makers to continue to make a living despite economic changes. Expectations of marketability and economic self-sufficiency also underpinned residential schools' motivations for teaching skills that they defined as traditional, whether or not students and their communities understood them in the same way. While a few students were able to use these skills to their own economic advantage, a larger legacy for processes of making things in Sliammon was the teaching of traditional skills as a direct way of asserting resilience in response to the cultural genocide of residential schools.

Simultaneously, Sliammon people's marginalized relationship with the wage labour economy as it changed in Powell River over the course of the twentieth century informed the ways that they could use their handmade goods. Handmade items were not only items to sell or trade; they also sometimes facilitated individuals' participation in wage labour, and as teaching of traditional skills became more institutionalized in Sliammon, a few makers were also able to participate in wage labour through their teaching of tradition. Throughout the twentieth century, makers of handmade items asserted their ideas of authenticity and continuity in response to the local effects of newcomer institutions, efforts that continue today. The processes of revitalization that makers and learners engage with are not simply processes of restating the past; they also directly speak to changing local realities like shifting relationships between Powell River and Sliammon, treaty negotiations, and continuing to assert Sliammon's permanency in the region.

Conclusion

In 2014, a group of women from the Gitga'at First Nation crocheted a giant chain to string across the Douglas Channel, in a tangible statement of protest against the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline.¹ While the apparent novelty of their action made headlines around the world, the relationships among local needs, sociopolitical statements, gender, narratives, and agency were not new. As my focused work with community members in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon has suggested, Indigenous communities and individual makers of objects have engaged with tangible, changing histories that have a purpose: to respond to the needs of their families and communities. Those needs were often shaped by official government policy towards Indigenous people, along with the more “informal” expectations of non-Indigenous people from beyond the communities of how Indigenous people should make a living. In the latter part of the twentieth century, these interactions began to change rapidly in some ways, as governments and Indigenous communities alike began to seek economic development or opportunity (though often in conflicting ways), and community members sought to reinforce their distinctness and legitimacy through tangible statements, symbols, and arguments about their recent pasts.

Thus, this dissertation is about histories of making things, but it is also about negotiating expectations. When I first spoke about my dissertation to Jules Daigneault, with whom I had conversed on many other occasions about other topics, he was immediately enthusiastic. He argued that he was one of the only people in Ile-a-la-Crosse who made the flat-bottomed wooden skiffs that continue to be commonplace on the waterways of northwestern Saskatchewan, though less frequently than they were before commercial motorboats were easily accessible and affordable. Jules envisioned that I could visit him at his home workshop, to photograph each stage of construction on a skiff and compile the images along with his stories into a book that would be used as an educational tool in the local schools.

When Corinne Mitchell worked in Vancouver during the several years between her husband's death and her own retirement and return to Sliammon, she became involved with a project that also sought to link values and skills. The Aboriginal Diabetes Awareness, Prevention, and Teaching (ADAPT) program decided in 2003 to compile a cookbook for those dealing with dietary restrictions. Corinne, reflecting on her grandparents' sharing of stories alongside food, proposed that elders come together with project participants to recreate such an atmosphere. The

¹ “Northern Gateway Pipeline Protest: Crochet Yarn Blockade Stretches Across Douglas Channel,” *Huffington Post*, 20 June 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/06/20/northern-gateway-pipeline-protest-yarn_n_5514435.html.

“Elders From All Nations Cookbook,” as it came to be called, was a point of pride for Corinne because of its success in forging trust among all those involved, in a context – a disease that may be linked to the decline of sourcing, processing, and eating local, traditional foods – where many of the participants felt they had little agency.

Corinne’s and Jules’ interests in making things were, of course, separate and distinct from each other in several important ways. Corinne found that the cookbook helped to forge a sense of belonging and empowerment among Indigenous women living in Vancouver, often away from their home communities, even though the original intent of the project was simply to create a resource for those wishing to cook more healthy food at home. Jules hoped to impart his own knowledge to younger generations in his home community of Ile-a-la-Crosse, a desire sparked by his assessment that contemporary youth are exposed to more negative influences than they had been in his generation, but also by his interest in remaining an authoritative resource on traditional knowledge in Ile-a-la-Crosse. But these diverse motivations for creating tools to assist community members in learning specific skills indicate that responses to histories of colonialism remain necessary, and that they continue to change to meet local needs.

