A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE SHORT LIFE
OF THE ISLAND CACHE

Mike Evans and Lisa Krebs
with John Bogle, Bob Parris,
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This book is the result of the work of the “Island Cache Recovery Project.” This was a project undertaken by people from the University of Northern British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the Prince George Métis Elders Society (PGMES). All these institutions supported the project financially and administratively. The project received additional funding support from the Northern Land Use Institute at UNBC, the North Central Métis Management Society, Support for the Advancement of Scholarship Fund of the University of Alberta, BC Heritage Trust, and Canadian Heritage. The principal investigator, Mike Evans, was also assisted by a Standard Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Using a community research model, the purpose of the project was to recover the history of a community that no longer exists. By means of interviews and the compilation of an extensive archive, the project attempted to revisit the community, and understand its demise. The Island Cache existed as a viable residential community for almost five decades, and the replacement of the residential community with industry in the late 1970s was a land use decision people thought should be revisited.

The story of the Cache resonates with the better-known history of the African-Canadian community of Africville. We have benefited greatly by the work done by that community so very far away from Northern BC, but so very close to the Cache (Clairmont 1974; Clairmont and Magill 1976).
The Island Cache Recovery Project was a community-centered participatory research endeavor guided by an advisory committee consisting of former residents of the Island Cache, members of the Prince George Métis Elders Society, and representatives from the University of Northern BC and the University of Alberta. The project had three phases. The first two phases of the project attempted to recreate the community of the Island Cache. Specifically, the first phase focused on the representation of the Cache through the oral testimony and personal memorabilia of former Island Cache community members. Phase one began with a community conference to bring together the past residents of the Island Cache. During the second phase of the project we collected the oral testimony of City officials and policy makers, as well as an extensive archive of data including City documents, demographic data, newspaper reports and other pertinent materials. The final phase of the project was the analysis of the data and interviews collected in the first and second phases, and the creation of two documents reporting the project’s findings. The first document is this one, a publication oriented toward, and accessible to, community members and the general public. A second document is being
prepared; this second report is a more scholarly work directed towards students and academics interested in the history of Northern BC, urban Aboriginal issues, and the policy and planning processes in place at the time of razing of the Island Cache.

Throughout April and May 1999, there was an initial period of research to identify past community members and to invite them to a conference to share their experiences and stories about their lives in the Cache. This conference was organized with participants from the Prince George Métis Elders Society, UNBC students, and former residents of the Island Cache.

The Island Cache Reunion took place on June 12 and 13, 1999. The conference had two purposes: to bring together past residents to talk about the Cache, and to begin the interview process. Some fun was had as well.

Concurrent with the Island Cache Reunion, a UNBC Métis Studies course (taught by Mike Evans and Ralph Wright) was offered at UNBC. The class, which was one of four developed by the Métis Studies Curriculum Development Committee, was designed to develop and apply research skills in a participatory framework, specifically with Aboriginal communities. The students of this class, many of who were from the Aboriginal community
in Prince George, played full and active roles in the research.

The reunion was held over two days; the first evening was a potluck dinner and social, and on the second day people met at Cottonwood Island, the site of the Island Cache.

More than 80 people attended the first day of the conference; several interviews were conducted at this time. Those who attended the conference added significantly to the contact list of past residents, many of who still resided in Prince George. The second day brought several past residents to Cottonwood Island to walk through the space that once was the Island Cache. It was through this conference that the project’s aims were publicized, which in turn brought forward many former residents wanting to be interviewed.

The interview process with former residents of the Island Cache began intensively in June 1999 and carried on through December 1999. The interview process followed “Tri-council” ethical guidelines for research. Procedurally this consisted of an informed consent for audio and video, the interview, a transcript review by the participant and a final consent process for the inclusion of the material in the book, and permission to archive...
the research materials. Throughout the entire process, participants had the option to withdraw their participation (note, four individuals withdrew, and one refused permission to archive).

During the project we conducted 44 interviews with 76 people; the average length of each interview was about 45 minutes. People participating in the interviews came from diverse ethnicities including European immigrants, Canadians from the Prairie Provinces, and Aboriginal people. These interviews gave us a framework to reflect on life in the Cache over a period of 50 years and to capture the community of the Cache and its role and place within Prince George.

In addition to interviews, personal photos, and newspaper and memorabilia collections donated to the project have added to our understanding of landscape features that are now missing. In particular, the extensive archives of Mr. Robert Parris have been central to our reconstruction.

Much like the interviews with former residents, the interviews with City officials help to frame the perception of the Island Cache. More specifically, they reveal the policy and planning surrounding the development of infrastructure in the Island Cache, reactions to the
floods, and of course the perception of the Cache by outsiders. In total we interviewed 10 City officials, including the former City Planner Desmond Parker and Mayor Harold Moffat, who was in office during the most controversial years of the Cache, the 1970s.

Through the efforts of student researchers and volunteers, an extensive archive of data has been collected. The documents contained in the archive consist of the following sources:

- City documents, such as health inspections, offers to purchase, subdivision plans, planning consultant reports to council, planning documents, site maps, slides and photos of the area, survey maps and air photos, public announcements, expropriation notices, official City correspondence, historical photos, City tax assessments, internal City documents, reports, etc.

- Newspaper articles relating to the Island Cache, both from the library archives and the museum archives.

- Demographic information.

From these sources we have pieced together the history of the Island Cache. But more important to what follows are the memories of the community of those

R-L, Earl Henderson and David Spencer Interview Sherry Lewis (with daughter Johanna and granddaughter Tawnya) at Cottonwood Island 1999
who shared its history. It is our hope that in this book people will see at least part of their past recovered and honored in ways that did not happen while the Island Cache had a physical existence.
This book is about the area of present-day Prince George on the south shore of the Nechako at the Fraser Junction. The confluence of the Fraser and Nechako Rivers is a complicated place. The ancestors of the present-day Lheidli T’enneh Nation were at and around the Nechako Fraser River Junction from time immemorial. Europeans (in the person of Alexander Mackenzie) passed by for the first time in 1793. In 1807 Fraser built the first fur trade fort at the junction, and from these beginnings the present-day city of Prince George grew. Prince George is at a joining of both rivers and peoples. It was and is one of the important
centres for Aboriginal European interaction in the British Columbia interior.

During the fur trade era Fort George was a key trading site for First Nations of the Northern BC Interior. The Nechako Fraser River Junction was later a central part of the building of a northern transcontinental railway in the early 20th century. The railway in turn opened up possibilities for resource extraction industries — especially lumber. After WW II in particular the Prince George region underwent a period of explosive growth that has more or less continued to this day. Rapid economic growth drew people from all over the world, and especially from elsewhere along the northern rail link, into the area. These newer immigrants, some of European descent, some immigrants, and others from Indigenous communities in Northern Canada, joined early settlers and the Indigenous peoples of the region to create a multi-ethnic mix of communities. Throughout however, tensions between the dominant Euro-Canadian community and marginalized Indigenous communities (some marginalized on their own territories) have persisted. Urban centres, like Prince George, have drawn people from all communities to the opportunities that seem on offer. For many Indigenous peoples however, opportunities have been hard to realize, and urban pov-
ory persists. In cities like Prince George poverty is imprinted in geography, and the urban landscape is marked by profound boundaries. These boundaries are not new.

Located on an island just before the rivers meet is a place sometimes called the Island Cache, or Foley’s Cache, or just the Cache.1 The community began in the 1920s when a small group of settlers took up residence on the island just outside the City of Prince George. Initially the area was separated by a flood channel.

As the flood channel was gradually blocked and filled in, and the resulting slough shrank, the division between the Island and the Cache became less geological, and increasingly political.2 By the 1950s and 60s only the legal boundary between city and unincorporated district remained; nonetheless political tensions between the Island Cache residents and their nearby neighbours in the City marginalized the community despite the physical connections.

By the late 1960s the Island Cache was a very different place than the City on its border. In 1970, the Island was incorporated into the City, and a period of escalating political turmoil then began. In 1972 these tensions came to a head. Once the predominantly Aboriginal, immigrant, and poor population of the Island Cache was incorporated into the larger community of Prince

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1. Today the terms Cache and Island Cache are commonly used interchangeably, and except where the actual area being described is at issue, we too will use both terms.

2. In fact, the exact location and boundaries of what people meant when they talked about the “Cache” are somewhat difficult to pin down. Various the name has referred to the railway lands, the railway lands and the Island, and sometimes even just the Island. For example, even the definitive history of Prince George by Runnalls identifies the Island as the Cache (1983: 147). Strictly speaking the “Cache” refers only to the CNR lands, not the Island, though ultimately the “Cache” refers to what people say it does — the point is that the referent changes over time and between speakers.
George, it was simply not acceptable that the community maintain a separate identity. Integration into Prince George was swift and decisive, and accomplished through by-laws, condemnation orders, and then bulldozers. The event that triggered by-laws, the bulldozers, and the end of the Cache was a flood.

For the entire history of the Cache, flooding was an issue. During the winter months, river levels at the mouth of the Nechako can rise quickly and dramatically if ice blocks the flow at the Fraser River junction.

