

Nuxalk History

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We, the Nuxalkmc, have always had close ties to our natural environment, to the land and the water. Families have Smayustas, or creation stories, about where we first descended to the earth. These stories have been passed on through countless generations, maintaining the close tie each Nuxalkmc has to the land and origins of each family. Our histories, including our dances, songs, crests, house poles and names tell us who we are, who we continue to be.

Following the arrival of settlers to what is now known as British Columbia, Canada, the smallpox epidemic in the 1860s completely wiped out many Nuxalk villages, and devastated countless others, taking with their lives many smayustas that can never be resurrected.

As survivors came together in Q'umk'uts' Village near Bella Coola, smayustas began merging, simplifying the once extremely complex relationships and associated rights and responsibilities of individuals and families. The surviving families of those villages are the ancestors of the families who today make up the Nuxalk Nation. These families can still tell you which village they are traditionally from:

- Nuxalk (Bella Coola Valley) people are called Nuxalkmc
- Ats'aaxlh (South Bentick) people are called Taliyuumc
- Kwatna people are called Kwalhnamc
- Kimsquit people are called Suts'lhmc
- Ista (King Island) people are called Istamc
- Nusxiq' (Green Bay) people are called Nuxiq'mc

in 1880, significantly affecting the lives and land of the Nuxalk. In 1884, the Indian Act banned the Potlatch -the centerpiece of Nuxalk identity, government and cultural connections.

Through the Potlatch , a system of traditional government where family affiliations, responsibilities, transfers and ownership of property, acknowledgements of births, deaths, marriages and chieftainships were acknowledged and legalized. By banning the Potlatch, the process of Nuxalk governance and keeping the Smayustas alive was severely restricted.

The Potlatch ban remained in effect between 1884 and 1951. For nearly 70 years, the Potlatch was deemed illegal and anyone caught participating in one faced imprisonment. Despite the attempts to destroy the Nuxalk way of life, the dedication of the people kept the traditions alive and this has been passed on to present generations of Nuxalkmc. It took great wisdom and vision of the surviving ancestors and families to ensure the continued survival of our people.

1862-1863 - Native villages in the Bella Coola Valley area were decimated by a smallpox epidemic. Some estimates put the population reduction at 70-90 percent.

1867 - Hudson's Bay Company established a post in Bella Coola, first on a boat and later at a permanent post on the south side of the Bella Coola River, next to Q'umk'uts. In 1882 the business and property were sold to a HBC employee, John Clayton, whose family continued to operate the store into the early 1900s.

1877 - Kimsquit Bombings. In 1877 the Royal Navy, with a Captain Harris commanding, shelled the Kimsquit village in retaliation for an attack on a steamer, the George S. Wright, in Queen Charlotte Sound in 1873. Rumours uncovered in 1877, by Harris using a Tsimshian Indian as interpreter, implicated the Kimsquit in the murder of the crew. Seemingly without the precaution of verifying the validity of these accusations, the authorities in March of 1877 dispatched a Naval ship, the HMS Rocket, to Kimsquit to apprehend the accused parties. Captain Harris of the Rocket found the Kimsquit Villagers baffled at his request to turn over the guilty parties, apparently since they had no knowledge whatsoever of the GS Wright's incident or any wrongdoing connected with it. Nonetheless the officious Captain Harris took prisoners and reportedly after warning the villagers to stand clear, he proceeded to bombard the village. The result was near total destruction of the village living quarters. Eventually, after belated inquiries and investigations into the Kimsquit

matter, the authorities admitted their error, yet public disclosure of their mistaken action was not immediately disclosed. After some considerable time, the prisoners taken from the Kimsquit Village were quietly released to the Department of Indian Affairs, who sent them home.

[Derived from: Sirois, J. 1996. Kimsquit Chronicles. Hagensborg, BC: Skookum Press.]

1882 Reserve of approximately 25 km² (1362 ha) allotted.

1884-1951 Potlatches banned by the Indian Act

1902 Estimated population of Nuxalk is 311.

1912-1916 McKenna-McBride Commission

circa 1920 Talyu, Kimsquit and Kwalhna people request and receive permission from Nuxalkmc, living at the mouth of the Bella Coola River, to come live with them. The population is at an all-time low.

1938 - Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, the largest in BC at 981,000 hectares, officially opens on May 21, 1938. The park was named after the 15th Governor General of Canada, John Buchan, Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield.

1953 - Local labour and volunteer effort pushed the "Freedom Road" over the mountains to Anahim Lake. Now connected to the provincial highway system, the Valley became the "Third Outlet to the Pacific."

1985 - Nuxalk Hall grand opening

Summer 2006 - Nuxalk Nation hosts the Rediscovery Canoe Quest

June 11-12, 2007 - Nuxalk Nation hosts Eulachon Conference and Gathering to take action on the decimation of the eulachon/ooligan.

more to come...