When community members spoke about histories of making, they also spoke implicitly about the economic, political, social, and personal motivations for making, often calling into question scholarly distinctions between items made for traditional or profit, familial or public, or personal or political uses. Times when handmade items were most visible to non-Indigenous people were not always times when makers and their families saw benefits of that visibility. However, without discounting the significant ongoing legacies of colonialism that Indigenous people continue to face, some community members have also been able to see economic gain from increased public attention to Indigenous objects. As emblems of tradition, handmade items became symbols of political movements acting in opposition to colonialism. As commercial goods, they provided means for non-Indigenous buyers to experience the “exoticism” of Indigenous communities without having to engage directly with the economic challenges that those communities were currently facing. In that same role, these items also offered economically marginalized individuals opportunities to provide for their families, at least as long as the market, driven largely by non-Indigenous consumers, held fast.

Thus, handmade items also illustrated labour histories of people who were not able to access wage labour or subsistence occupations that were predominant in much of the twentieth century, especially in Ile-a-la-Crosse due to its isolation, but also in Sliammon. These histories were also

gendered, in part because of historical divisions of labour that, to some extent, have carried through to the present day in the realm of making things, but mainly because women in both Sliammon and Ile-a-la-Crosse faced disproportionate barriers to many forms of paid work, and some were left vulnerable when their husbands died or were frequently absent trapping or hunting.

Furthermore, processes of making things sometimes became political or interpretive endeavours as well, because in ways that were less obvious with finished objects, the processes of making could be collective activities. Indeed, those processes could become commercialized along with objects when, through earmarked funding and increased local interest, teaching these skills became an economic endeavour. A common feature of all of these experiences of handmade items, though, has been in the way that community members today and in recent years have described them as traditional objects representing traditional skills and knowledge. Given the dramatically-shifting roles that handmade items have held and that this dissertation has depicted, though, the meaning of tradition has changed significantly as well, coming to prominence in community members' public responses to colonial legacies particularly from the late 1960s onward. Community members' processes of making things have shown that tradition is an idea with a history that has changed over time; although handmade items have been tangible and consistent, community members' reasons for making and interpreting things have been dynamic. In other words, tradition is an argument about the past.

I therefore complicate the static definitions of tradition that were cultivated by ethnographers and commercial markets for Indigenous-made items, yet without discounting the fact that tradition is a concept that has resonated increasingly strongly with community members as their interactions with settler institutions expanded over the course of the twentieth century. I show that tradition is not only a philosophical or theoretical idea created with a singular expectation in mind; it has also been closely linked to individual people's social, political, and economic realities. As a result, community members' individual perspectives and interpretations of their experiences have been crucial in shaping their own and responding to others' expectations of what tradition has looked like since the 1930s. A focus on processes of making things illuminates and elucidates the processes of making histories as well. Indigenous communities and individual makers of objects have continually engaged with directly with tangible histories, and they have done so to address the needs of their families and communities. While my work has focused on two specific communities, the insights and conclusions I have drawn are not necessarily only local and specific. Making things offered ways to respond to colonialism and to reassert belonging and agency, not only by producing symbols of

identities, but also by providing economic opportunities, and serving as a tool for interpreting past experiences. Therefore, this dissertation sits at the centre of a historiographical web, drawing together gender histories, labour histories, and histories of ideas: concepts with implications beyond strictly Indigenous histories. Forefronting community members' perspectives helps me to write in a way that is faithful to their stories, and has furthermore given me the opportunity to subtly challenge and advance existing scholarship on tradition, authenticity, and representation.

Beyond drawing diverse bodies of scholarship into conversation with one another, my long-standing community-engaged scholarship also makes methodological arguments. My relationships with community members have not only been processes of gathering information; they have also been processes of interpreting knowledge both to and with me. Taking direction from community members, as well as attending to Indigenous scholars' critiques of existing historical approaches, has important methodological implications. Negotiating relationships with multiple distinct communities means that it is particularly crucial to understand local cultural, political, and economic experiences. Navigating protocols, be they formalized or simply articulated verbally by community members, was not only a process for me of gaining access to information; it was also a process of guiding me to ensure that I placed community members' perspectives in contexts that were faithful to their own experiences and understandings. This approach additionally worked against replicating historic power imbalances in research relationships.