Winter floods tend to be short, lasting only until the water carves its way through the ice jam. Usually, unless the flow actually crests above the dyke, the water does not have time to seep through the soil onto the low-lying areas on the other side of the dyke; water levels tend to rise fast, and fall rapidly. Frozen ground also acts as a barrier to seepage. Whatever the reasons, winter floods are rather infrequent, if sometimes spectacular. Dykes can generally control waters like these.

Spring and early summer flooding is more common, and a much more serious problem. Unlike the winter river, which becomes dangerous only when the Nechako actually flows over dykes, the summer floods can come from under the dykes. Eons of the rivers’ deposits, sands and gravels, form much of the land at the Nechako Fraser Junction. Water seeps easily through these soils. During long summer floods when the water backs up the Nechako from the Fraser, the water can literally come from the ground, as the river and then the level of the water table rises.

On June 14th, 1972 a severe flood struck the area. This summer flood was not the worst flooding that effected the Island Cache, but for reasons of politics and power, it was the last.

This book is a brief history of the community of the Island Cache. It is about rivers and the lands around them; it is about floods of water and floods of power; it is about dykes, and the ground they are built on; and it is about the communities that build dykes and why they fail. The Island Cache was lost because power, like water, can seep into people’s lives, around and under attempts to protect their communities, unseen until it is too late, and both house and home are swept away.

The history of the Island Cache has never been written for many of the same reasons that the community is now a historical artefact. The community was a relatively poor place, filled with working class families, families on
welfare, and families of the working poor. The position of the community reflected the marginal position of Ab-
original and recent immigrant peoples in the politics and economy of the 20th century Canadian North. Pushed
to margins of society, the people of the Cache survived as best they could. They created a vibrant community,
but because the Cache and the people who lived there were very different than the communities of those with
power, “progress” meant the end of the Island Cache. But it is better we start this story at its beginning.
The first permanent European habitation of the area began with the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTPR). The area of the present-day Canadian National Railway yards and the industrial areas to the north of the yards were bought by the GTPR in 1912 as part of the purchase of Indian Reserve #1 (IR#1).

IR #1 had been set-aside in 1892 for the Lheidli T’enneh Nation. Eager to ensure swift development of the region through the completion of a railway, authorities eventually convinced the Lheidli T’enneh to give up the lands at the mouth of the Nechako, and move out to the reserve at Shelley (Leonard 1996: 165-177). This allowed the GTPR to acquire the land, and establish what became the dominant townsite.
The purchase also allowed the railway to bypass other lands and towns in the vicinity, which had already been claimed by other developers. A great deal of controversy arose, with legal actions flying back and forth between developers, but in the end the GTPR won out (Leonard 1996: 186-217). From this point forward, although other settlements continued to exist in one form or another, the older towns at the Nechako Fraser Junction (Fort George and South Fort George) were eclipsed, and eventually annexed by the City of Prince George.

Figure 7.1 Brett, Hall & Co. plan of Prince George Townsite, 1913
“Foley’s Cache” was an equipment depot set up by Foley, Stewart, and Welsh, the contractor responsible for the construction of the GTPR in the region.

Foley’s Cache was the terminus for moving goods from Tete Jaune Cache, down the Fraser to the mouth of the Nechako. For years after the railway had been completed, and the equipment cache abandoned, old buildings, and the rusting hulks of two beached steamers remained.

Although Foley’s Cache contributed the “Cache” part of the name of the later community of the “Island Cache,” it was the core of the residential community for only a short time. Railway-owned lands (the Cache) were part of the lands purchased with IR#1, and inside Prince George City limits, to the west of the flood channel separating an island (now known as Cottonwood Island, or the Island) from the mainland at the confluence of the two rivers. Foley’s Cache itself was at the western tip of the flood-channel separating island from mainland.
The railway was responsible for building the first dyke. This they did across the flood channel — blocking the channel, and beginning a process of backfilling that continues to this day.

Among the first European residents on the island were the Bonds. According to Jessie Bond Sugden (1985), the Bond Family, who became long-time Island residents, skidded their home across the flood channel from the Cache to the Island. As non-employees of the Canadian National Railways (CNR), which had absorbed the GTPR in 1920, the Bonds were considered squatters on CNR land. After

3. Mr. George Bond, patriarch of the family, named the area “Island Park” in 1935, though this name did not, in the end, stick. The Bond residence on “Island Park” was, however, a popular place for weddings and gatherings for people from Prince George in the 1930s. This is according to Sugden (1985: 1), though note, the PGC (Attractive Swimming Pool and Park Laid out at the Cache, June 2, 1932) announced that “Mr. Alexander [of Alexander Mill] is issuing a general invitation to the people of Prince George and vicinity to pay a visit to the Island Park tomorrow …”
some pressure from authorities, they moved over to the Island in the winter of 1925.  

Initially the Cache was an industrial area with some housing, and the Island a mixed residential and park area.

Soon the pattern of residences and industrial sites got more complicated; a new pattern began to emerge with the Cache Area to the west becoming increasingly industrial, the west end of the Island becoming more residential (though with one mill and booming ground to the east) and the east and northeast of the Island left largely undisturbed. Industrial development (in addition to the CNR) began in the late 1920s.

In 1928, a dispute erupted between Cranbrook Sawmills and Martin S. Caine over access to booming grounds and shoreline off the “Railway Cache.” The conflict was actually over land on what was later called “Cottonwood Island.” Both companies wanted part of the island and adjacent waterway (Prince George Citizen [PGC], “Milling Concerns Fight for Site at the Cache,” January 28, 1928). Eventually the dispute was settled by a compromise with Caine buying most of the lots on the northeast shoreline for a booming ground to feed a mill site to be located at the CNR Cache, and Cranbrook buying most of the lots on the north-central shoreline to
supply a mill site on the Island. Both purchased the land for the knockdown price of $10 per lot from the Crown. There was considerable support for the mills as these would be the first at Prince George. (PGC, “Sites Secured by Milling Interests at Railway Cache,” December 13, 1928). In terms of the history of the City, this marked the rise of local milling. In terms of the “Cache,” it seems that the designation given to the CNR lands to the west of the Island was extended to encompass the Island. Gradually, however, the area on the island increasingly became known as the “Island,” or the “Island Cache,” with the main concentration of residential areas shifting gradually to the Island part of the Island Cache. The name, “Cottonwood Island,” came later, in 1958.

Early on people lived both on the Island and in the Cache, but mainly in the Cache area.

Cache Resident, 1933-1955

They’re two separate areas, and at one time there was a waterway that divided the Island, that’s why it was called an island because it was surrounded by a waterway. . . when the railway did their construction they built a dyke from what is now, I think it is still called Island Park, up to about where the La pas Lumber Company is and that cut off that stream, the old stream of the Nechako River. But amazing when we were kids there was still the odd salmon that would get into that back water and would come up in, we referred to it as a slough at the time, but there was a bridge across there, and there the road crossed. There [weren’t] even that many

4. At this auction the Bonds also bought some lots, presumably to regularize (expand?) their use of a house site on the Island.
5. Alfred Alexander purchased the Cranbrook site, for what became known as Alexander Mill. The CNR Cache site eventually held a number of mills (including Caine and Strom, and now The Pas for example).
6. In hindsight this is ironic, because the mills gradually filled in part of the western channel, literally eliminating the “island.” In the end it seems only logical that the area became known as the “Island Cache,” though people will often simply use the term “The Cache.”
residents in the Island when we first lived there. I doubt if there was a dozen families that lived over there. In the meantime, during the war and shortly after that’s when a lot of people moved into what was the Island. They moved in as mill workers and what not.

The Hilde family moved into the area in 1940.

*Ron Hilde, Cache Resident 1940 – 1942*

[We lived] down on the sawmill site. We lived there. My father was a millwright. . . . It was called Strom’s Mill. It was quite a thriving business. I was 12 years old. And my father was a steam enginéer and a mechanic. And he . . . did most of the mechanical work. When we first came, we used to play down there. There were quite a few families down in the Island Cache. That was our playground, the whole area. There was an old fellow that lived right next to the mill; you see Strom’s Mill was behind the CNR Roundhouse. And there was an old fellow, by the name of Frank Paine and he had some old horses, they were not very well kept. He had worked with CNR, during construction, I guess, at one time. And he lived in this cabin there and had a barn and he had these four or five horses and they roamed all over the Cache. They were his pets.  

7. Mr. Hilde seems to be speaking about the CNR Cache, but calling it both the “Cache” and the “Island Cache.” In practice many long-time residents do this, as they are often not concerned about the difference. Alternatively, some people are quite clear about making a distinction — this is especially the case with those who were associated with the Railway.

8. This was the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Hospital, built to service the railway workers.
According to Mr. Hilde, in the 1940s, most people in the Cache were still associated with the railway.

*Ron Hilde, Cache Resident 1940 – 1942*

Mostly kids who lived in the Cache, [were] CNR kids like Hilliard Clare and his sister, and Mildred Brine and Freddy Brine — they were families that lived there. And there were other families that lived in the Cache, all railroad people. But other people that lived close to the river, and some families lived across the river . . . during the summer . . . they would come across in a boat until freeze-up . . . that family’s name was McDonald. Bobby McDonald was a Native and these two or three girls, they would row across every day to go to school and there would be a parade of kids from that area going to school.

*Int: So how would you describe the community in the Cache, everybody was close, friendly?*

Yeah, they were. Of course you would have a difference, the railroad people, were a little different — they were railroad people and other people that did work with them. Most of the people worked for them or for the City. But I don’t know why, I think a lot of people lived in the Cache because there were a lot of buildings probably built there during railroad years. And in later years, lots of the railroad people lived uptown. The buildings were available. The Bonds lived in a hospital; Clarks lived in the hospital at one time. But those were buildings that were built there for the railroad personnel, and they were used. And the hospital became a residence. It was a nice little community. I can always remember a store down there, Hackanson, as you mentioned — I remember that now. There was a school; the school came later.

**THE MILLS MOVE IN**

There were a couple of mills in the area early on, and then things changed. BC Spruce was one of the early mills to come in from Saskatchewan. The people working at the mill lived in the Cache, and on the Island.

*Cache Resident, 1933-1955*

Well, the people that come out and started BC Spruce were all from Saskatchewan. Bob Cameron — he was the President of the Company — and most of the employees. They had a mill somewhere in Saskatchewan and when they moved out here they brought a lot of their employees with them. There were three or four Tremblay families — some of their families are still around here, and . . . the names escape me because there [were] quite a few of them that came out.

BC Spruce in itself, they must have had at least a dozen families just in the neighbourhood where we were. They built . . . little shacks for the fellows to move into when they moved out here from Saskatchewan, and some of them developed some fairly substantial homes. Well there were at least a dozen of them in there and then of course, I’d hate to even estimate how many people moved into the Island part. I think a lot of them just built wherever they felt like it, you know, and I doubt very much if there was ever any legal certificates made or . . . .
It wasn’t only Strom’s and BC Spruce that came to Prince George. A number of other mills sprang up in the mid and late 1940s. Until WW II, the milling activity in the area was limited, but after the war there was explosive growth, and a corresponding growth in the population of the Cache, as lumbermen and their families moved in.

Ron Hilde, Cache Resident 1940 – 1942
But the sawmills were all built, from 1940 on . . . started coming in. And then in the 50s, a lot of them came in, like Rustad’s. A lot of the sawmill people from Saskatchewan were literally chased out by the government. The government took over everything and there was the Rustad family and others. But Proppe had been in Prince George for a long time; he had a farm up by the airport. My dad worked for Proppe Lumber. Everybody wanted my dad to work for them . . . Caine Lumber, it was closest to the bridge, and then there was BC Spruce and there was another one . . . I can’t really remember. La Pas was started by Hoffs; it was called Hoff’s Mill. Hoff and my dad were friends and my dad was sick at the time and they would come and visit him in the hospital. He would have these plans and he would tell them what kind of a layout [was needed] for a certain piece of equipment. When he got out of the hospital he went and worked for them. And he actually designed the Hoff’s Mill — the first mill that La Pas Lumber took over. And for Northern Planers he did the same thing, and that’s on First Avenue. He built that one; it was a consortium of sawmill people. I worked for them. But in later years it was all sawmills, all that area was industrial. In that area, I remember that there were about twelve or thirteen. A lot of people, I think, that lived in the Cache worked in the mills. It was convenient, close. Nobody had cars really.

According to one Saskatchewan migrant, the reasons for relocation from Saskatchewan were political.

Dorothy Lamb, Cache Resident 1948-1958
A lot of the people who worked in the mill, they were people that worked for the Lambs in Saskatchewan. Well apparently it was political. The CCF [Cooperative Commonwealth Federation] government took over, and they confiscated all the good lumber, and all the mills. They came in and marked it, apparently. I wasn’t there, they marked it, and they took it all over. That was their policy. They were going to “spread the wealth.” Everybody was going to be equal, we’re going to take from the rich and give to the poor idea, and that’s why nearly all the mill owners that came here were from Saskatchewan.
The Lambs (who purchased the Alexander Mill in 1946) came in search of a wood supply.

*Dorothy Lamb, Cache Resident 1948-1958*

[At Lamb’s Mill] there was a big sawmill, a big planer mill and office and power. They had a great huge pipe that came from the planer mill, made sawdust and shavings, then blew over and went into a big coffer down to the boiler. My husband was the engineer for the boiler, and that powered the mill. It was quite big ... the mill property was a hundred and ten acres ... where the park is ... was all the mill’s property. One part of it ... was an island, which was originally all land, but in order to have a place for the logs, they made ... a pool, a pond. They were one of the few mills that had boom logs on the river. In the wintertime we went to a ... camp, Isle of Pierre, on the north side of the river. They logged all winter, and then come about May, they would dump the logs into the water, and come down. Then they had these boom logs in the Nechako, by the cut banks.... A series of them, so then the logs would come down the river. They’d hit these boom logs, and come into the millpond ... and then they’d work in the summer. Different than they do now. So the mill, the sawmill, and the planer mill, only operated in the summertime.

*Cecil Nicholls, Cache Resident 1946-1960*

In 1946 ... a lot of the mill men all moved from Saskatchewan. They couldn’t get any more timber down there. Timber board took it over so they, the mill men, they moved out. A bunch of them moved in and settled in the Island Cache. There [were] Rustads and Lambs and BC Spruce. A whole bunch of them all moved. At that time we were logging just the other side of Myworth, and we were bringing the logs down on the river. We had to go into the river to bring the logs right into the mill. Lambs had a big steam mill, they bought it from Alexanders in 1946, and they asked me to come back out from the Prairies and millwright for them.
Prince George was growing fast, and a number of people arrived from overseas, in addition to those coming from the Prairies, looking for wood and work.

Bruno Randt, Cache Resident 1955-1982

... the Island Cache ... certainly we had 600. German, most, well not mostly, but, many immigrants ... landed immigrants, and good people ... and Indians ... and Native people — good people, friendly, our neighbors. Doucette was the next neighbor. Doucette, Mossman, Carpenter. Carpenter was an Indian family ... some Carpenters ... there was old Carpenters, young Carpenters. Yeah, that was a peaceful time, before the city ... took it over. Friendly people ... we had 2 stores there ... one big store for groceries, and one small store there. Just groceries. We had some bandits, but not many. And, we had many good homes there. Strong built houses, and the city took over and bulldozed these houses down.

Cache Resident 1948-1955

Basically they were all people that worked in the mills or in stores. There were a lot of European people that came over. I have a good friend that just lives over here, she came over from Italy and she couldn’t talk a word of English ... we got to know them through the people working at the mill. We helped her with learning the English language.

There [were] a lot of us that were kind of related that came out [from Saskatchewan. They didn’t necessarily work for BC Spruce. They worked for La Pas Lumber or ... for other mills, because there [were] a lot of little mills going at that time.... I felt that we were all equal. There was no elite. You were all basically cut from the same cloth and there wasn’t a lot of ... jealousy or whatever it is, because we were all the same and we all got along very well and had lots of fun.
Dick and Joyce Lawrence, Cache Residents 1947-1950

D: Surprising how many were from the Prairie though.

J: Yes, at that time, when we were there. And later on, these prairie people left the Cache and built their own homes uptown. Like, June, and Christensons, and they moved out. But, we had some interesting characters down there, and some of the people stayed for a long time, like Lucille Mossman was there for years. And then Mrs. Caine was there for years. You know, they had been in the Cache long before the Prairie people had come in. They’d been there a long time. And they used the river ... the people, some of the Native people that lived in the Cache ... they used the river for fishing and they caught sturgeon, and trout of course, and very often one of the butchers up town would buy the sturgeon and cut them up and sell them right in his shop ... they came from the Nechako river.

Soon most of the shoreline along River Road was being used.

A sturgeon from the Nechako: L-R August Quaw; James Carpenter; Linda Carpenter; Gregory Carpenter; Lorna Carpenter; Lettie Ormerod; Janice Carpenter; Craig Carpenter.
Many people followed the mills. The Switzer family came in from Alberta.

**Ken Switzer, Cache Resident 1943-1975**

In 1943 we come by the train from Wildwood Alberta. All I remember about that part of the ride was all [the] soldiers, they had an army camp here in them days, so we were riding in the coal 41 with all the soldiers. When we came here in 1943 we had to stay with people because we never had a house yet ... it was down in the Cache. We stayed right here close to the pond that was close to Cottonwood Island Park ... pretty close to the mill. That's where my Dad was working then. We built our house in about three days right there. It took three days to build a house, no insulation, here's a picture of it (showing a photograph)

*Int: That’s a nice fair size house though.*

Yeah, well there [were] 8 kids. You had to have a big house.

*Int: But no insulation — that must have been chilly in the winter?*

Yeah, well the water just about froze behind the stove it was cold enough, we were glad to go to school in the winter. [laugh] I lived there 33 years. Yeah, my Dad died in 1974 and I moved out in '75, they wanted the place out and I think the City bought it in late 1975, that’s all I remember about that.

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Rose Switzer, Ken’s Mom remembers the train-ride a bit differently.