Since my work is based in two communities very distinct from each other, it also provides a methodological example of how to discuss histories of ideas that have been common to many communities, while continuing to emphasize the significance of local perspectives. Discussing these larger ideas from more specific perspectives also enables me to complicate existing scholarship that is specific to individual communities, by exploring how local histories are not isolated from larger historical phenomena. By drawing together these historiographical discussions that have been isolated from each other or within a specific region, I emphasize that tradition, as it has been represented by handmade items, is a concept with its own histories that have been defined and debated through processes of making things.

These methodological arguments cannot be separated from historiographical discussions, because histories of making things that community members have depicted are ongoing. Tradition is a tool for responding to contemporary concerns, present-day interpretations cannot be separated from past events. My work has therefore been a part of some of those present-day interpretations as well. Underpinning my discussion objects have also been efforts to question how my changing and situational role within the

community shapes my eventual historical analysis. The ethnographer Clifford Geertz has argued that ethnographic research is not a process of seeking absolutes, but instead is found in “transient examples of shaped behaviour.”² This notion is particularly significant for graduate students, who are tasked with finding cohesive overviews of community histories and research practices while being transient themselves, both physically and in terms of their learning processes and shifting perspectives in the community. It is tempting at times to seek a linear view of “progress” of historical knowledge and understanding within communities, and Geertz’s concept of “thick description” – that is, the deep and layered discussion of the contexts in which researchers gain knowledge – is in part a response to quests for empiricism in anthropology, or the assumption that ethnography takes place within a controlled environment. By explaining the contexts in which I heard and interpreted narratives, I have sought to reinforce that objects and ideas of tradition have not been static or uniform across entire communities; rather, like my own research, they have been part of individuals’ analyses of the past and its significance in the present.

Yet at the same time, completing a dissertation also demands the completion of work within a controlled time frame, in the end regardless of the unpredictable nature of working with and relying on many places and individuals. Political changes, an influx of fresh salmon needing to be processed, deaths in the community, bad weather, and forest fires, along with more expected interpersonal scheduling conflicts have meant that along with my inherent transience as a graduate student, processes of learning and analysis have been transient and shifting as well. The experience I have gained in asking questions about histories in Ile-a-la-Crosse and Sliammon has not been linear. Accordingly, the conclusions that I have drawn about these histories are closely tied to the contexts in which my conversations, interviews, and experiences took place: contexts that I have sought to make as explicit as possible. The relationships I have formed cannot speak for themselves, because they are defined in part by the contexts in which community members and I have experienced them. When considering community members’ histories, I have expected to seek out change over time in my own work as well, since as Narayan notes, researchers also experience shifts in their relationships with their research.³ In other words, the act of research itself is a historicized and interpretive practice, and this dissertation represents one outcome of those processes.

The circumstances, contexts, and backgrounds to the conversations that I have had with community members have directly informed what I have learned and interpreted in my encounters with processes of making things. The interviews that I have conducted and that I have referenced throughout this dissertation can not be divorced from their origins. Interviews alone do not encapsulate historical and contemporary

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 10.

³ Narayan, “How Native Is the Native Anthropologist?” 672.

knowledge (either mine or community members'), since my participation in and observation of (at times seemingly unrelated) contemporary events, interactions, and circumstances have helped to give me a basis for comparison of change over time, and offered insights into the ways that family and community networks shape power dynamics. The questions I have asked and conversations I have followed in formal interviews have grown in part out of my efforts to deepen my contextual understandings as well as my factual knowledge about the research topic itself.

Thus, this dissertation has been about making things, but also about making histories. Processes and histories of making things have helped to show how dynamics within a community – particularly those around gender and class or economic status – affected both responses to and experiences of colonialism. Community members' relationships with handmade items reveal those dynamics, because a focus on processes of making things offers insight into the ways that individuals' experiences and understandings of the past did not always fit tidily into broad narratives of community histories. Nor did the ways that individuals interpreted their activities of making things in the same way that others did, especially in time periods when emphasizing tradition over survival was possible mainly for those who did not need to make things to survive economically. When making things became lucrative, its status as a traditional activity became more important to makers. Of course, interpretation of the past is by no means an activity limited to specific time periods or economic conditions, but when narratives (either from Indigenous communities as a whole, or from individuals within those communities) are marginalized by the ongoing impacts of colonialism, the complexities within those histories are sometimes buried. Looking at the past through a lens of handmade items selected by community members themselves reveals how making things and making historical arguments go hand in hand.