**Rose Switzer, Cache Resident 1943 – 1959**

Yes, my husband [came] up here. I wanted to go back to BC, that’s where I went to school in Nelson you see, and I hated Alberta. So a friend of ours he said he was coming up to look for a job and he sent money for the old man to come up and work at Alexander Mills, which was in the Island Cache. And he helped, that’s what he did, and that’s how we came up here. I come up here with 6 kids on the train and we had a double seat and it was wartime, just one double seat for me and my kids. And it was full of soldiers you know, and Don my son kept running away from me, and the soldiers would take him, they thought it was great, and I had a heck of time keeping track of him on that train.
People bought lots, and built their own houses.

Heinz Bartkowski, Cache Resident 1953-2003
My dad worked for ... the CN. He worked in the yard there. My mother was just at home. Used to have lots of gardens. Used to grow most of our own vegetables, chicken, rabbits, 'cause we came over, and we never had [anything]. Just came over with a suitcase and a bicycle. That's all we came with really. So we built their house from scratch just from lumber that was left over from the Lamb's sawmill.

The Doucette family moved to the Cache in 1947 at around the same time as a number of other Prairie people. Mr. Doucette took a job at the boiler at the Prince George Planer Mill, and they moved into a place on the northeast corner of River Rd. and George St. The Doucettes were one of the families that came just in time for the summer flood of 1948.
We moved in there, and then we had that big flood, and Dad had to raise the house. We had a foot of water in the house, so Dad had to raise the house a foot and a half. We had to move all our belongings over to Lamb’s mill. They let us all stack our furniture and stuff on those big platforms to keep it out of the water.

The N.s arrived at about the same time.

1948. I came from Saskatchewan. My husband got a job here for Rustad Brothers, a planer mill and sawmill. Well, when I first got here, like I said two weeks afterwards, it started to flood. So I wondered why, what I was doing in this country? My husband brought a boat home and then my oldest son and I had to go to the station ... get some of our things that we hadn’t been able to pick up. So I fell out of the boat, trying to keep him away from the fence you see, I put my hand on the fence post and pushed and in the water I went.
The flood of 1948 was one of the worst.

Dick Lawrence, Cache Resident 1947-1950

One of the first jobs I got was piling lumber for Strom. He had a sawmill right there, joining the CNR. And I worked for him for a while, then I went to Prince George Mills which was up the river from there. I worked for them. We had a period of quite high water one spring — flooded... nobody was prepared for a flood, so we were wondering how we were going to get in and out, because there was no bus service or anything, but everybody was concerned about getting in and out to work. My neighbour, Christenson, said, “...I know I can get a boat from Lamb’s sawmill,” but he said, “we haven’t got a motor for it.” I said, “Well, I’ve got a small Johnson motor I brought with me up here,” so we went down to the mill and picked up the boat, put the motor on it and came back up... we were going in and taking people in and out, for nothing, and then a lady called me, she said “Come back here, I want to speak to you for a minute.” So I turned the boat around, [and] went back to her house. I said, “What do you want?” She says, “You’re going across my property... it’s private property and... you can’t do that.” I said, “Okay,” so I turned around, and went straight down the main street... and made a right hand turn and went over to the CN and let everybody off there and then came back. Did that for a couple of days and then, she called me back again says, “Come back, I want to speak to

you again.” So I turned the boat around, and went back to her house and said, “What do you want lady?” She says, “I want you to pick up my son and take him uptown.” I said, “Okay, tell him to get his bag and get in the boat.” So he got his bag and got in the boat and we took him uptown. And then the river starts to lower. So then people were able to get in and out easier. So, we weren’t very busy, so Alf said, “Let’s go and have a beer.” So we pulled in to the beer parlour and we sat down, and all of a sudden there was a voice came, “How’s everything down in the Cache?” [laugh]... I looked and here was the same lady I’d picked up. I said, “Oh, it’s a lot better now.”
We had to move out in ’49 ... move uptown because there was about 8 inches of water on the floor and we lived in the highest part ... it was bad you know, when you move out like that with your children. We had a friend, he had a greenhouse, and he said we should live at his place until the water went down a bit, so we did. And what a mess I had to clean up, oh, you could imagine — outdoor toilets. You know what I did? I scattered lime all over the yard — it looked like it snowed. [laugh] [I was] trying to keep the kids from getting sick. Nobody got sick. You see we didn’t have a well — we had a sandpoint. It’s just a pipe [driven] into the ground for water, that way you didn’t get the sewage you see. When I first moved down there, it wasn’t so easy because I had to pack water up the hill. We didn’t catch any rainwater for drinking and cooking ... my mother came up and she got old Hans Lind to drive us out a sandpoint. She made short work of that. [laugh]

I think we lived up at that place for about two weeks, until we moved back, still in a boat like. Oh what a mess, that was terrible. And I was afraid everybody was going to get sick, but the water went down fast once it started. Our house was kind of built up on a little hill, that was a good thing. I scattered this darn lime all over to kill any disease or ... germs that were there — it looked like it snowed. [laugh]

Still people came to the Cache; they came for the work, but there was fun to be had too.

Lamb’s ... we lived right by an inlet where Lamb’s floated their logs down. The best part was running those logs, every time Mom and Dad weren’t home. [laughs] We’d go out there, and we’d run, you could really run them. It was lots of fun. As long as you didn’t fall in between them, you were fine.
Easter Sunday, one year ... Harry, could probably tell us the date, 'cause he laughs about it every time he thinks about it. We were getting ready to go to church Easter Sunday, and he come over. . . . he was a heathen, he didn't go to church, and I was dressed up in my “Sunday go to meeting clothes.” [We went] out running logs, and I fell in ... got soaking wet. My mother happened to see it, and she let out a bellow: “Isadore, Isadore, look at your boy!” [laugh] Yeah, “Isadore, look at your boy.” Oh she was wild.

Running the logs could be work too.

Roy Doucette, Cache Resident 1947-?

I was about 13 years old ... we grew up right next to the inlet there where the logs went into Lamb's mill and they had a jack-ladder to bring the logs up into the mill to be sawed. ... I was used to running logs, cause we lived next to it. I was quite used to it and I was doing it one weekend all by myself. It was on a Saturday and the mill was shut down. ... I couldn't see anybody but there were bushes on the side of the water. There I was out running the logs, and this voice said, “Hey kid get over here.” I didn't know who it was ... it was Ira Lamb, the owner of the mill and he says, “Are you working?” ... this is right at the beginning of the summer holidays. I said “No I'm not working,” and he says “Would you like a job?” and I said “Sure I would.” So he hired me, “Be at work Monday morning.” So anyway, I went to work on Monday morning ... they needed somebody that could be light on their feet — that could run the logs. What happened is you would push the logs up the jack-ladder with a pipe pole and after you would push so many, quite often they would jam up ... so you would have to run up the logs and break them loose with a pipe pole, and then they would all move in with the current, and then you would have to run back and jump on the land. It was quite dangerous, but I was very good at it ’cause I was quite used to it ... I did that for the two months of the school holidays and, I guess about a couple of days before I had to go back to school [Friday] I went to Ira and said “Ira you had better get somebody to replace me, I got to go to school on Monday.” “Okay, no problem that will be fine,” he said. “Bring in your unemployment book,” and I looked at him and said “What's an unemployment book?” Then he looked at me and said “How old are you?” I say “I'm 13 years old,” and he wouldn't let me finish the day, he said “I can't hire you, you have to be 16.” [laugh] Yeah, I remember I was making big money at the time, it was union rate, $1.10/hour, and that was big money in [those] days, especially for a kid. So I had a car pretty soon. [laugh] For a while there I delivered wood for Roy Daniel, when I was about 14, the following year. You could drive all over town ... there were no police or anything. So this old ford truck with a dump box, I'd pick up a slab lift from Lamb's mill, they had a hopper there and the slabs were cut into stove wood length and then they would pull the handle on the hopper and it would fill up the old truck and you would go deliver wood all over Prince George. Make good money there at that time too. [laugh]
Some of the most important mills were not sawmills, but planer mills.

Pat Foreman, Cache Resident 1955-1965

I think in all fairness to the Island Cache something you should cover and cover well is that a good portion existed because of the 10 or 12 planer mills that were down there and employed all those people. . . . Every time they got high water it would cost them a lot of money to pick up all their lumber piles and that. They just gradually moved out of there. But if it hadn’t been for these same planer mills, Prince George wouldn’t be what it is today. So basically the hot-tee-tots that lived uptown in Prince George, if they hadn’t the planer mills that were down in the Island Cache, a lot of them wouldn’t be as well off today as they are. [laugh] And, I still think that in the ’50’s there would be a good portion of people employed in Prince George, were employed in the sawmills and planer mills . . . it’s the bud life of Prince George. All the planer mills weren’t over in the Cache . . . you would go down 1st Avenue and from Cameron Street Bridge, down towards Victoria Street . . . all those big complexes on the right hand side, there used to be planer mills in there too. There had to be a lot of planer mills, you had 700 small sawmills. They cut the lumber in the bush and hauled it to town, then it was planed and loaded in boxcars.

Even while the mills expanded, the Island still had a place in the City as a park. 1947 brought the development of Kin Beach, a park and recreation area on the north central shoreline of the Island.
The year 1947 was also the year that electrification of the Island began. There were numerous delays. In August of 1947 Islanders presented the City with 52 signatures of householders willing to subscribe to the service. Delays continued (due to lack of copper), but eventually the service was installed (PGC, “Islanders’ Press for Light Service,” Aug 7, 1947). Electricity was the one and only effective service the people of the Island Cache would see. Even while pressure for housing from the mill workers caused the residential area to expand, transportation links, at least for people (if not for lumber — which moved mostly by rail), deteriorated as well.

Not all the housing had electricity, and a great many used wood as late as the 1970s. This led to complaints from some children (who had to forage in the mill areas for wood), but was a more serious problem for some older people.

Joan Paulson, Cache Resident 1959 – 1973?

Yeah. I just found it a real inconvenience having to pack wood ... luckily we had electricity ... we had to really work for water and wood and heat and stuff like that. (Int: Did you have electricity in every house? Did almost every house have that?)

There might be the odd small shack or bachelor’s house or something that had a lamp for lighting and stuff. There was a time that we [were] looking into one shack and we ... looked in one window ... and he was laying on the bed and he looked dead. I think he had been there for a few days. The kids were saying he was dead and I was going “no way.” I looked in there, and now that I think of it, he was dead. I know the ambulance came and took him out of there. His eyes were open and he never blinked. So, ... they probably froze, they were cold. I feel sorry for the older people because they had it rough — it was hard.

9. Newspapers in 1947 referred to the “Island” and “Islanders,” rather than the Cache. This changes again in the 1950s when the term “Island Cache” appears in the PGC.
10. For example, a request for a school was turned down in 1947.
There was another old gal down there. Her name was crazy Katie ... I think she had had her children apprehended in Saskatchewan or something ... of course that was another everybody teased. Crazy Katie — she put curlers in her hair and wore them for a month and [did] weird things like. She had supposedly put an iron to her child’s privates for bed wetting ... there was weird characters like that down there ... that made the whole thing look rough, eh. But it made our life interesting. Katie ended up dying alone [with] her feet froze to the floor. Of course she had her legs removed and then she died....
In 1957, the railway crossing at Ottawa Street, which had provided relatively direct vehicle access to Downtown from the Cache, was closed (PGC, “Cache Residents Must Leg it Now,” Nov 26, 1957). One of the recurring complaints from Cache residents was the difficulty, and sometimes danger, in crossing the CNR tracks. This was especially a concern for school children. Although a community petition resulted in the building of the Island Cache School in 1957, the school never served any grade higher than four, and eventually much less than that. Even after the school opened, older children still had to make the journey through the lumberyards and across the tracks. “Crossing the tracks” was a memory for most former Island Cache Residents:

_Herbert Greulich, Cache Resident 1953-1957_

You would have to jump across the train ... railroad cars. You would ... end up on George Street.... That's where you come out. Strom Lumber had a burner there. You had to go between that and the yard to get through there. A lot of the drunks used to hang around the burner because it was warm. [laugh] So you [would] get part way and then you would run like heck to get to the other side ... well kids were always scared ... so you would run like heck. It was dark, you can't see, you know the road is there, and that's it. You just run [laugh] ... unless you were with one of the other kids — then you walked ... 'cause there was enough of you around, but if you were alone you ran. [laugh]
In the 50s many families didn’t have cars, so it wasn’t just the school children jumping the tracks.

*Mike Lamanes, Cache Resident 1951-1962*

The drawback of living in the Island Cache was the roads. There really [were] no roads ... the freight train would come across the track and you would be held up for twenty minutes, sometimes a half an hour. And another disadvantage, we had a family, so we didn’t have a car in them days so when we had to go up town, we packed the kids over the railroad track. There might be three tracks there, three box cars so one would pass the child over and then the other one would get underneath. We used to come out on George Street uptown.

A lot of residents worried about the smaller children. This was true for people who lived in the Cache in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

*Rose Switzer, Cache Resident 1943-1959*

Well it was so far for the kids to go to school ... they had to go to Connaught School ... some of them had to go to King George V. Then finally I got a little school in the Cache. I got a petition and the little kids could go to that one. Well I didn’t want Sharon going across those tracks you know. Oh, I’m telling you, I was a nervous wreck, ... the kids going across those tracks, because a train would come so fast and some of them never even stopped going through there.

*Int. How many people signed the petition?*

Nearly everyone that was down there, ’cause they thought it was a great thing. People didn’t want their children, their small ones going across the tracks. Like the ones that just started, crawling over those trains, between the trains, I didn’t like that. And we used to have to cross the swinging bridge. I crossed that with a stroller. [laugh] I would have to do my shopping uptown; we had no car or anything, so....
There was good reason to worry.

Sharon Simmons née Switzer, Cache Resident 1943-1959
Well I have to admit I used to hate crossing the tracks because, my now sister-in-law, used to be Penny Fidich. When they lived down there in the mill, we were crossing the tracks one day and it was pretty cold out and she lost her foot under the train. It was a dare really that she took. I guess there [were] so many trains that day ... we were going to be late for school and everybody was hollering at her to hurry. She was one of the younger ones so, when she crossed she decided to go under and she just didn’t get her one foot out of the road in time.

But often there was not a lot of choice.

Cache Resident 1955-1965
There wasn’t a safe crossing, let’s put it that way. The safe crossing was about a half mile down, where the road was, ... the actual roads for the vehicles and the bridge of course ... because it was an Island. There was a bridge that came across, but who wanted to walk all the way down to the bridge? I mean, we were kids. It was quite a ways.... I’d say a good half mile going down, and then you’d have to have, what, another half mile back up again to get to the main road ... and plus it wasn’t very secure because it was just this road, then sawmills and bush all the way. It wasn’t very secure, it wasn’t very safe. Whereas just coming down the road and across the tracks there was a lot of people around, it was a lot safer ... I mean, safer in a sense [that] there [were] people around, but not safe because of the trains.
The Cache never did get a safe crossing; Island Cache kids had to learn to jump the tracks.

Stephanie Lode, Cache Resident 1969-1985

When you learn how to jump tracks at a young age you want to learn about trains ’cause you want to know how they’re going to kill you if you ever slip.... [laugh] I know it’s a bad thing to say but that was the only way to get to town.

Int: Your mother must have worried about you?
She came with us ... it wasn’t me wanting to do it; it was “we’re going to town let’s go, can’t we walk around, no we’re going straight,” so down we go all the way down George Street, through the little mill, you know, around the little mill, wave to everybody, hopefully there’s not a CN cop ... jump the tracks one, two, three, four, five or whatever and there’s 1st Avenue ... where the Mohawk is. [laugh] That was my little routine.... [laugh]

That’s how I grew up. It was strange but silly, but Dad worked out of town and Mom didn’t drive and well that cab cost a $1.50, that was way too much, it only takes us 5 minutes to walk. We can jump the tracks. If there’s two trains all the better, up, through, down, up, through, down ... you pick the ones that are usually flat boxed or the ones that had an opening right through the middle. If you got the ones they were connected like so, then they had a little walking ramp with a little railing. Those are a piece of cake. You’re up and down in no seconds flat. I would never do it with my kids, but my mother said you had to and that was it, you were told and you did. It was just one of the ways that we grew up and I never thought anything of it. There was no City bus. They never ever made a City bus go down there ... and we were part of the City, but they never thought so. I always asked Mom, “How come there’s no City buses down here?” and my Mom said “I don’t know honey, I don’t know why they don’t come,” and I said “Well the City’s right over there, how come they don’t come?”
The issue of a City bus was a long standing one, but one that got a boost when Penny Fidich lost part of her foot.

*Cache Resident 1948-1964*

... of course we were supposed to walk all the way around ... it was about that much further for a bus. Well kids aren’t going to walk that far, they’re just not, not when you can cut through the train tracks. And my Mom always said “Jump over, you don’t go under, always go over.” So we’d go over in between the couplings. Penny went under, and the train hit and her foot was just sort of bent back like that and it took off half her foot ... even then they didn’t give us a bus. I know that was a big squabble down there like they took up petitions and they did things to try and get us a bus, but no way. And there was no way us kids were going to walk 3 miles when we could cut it to a mile.

Nonetheless the building of the Island Cache School was a very important step for the community.

*Island Cache School Teacher 1958-1959*

I went through Victoria College and I ended up teaching, starting in September 1958, in the Island Cache. It was considered not a good school to get. But, I thought it was a great school. It was my first year teaching and I was 20 years old. There was a main school that had two school-rooms and the grade ones and twos and threes were in there. And then there was a portable that was pulled up so it was a T shape and I was in the portable. It had kind of an oil heater at one end of the room. There was no foundation under the school, so it was cold in the winter, and I ended up getting chilblains. Couldn’t figure out, my feet were always cold because the heat source was at the one end of the school. It was sort of a long lasting effect because my feet get very cold, freeze very easily ... it was quite painful and I didn’t know what was happening, but that’s what the doctor said at the time.

*Int:* How would you describe the relationship between the school and the community?

I think it was typical. Since then I’ve done a Masters degree in Special Education and it’s very typical, and I’ve taught Inner City. And looking back now, I didn’t realize at the time because I was too young. I think the parents of a lot of those children, or a majority of those children, felt the school was God, and didn’t challenge the school very much. Not the same when you’re in an upper middle class area, where they challenge what’s going on in the schools. So grateful to have a school probably and lack of education in their background, you know, teachers just did what they needed to do and there was very little question about why we were doing it, or if it was right to do.