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Appendix 1: Overview of interview methodologies

In accordance with a submission requirement of the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, here I provide a brief explanation of my oral history interview procedures. While I elaborate on my processes of community-engagement and relationship-building in the introduction to this dissertation, and emphasize that these processes are central to ethical scholarship in this field, this appendix describes the specific context of interviews.

Following community approval of my research, and the approval of my Behavioural Research Ethics application through the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Office, my process of conducting interviews began with conversations and visits to the communities, speaking with knowledge keepers, elders, community organizers, and political leaders in both communities regarding my research project. I also worked to get to know community members through existing connections from previous research, as well as through assisting with community events. When visiting or interviewing a community member, I would generally bring a small gift, such as a jar of homemade preserves, in appreciation for their time, and in an effort to be a courteous guest in their homes and communities.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured or unstructured; typically, I began with a brief explanation of my research, and of the consent form procedure (see Appendix 2). Then, I would ask community members about their family, how long they had lived in the community, and any other introductory details they felt were important to share. I would then ask them to tell me more about the items that people in the community had historically made, whether members of their families were involved in such processes, and how those processes had changed over time. Following these initial discussions, the interview would proceed unstructured, allowing participants to explain to me any topics or ideas that were of particular significance to them. Often these further conversations focused on histories of making things, as related to my dissertation topic, but they also frequently delved into related discussions of local social, political, and economic histories more generally.

The duration of the interviews was determined by participants' interests and schedules, but typically lasted around an hour. When my and community members' availability allowed, I endeavoured to visit with one-on-one or interview each participant at least twice, to allow me to clarify questions and participants to elaborate on their ideas. At the end of each interview, the community member and I would go through the consent form in detail, to ensure that participants were aware of the opportunity to place limits or stipulations on my use of the interviews, or to withdraw entirely. None of the community members I spoke with wished to place any conditions or make any changes to their interviews. Each person I interviewed receives a CD copy of the interview recording, and recordings will also be housed in libraries and archives in Sliammon and Ile-a-la-Crosse for future use by community members.

Appendix 2: Sample consent form

Consent Form

My name is Katya MacDonald, and I am a PhD student in History at the University of Saskatchewan. My dissertation topic, entitled “Making Histories and Narrating Things: Histories of Handmade Objects in Two Indigenous Communities,” looks at the objects that community members have made now and in the past (especially in the 20th century), and how people have used those objects to portray aspects of their history and culture.

As part of this research, I would like to interview you about items (e.g. crafts, food, clothing, tools, etc.) that you and your family have made over time, and why. I will be interviewing participants both in Ile-a-la-Crosse, SK and in Sliammon, B.C. Your contribution is very valuable to me, and I will respect your wishes regarding the interview. Participation is voluntary, and the amount of time you wish to spend is entirely up to you. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time or to refuse to answer any question you do not wish to, with no explanation necessary. At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to make changes, or to withdraw entirely.

I would like to record the interview on an audio recorder, but if you would prefer not to be recorded, I will take notes by hand instead. You will receive a recording of your interview(s) or interview notes to review, and have the opportunity to make changes at any time. As well, copies of the recordings or notes from Sliammon participants will be stored with the Sliammon research centre, while those from Ile-a-la-Crosse participants will be stored at the Ile-a-la-Crosse public library. Originals of the recordings or interview notes will be stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Saskatchewan for 5 years following the completion of my dissertation, at which point they will be destroyed. In addition, a copy of my dissertation will be stored in the Sliammon research centre and in the Ile-a-la-Crosse public library. Your contribution to my project (potentially including direct quotations) will be fully acknowledged in the archived records and in my completed dissertation, unless you request anonymity. I may also use information or quotations from your interview in conference presentations or journal articles stemming from my thesis research. Please be aware, however, that if you wish to remain anonymous, others may still be able to identify you based on what you have said.

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca (306) 966-2975, or toll free at (888) 966-2975.

If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to contact me (Katya MacDonald – ph: 306-281-0876; e-mail: katya.macdonald@usask.ca) or my supervisor (Keith Carlson – ph: 306-966-5902; e-mail: keith.carlson@usask.ca).

Conditions:

None

I have read the consent form and I agree to be interviewed. I will receive a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Mailing address (for copies of recordings)

Signature of Interviewer

Date

Date(s) of Interview(s)