We had a sort of a joke at home ... when they had the parent–teacher meetings at the Cache, there was lot of homemade bread. They’d cut off big slices, and it was really good, and then you’d have bologna and mustard. You’d have a real honest to God sandwich at these parent–teacher meetings. Then I went to King George the V school, which was considered sort of the upper class school in Prince George at that time. We’d have these scrawny little sandwiches, everything was pretty dainty. You had to have six sandwiches in order to get a bite.
So at home, when we were making sandwiches, “Do you want an Island Cache sandwich or do you want a King George the V sandwich?” [laugh] So, if it was a real honest to God sandwich where you got a feed, we had an Island Cache sandwich and that was sort of a family thing for years. But, I remember the great home-made bread. People didn’t have a lot of money, but they brought things … it was a good parent teacher group.

Best thing about being in the Cache was the kids, [they] were fantastic. It didn’t matter what you did for them — they appreciated it. And, you know, you can teach kids that have so many things given to them, especially nowadays and it doesn’t matter, you could have a major dog and pony show going on in the classroom and they’ve been so stimulated by TV and everything else that it’s very difficult to stimulate them. But the least thing that you did for these kids, they really appreciated. And, there [were] no recreational facilities in the Cache. I don’t even think there was a playground. And I got the volunteer fire department to flood a rink at the back, at the side of the school so they had a skating rink. And the volunteers were happy to do it, and the kids, you know, loved that skating rink. So they’d skate at noon and at recess and that was a big deal for them.
As an unincorporated district there were few taxes, and fewer services in the Cache. In 1958 a series of fires on the Island caused people to create a fire department, and a water improvement district — the “Cottonwood Island” Improvement District.

Mike Lamanes, Cache Resident 1951-1962

We tried to cooperate with the City and the City just wouldn’t have [anything] to do with that. Then we moved to Victoria and finally Victoria responded, “You’ll have to form a water improvement district and you’ll have to get all this information to send us.” So we formed a Committee and we held a meeting — Kal Perry and Irwin Wylie and Pat Foreman were head of the Committee. So that evening that we held the meeting. Evidently we had to have a name for the water improvement district, so it was put to the floor ... so everybody has a chance to say what we’ll call it ... I said ... we should call it Cottonwood Island or Cottonwood Trees ... they decided to go with my suggestion ... that’s how the Cache got the name of Cottonwood Island and I hope this will clarify the matter with Bob Harkins [a local historian] on how Cottonwood Island got its name.

We wanted to ... get the streets in right areas and we decided that with the water improvement district we might get some type of sewer system and fire protection and that was the goal. It was going along fairly well for a while, and then everything just sort of fell apart. We weren’t getting the cooperation from Victoria at all. The only thing I can say that is if the City or Victoria would have played ball with us, it could have been a nice place....

That opinion was one shared by others living in the Cache at the time.

Pat Foreman, Cache Resident 1955-1965

Well they tried to get something going. They wanted to get a grant from the government to put our water system through there. Now I’m not sure, but I think the City of Prince George had in mind of buying this and selling it as industrial land long before it ever became a fact. Well, every time you turned around, you would run into a stumbling block and nobody would give you an outright answer. You were dealing with the government; they were very damn evasive. You knew that something was going on, but you never did find out what.
In 1970, Ray Williston, then Minister of Lands, Forests and Water Resources, explained the Province’s position, and suggested that their policy of non-development was open and long-standing.
Nonetheless the residents organized. A volunteer Fire Department was formed out of the “PTA Bucket Brigade,” and had work to do very soon. Impressions about the Cache at the time were mixed, but an editorial in the PGC (May 8, 1958: 2) was very supportive of the fire fighters. Fire was always a problem in the Cache.

**ISLAND FIRE-FIGHTERS ARE A LESSON TO ALL.**

One word you sometimes get tired of hearing is ‘pionéer’. Sometimes you get the impression that every hunkie who has sat his butt end in a beer parlour for 10 years must be honoured as a pionéer.

Yet every now and then, something happens that reminds us just how close we are to the reality represented by the word.

The day before yesterday a fire broke out in the Island. First men on the scene were not any paid officials, but a group of volunteers – the famed Cache “Bucket Brigade.” Fifty of them armed with buckets held the fire in check until the forestry service firefighters arrived.

This is just one example of the way people on the Island and in other unorganized areas fend for themselves. They draw their own water, build their own homes – and fight their own and their neighbors fires.

It is in these areas, if anywhere, that the sturdy and independent spirit of a McKenzie or a Fraser still finds a home.

We trust this spirit will long survive.

It will be a grim day indeed for humanity when every last little cluster of paper shacks or gathering of trailers is incorporated into some planner’s organized zone.
George Lamanes, Cache Resident 1951-1966

(Int: What would you say was the best thing about living there?)

Paying a dollar for taxes for one thing.... We had that grant [BC Homeowners Grant]. If your taxes weren’t over the amount the grant was, then you paid a dollar. I think the grant was $50 or something. So if your property was under $50, taxes were a dollar ... that grant covered it, but [that] means you got nothing for a dollar. [laugh] Well, it was all part of the Cache.

(Int: What would you say was the worst thing about living there?)

Well, the roads, like you said, you had to walk, if you wanted [to go] uptown you had to walk around or through the tracks, no buses. There [were] no facilities like in the city, services, fire protection.

They had no problem with insurance, but we didn’t have fire protection. Then a few houses burnt down ... the insurance companies finally clamped down and they wouldn’t give any insurance, because we had no fire protection. Well, we had a little pump and hose. Towards the end it started getting tough.

Even though there was, for a time, a relatively well equipped fire department, people also felt poorly served by law enforcement and ambulance services.

Cache Resident 1952-1964

There were some things about the Cache that really were disturbing. Like one time a fellow burned to death, down in the Cache, and it took the city, 4 hours, 5 hours, to get an ambulance down there, to pick this guy up. They wouldn’t come down because nobody was going to pay for it. I can remember this vividly, the guy was laying out on the street, he was like charcoal from head to foot, and screaming, and, and you know, stuff oozing out of his skin. There [were] all [these] big, black chunks, and, nobody would come pick him up. Yeah, and he died later that night, so ...

(Int: If they’d gotten there a little sooner ...?)

No, no, no I think he just had it....
At times various people ran small stores.

*Cache Resident 1959 – ?*

And there were businesses, there were a lot of home businesses, every second home had a beautiful garden too. I think the land there is really rich, that’s the way I remember it. As for the two stores that used to be there, I don’t think that’s as much of a loss, in fact from a kid’s point of view, the one lady that owned the one store was very hard to live with, [laugh] she wasn’t very friendly. That was the bigger store. There was a store on the left, it was the general store — then there was a store that came later, and I remember all the stairs, having to go up … I don’t know if it could be that I’m a hard person to accept change, but she wasn’t that friendly, and the prices seemed to be higher there, from a kid’s point of view … couldn’t get as much candy for our penny. [laugh] I think when her store started up … that’s when the price of candy went up, ‘cause over here with this store, we seemed to get a lot better deal, well that’s from my point of view. My first introduction to her … I had a penny and I just wanted a gum … she sent me packing out of the store. I guess it was a bad day for her — she didn’t want to sell me that gum. I was just a little kid and I was all excited. I couldn’t make up my mind what I wanted and so I finally decided to have a gum, and she snarled at me … I ran from the store. So I spread it around that she wasn’t very nice to go visit, so we mainly went back to the general store, — they were very nice people. I can’t remember their names, but for a kid you know, as long as you get a smile, you get a good deal from a kid’s perspective. If the person is friendly, that sticks in the head, as for the names, they don’t stick well…. There was a lot of that in the Island Cache, but there [were] a lot of people waiting to take advantage of individuals that thought they were friendly, so you had to be careful, but there was still a lot of comradely, neighbourhood friendships and what not.
One store, run by the Hakansons remains a vivid memory for many.

_Cache Resident, 1951-1970_

Well anybody that would come into your store ... would stop and have a little chat with you, buy something and away they would go. You know, you would probably ask them “Well how have you been making out” and all that sort of stuff, and you knew what everybody was doing. Well when you have a store like that where pretty well everybody knows everybody else ... you land up there and somebody will say something to somebody else. You don’t just walk in and buy what you want and walk out again like you do at all these big stores. You don’t say anything to the clerk hardly ... you just get your groceries and away you go. [laugh]

_Verna Wiley, Cache Resident 1950-1960_

Had the best cheese there was around I think. I’m sure I knew we sure liked it. We heard other people complain when there was no more cheese. [laugh] No, you can’t get that kind of cheese anymore — they don’t make it.

_Doris Hakanson, Cache Resident 1948 – 1980_

Be damned if I can ever buy any. [laugh] Yeah, we’ve never been able to get that cheese.
Other people ran other businesses.

Roy Doucette, Cache Resident 1947 -?

It was where all the working people would go on weekends. It was sometimes a little bit exciting, you know, with the bootleggers and what have you. There were a lot of bootleggers down there. I delivered the Citizen to most of them at that time. Got educated pretty good. [laugh]

Island Cache School Teacher 1958-1959

Another story: I was young and teaching, and there was a whole bank of windows on the one side of the school. During the day, I noticed there was a house across, there was lots of men coming and going from these houses, but you know ... naive and innocent, I had no idea. There was lot of laundry on the line and I'm thinking, oh, they're pretty clean people. Anyhow, finally someone clues my dad in that this place is a home of ill repute. This is what was going on, and I didn’t have a clue. And this is getting into about February and I’d been there night after night with lights on, doors wide open — no one ever bothered me. So my mother, when she found out got all worried, so then she had to come with me at night. So I said “Well basically mom, what’s going to happen here is that we’re both going to get attacked.” That lasted for maybe 4 or 5 evenings and then she gave up. I guess she figured if nothing had happened at this point. But there was never any hassle. I guess that was what was going on but no one ever approached the school. I never had, you know ... it just didn’t happen, that’s all.

I didn’t know that when I was in the Cache, they probably were making moonshine. I remember when I first moved to Edmonton that was very common with the Ukrainian community. One time I was out supervising and this little garage blew up. What happened? The kids were saying, well he’s got his moonshine in there. [laugh] Kids knew more about it than I did. You know, it just exploded. But I wasn’t aware of that in the Cache. I was aware that there was drinking, but I think there was a lot in the 60’s and 70’s, in society there was a lot more drinking, period. It wasn’t just in the Cache. It was prevalent throughout Prince George, it was prevalent everywhere. Nowadays, you know, they just don’t want people who’ve had too much around, it’s just not that socially acceptable anymore.

11. Bootlegging, or the extra-legal sale of alcohol, was a common practice in British Columbia at this time. Access to alcohol was restricted in various ways, and bootleggers served a wide clientele.
James Larson, Cache Resident, 1966-70
There ... wasn’t any recreation ... any recreation you had to manufacture yourself ... in order to catch a show ... later on when Bruce and I were newspaper carriers we got these free passes ... we had the greatest neighbourhood for being newspaper carriers because the clientele was turning over steady. People moving in, people moving out, so one customer quit and you got a new one. When somebody moved into that place, you’d turn this file in and get another free pass to the theatres.

Freda Evans née Garnot, Cache Resident 1958 - ?
Our table was ... from the army barracks. That’s what we used was a big wooden table and just benches. Mom’s nickname was “woman everybody used to stop in and eat all the time.” [laugh] We used to make sandwiches and give them to the rubbies and that. They use to come and sleep down in the burners down there. Actually there was one old guy, his name was Scotty, he was a Chef but he drank a lot. He used to come to Sacred Heart school and cook ... at Christmas time ... when he got cleaned up and that. But when he was on his little binges, he would come down there and sometimes chase us kids around ... when he was drinking. But he is all right. My dad used to make sandwiches and stuff for them. My mom sold ice cream. My dad bought beer bottles ... everybody tried to have something like little stores. Everybody eventually had little stores because we would have to walk all the way to the end of the train tracks to get to a store.

Cache Resident 1959 -?
There were a lot of small businesses, there was less paperwork — there was less worry about red tape. I mean, there were people that made their own cheese, there was a place to go get your rabbits butchered, if you were raising rabbits. Everybody seemed to be good at something, so I’d say there was a lot of creativity. The people were busy and yet they still had time for the neighbours in most cases, even though not everybody got along there was still friendliness. So what I think would be really important is to mention that there were a lot of, well there were a lot of budding inventors ... a lot of creativity in general.

Int: So is there anything else that you would like to add?
No, it’s just been nice to be able to talk about this.
The early European settlers moved into the Cache to avoid the control of the Railway and the City. Over time, the disadvantages of un-incorporation grew faster than the freedoms, but when the early settlers of the Cache took up residence, the City of Prince George had more substance in map than in fact. Eventually, Prince George grew, and formerly rival settlements became outlying ones, but this was a process that took some time. Early on the Cache was attractive because of the natural beauty of Cottonwood Island, but gradually industrial development in the area, combined with the improvement of the City’s infrastructure, made the Cache relatively less desirable (though in places Cottonwood Island never lost its natural charms) in comparison with other areas inside City limits. Air quality for instance, was less than ideal.

The closeness to the CNR was a draw in the Cache from the start, and as the lumber mills multiplied, so did the call for cheap housing for the mill workers. Many of these people worked their way out of the Cache, and into the City.
For instance Mike Lamanes moved into the Cache in the 1950s:

Mike Lamanes, Cache Resident 1951-1962

We arrived in Prince George in 1951. The name was the Island Cache, and we thought it was quite a unique place, so that’s why we decided to build our first cottage there. It was on Quebec Street. I moved up to Prince George from the Coast. I worked in the woods and they had fire season at the Coast and there was no employment, so I decided to come up country and I ended up in Prince George. I liked the fishing and the hunting up here so I decided to stay, and I met my wife here. We met in July of ’51 and we married December 29th of ’51. So we decided well okay, we were renting a place, a one-room place that was called Gibson Rooms on George Street, and at that time we were paying $70.00/month for rent. We had to go downstairs through the landlord’s kitchen, pack wood and coal up to the cook stove. We had our cook stove in the one room, clothes closet, bed, everything … we had to dispose the dishwater in a central toilet, and we didn’t figure that was very convenient for us, so we decided that we would buy a lot and start building. We started. We built the first part of the house — it was 14 by 21 I think. We built and when we moved in we had shiplap on the floor and shiplap on the walls — no electricity. We had lanterns usually for lights … two burner Coleman camp stove for cooking. We had orange crates for a dresser, and the old style bed — the ribbon springs with the legs on it and mattress, and that was our bed. And we had an airtight heater for heating, and that’s what we started out with. We lived in the Cache until 1962, so the first part
of the house was at that stage. Then I built on. I built another addition on in 1955 and then our first child was born in March 8th of 1956 and up to that point like I said it was, I thought was a nice and tranquil place to live in. But then there some cheap lots came on the market and that’s when, I’ll call it shack town, started, and all the undesirables started moving in. From there on it was downhill as far as I was concerned.

Originally I was born in the Prairies and so when we didn’t have any electricity or no running water, it didn’t bother me, cause I was brought up on that. Kerosene lights and no running water, get a pail and run. [laugh] And outside privies … that was the worst of it, living in the Island. We didn’t have inside plumbing, well I shouldn’t say that, I put inside plumbing in myself; I think it was ’57 and that wasn’t a very good idea because it didn’t have the right water source. You’d draw your water from underground and then you would put your sewer system in so all the drainage and all that. So you had to be careful that you weren’t drinking contaminated water. The lots were small, so you didn’t have all that much room to put the proper fields in for drains. And then when it [the Cache] started expanding with all the little cabins and all the outside privies, that didn’t help at all either.

It’ll give you an idea of what it looked like and, this is what discouraged me after. I put in all the effort in and made it look so nice, and then all the cheap lots came in and the undesirables started moving in … it just took it out of me that I didn’t want to go any further, I said, “I’m moving, that’s it.” But the years that we lived down there were happy years, we didn’t have much … we lived a simple life but a good life. We didn’t have to lock our doors and if you went down to the river and you forgot a fishing rod or something, you went back three days later or a week later, it was there, but that’s not the case anymore.
AN ABORIGINAL AND IMMIGRANT GHETTO?

Throughout the 50s and 60s people continued to come into the Island Cache in search of low cost housing, and housing close to the mills. The Cache became more and more multicultural, as immigrants from Europe moved in, and an Aboriginal community formed. A number of Métis and Cree families moved in from the Prairies. In addition, Carrier people from the local area also made their homes in the Cache.

Cache Resident 1955-1965

They talk nowadays about Canada and Prince George or Vancouver whatever, being a multicultural community ... you know, we got to get along, you got to do this, and you know you have to be politically correct and blah, blah, blah. You know we had that ... without the interference of government. We had that without the interference of, you know, outside agencies and so on and so forth, we had that. We had Italian, we had German, we had Portuguese ... you name it we had it. You know, Ukrainian ... we had that multicultural aspect without any outside interference and everybody got along. I don’t want you to say it was, you know, all rosy ... no community is and everybody had their own ups and downs. Kids didn’t get along, you know, for whatever reason, squabbles and so on. But the majority of the time, it was great.... Nobody ever bothered you. It was great. [laugh]

By 1970 approximately 60% of the people in the community were Aboriginal (about 40% Métis and 20% non-
Status Indians – there were some Status Indians as well). Many of the Métis families came from Northern Alberta, and many were related to one another.

Elizabeth Carifelle, Cache Resident 1965-1972
We came in 1965 for two weeks holiday and never went back, from Faust, Alberta. The yard was flooded in Faust, where the old man worked. So everybody got laid off for two weeks. We got here Sunday. He started work Monday. So we decided to stay. If we didn’t flood out I’d still be there. [laugh]

Rose Bortolon née Cunningham, Cache Resident, 1968-1972
When you’re leaving a little hamlet like Faust to move to a strange city, and then find, sort of like a little haven, you know. Faust was just like [the Cache]. There were a lot of Métis people there, and a lot of our relatives. It was just like old home week. We knew a lot of people there....

Violet Findlay née Potskin, Cache Resident 1954-1960
We had moved there in October of ’54. ’Cause we’re originally from Alberta ... where Rose Bortolon comes from. [Faust]

12. In 1970, though there were cultural differences, Métis and non-status Indians shared a legal category, or rather non-category; that is they were not legally recognized as Aboriginal people, though they were recognizable as Aboriginal, and suffered much discrimination. This only changed in 1982, long after the Cache was gone.

Int: So how long did you live there?
Ah we lived in the Cache probably about eight years, maybe not even that. I think there were, two, three that were born in Prince George, and the rest were born in [Alberta]. There was, what, 13 of us I think it was. We were living in a little shack. It had only one bedroom. [laugh] Well, I remember this one bedroom, I don’t know how we all ... we had bunk beds, and some of us had to sleep on the floor, and then the kitchen and living room was all together. Wasn’t very big but, I couldn’t tell you the size ... just an outhouse, no running water.

Int: So in general, what would you say was the best thing about living in the Cache?
Well, it seems when everybody comes from out of town that’s where they end up was in the Cache, and it was really a little community like ... everybody knows everybody, and ... I don’t know, I kind of liked it. When somebody comes in from out of town they seemed to like it ... you don’t feel lost, ’cause they’re from out of town.

Int: What do you think was the worst thing about living in the Cache?
Well, what was the worst thing about living in the Cache ... I couldn’t really say [there] was a worst thing.... There was nobody stealing or anything.

Int: So how would you describe the community of the Cache, as a whole?
Well, I would say ... it was just like one big family ... I’m related to Carpenters. Garnots, they’re all related to them.

Int: Rose is related to the Garnots I believe, isn’t she?
A Brief History of the Short Life of the Island Cache

She’s a Cunningham. Carifelles, she’s related to Carifelles.

Int: Do you think the Cache was a good place to live? When you lived there?
When we lived there, yeah it was.

Int: Did it have a bad rep at the time or?
Not that time, maybe his time. [points to husband Leo and laughs] He’s from Hinton. Anybody that comes around like, when you’re single, that’s the place they’d head is towards the Cache. [laugh] ... where they can sleep and eat I guess ... they’d run into people from the Cache. Of course these people would just take them home, “Well come over to my place and ... sleep or have something to eat,” and that’s where they’d stay after.... Now you have ... to watch who you bring in your house.

As in the past, some people owned their houses, some rented. Both rents and house prices were generally lower than elsewhere in the City. A number of the people who rented places out also lived in the Cache, and absentee landlords and holding companies owned some properties.

Stephanie Lode, Cache Resident 1969-1985

Mom said, “Let’s buy” because she really liked living in the Cache. It was like living in the country in town, 'cause you were two minutes from town but yet once you got there, before the big huge rumbling mill, it was very peaceful ... right beside our property, I don’t think there ever was a house there ... it was just all major saskatoon bushes you know, and we had a huge garden, always, like Europeans you can imagine. [laugh] The whole back yard was basically garden ... I know there was a little house here, another here, and then here, there was a really pretty yellow house... I always thought it was so nice. And right in the middle there, was three cabins and my parents actually owned those cabins and they rented them out to Natives. Mom has little stories that she tells me every once in a while, you know it was really hard to get rent from them, it was like $60.00 a month, you know stuff like that back then. And she’s like, they were so rough and tumble but there were actually little houses that they did rent out. I remember right through there [referring to map], ’cause this is River Road, L. lived on Quebec Street which was right here, he was right here, he was actually, his nickname was B., he’s dead now and he was the bootlegger.

Cache Landlord

It was ’64 or ’65 when we had a nice little holding company ... bought some property down there. The property was fairly cheap and there were a lot of renters around, some of them not too bad, some kind of crazy. Had quite a hard time to get the rent out of them, but overall it worked out quite well that way. I wouldn’t say it was lucrative, because most of these houses were really in bad shape. So we had to go down there and drill lines and add on a little bit here and there and fix up things, that was something that was going on forever, so that gets quite costly, but we came out on top of course at the end when we sold it to the City. As far as I remember, there were three houses on the property that the holding company bought and there were four on my own property, but there was only about two of them that were usable.
and I had to fix up the rest. I think I got about $25.00 a month for the smallest, that was just a cabin, and $50.00 for the other one, and then there was a bigger one, but the fellow that had [trouble] paying for it all the time, but I didn’t want to throw him out so I let him paint and sort of a caretaker down there, so he was happy with that for quite a while, whenever he had money he would give me some. The main house was around $100.00 a month and that was a fairly liveable house because the people we bought it from used to live there.

Int: How was it in the Community at that time?
Well it was a thriving Community. Where we had the lot, Natives were living with us. Oh very interesting people. I used to go in and hear stories from the ’30’s and ’40’s you know. We had about three, three lots we had in there, and they were all Natives. And well there was off and on there, because sometimes they moved out and somebody else moved in and we didn’t even know who were there most of the time. [laugh] Just show up and it would be somebody different there, and uh, oh gosh we lost a month’s rent that way. It worked out quite well, we didn’t expect too much in that way anyway.

Renters and owners, immigrants and Aboriginal people, all lived side by side in the Cache.

Garry Doucette, Cache Resident 1947-1979
We had a lot of fun down there ... typical kids ... we didn’t care if one was white, black, green or red. It made no never mind? And we, we had a lot of fun down there.

Nobody paid attention to ... oh, we had a couple of Negro families come in there one time and old Brownie, I could never remember his name, he was saying “Gee I like it down here. Nobody bugs us.” He worked for Hydro for years ... yeah it just didn’t mean anything to us at that time.

Cache Resident 1969-1985
Yeah, well you see we know all the Carpenters — everybody. Well so many of them are passed away. My father knew many of them because they would have the license to go moose hunting and our garage ended up being the moose place to be. You would always have dead carcasses hanging in there when it was time to hunt. I know most of them to see them. There used to be a little tiny pool hall called Premier Billiards, it’s a rooming house now but everybody used to hang out there. My dad always hung out there. I used to go there when I was a little kid. My mom used to be a chambermaid upstairs. Everybody from the Cache would be there, we could all sit, or have a couple of beers at the Mac, come across the street play some pool, and everybody saw everybody ... but the Cache ... would have been rough you know in times, but you were living with different cultures so you just got used of it.

Int: Did you find that there was more [problems] in the Cache than there was in maybe some of the other lower income parts of Prince George at the time?
I wouldn’t know. Basically my life was down there ... but there [were] different parts to the Cache too. I mean,
there was, these houses, ... houses right along in here ... are all nice houses. There’s a nice community and this section over here, there was lots of shacks, lots of really run down places, and then along here was lots of shacks and cabins ... there was some houses and stuff in here that were owned by the sawmills and stuff, that were nice, for sawmill workers, and, but yeah, there was, there was different sections of the Cache.

_Int: So there was varying people, like you had some people who were like working people, then you had other people who lived in the shacks?

Well, actually the people who lived in shacks worked as well. I think that what happened is that there was a really nice community called Island Park, and then the sawmills started moving in there. Lamb’s sawmill over here, and that was one of the first ones, and it had all these cabins that workers would live in, and then I guess as they got houses and stuff, or they moved out of the Cache, and then more people moved in, and it just sort of got run down. Yeah, so this sawmill had cabins for all the workers, and this sawmill had cabins for all the workers, and they were all around sort of the outsides of the Cache. And then within the centre of the Cache, there [were] some nice houses, and some nice, nice places.

_Int: Was it split by nationality?

Hmm. Well there [were] a lot of Ukrainian and German people down there, and then there was a lot of Métis people.... I can’t say really that I remember, I know that along River Road here there [were] a lot of Métis ... I can’t remember all of the people there, but I guess there was sort of enclaves of people ... I guess depending on where you lived, or what was available. You know, somebody says, “You know the place, the cabin next door’s coming open.” There was lot of what people called DP’s at the time.... Hungarians and displaced people [had] come, post WW II stuff ... and a lot of people that have moved out of Saskatchewan, where we came from. My parents came from Nipewan. My dad rode out here on the back of a 2-ton, 3-ton truck. Took two weeks to get out here. They were working for Las Pas. Las Pas moved from someplace in Nipewan or whatever, started up a new mill here, and transferred a whole bunch of workers from Saskatchewan to work there. My mom was not happy when she [laughs] showed up two or three weeks or a month later.... I think Dad gambled away all the money and [laughs] ended up buying a shack down in the Cache. It wasn’t where we’d sort of planned on.... Yeah, actually we owned this piece of property here and this piece of property over here, and I think we owned this one at one time, too ... like we owned that lot, and these 2 lots, and then, my dad gave my sister, this one for a wedding present, and they built a house there.... (Cache Resident 1952-1964)

Of course, everyone had to fear a large flood, and in some areas, people could count on at least a little flooding most years.

_Vidia Wicks née Hakanson, Cache Resident, 1951-1970

I used to hate it when they had the flood ... it would come up on the inside and ... the goddamn dike ... the water would just come up on the inside anyway. I remember June Carpenter’s house floating down the river.
It damn near killed us [laugh] ... lifted off the foundation and kept going. They took boats to bring it back.


Int: Did the landlords actually own those or were they just maintenance people?

Joan: Well they owned Strom’s cabins and the big house. I think he used to live in the big house. The Fidicks supervised the cabins. A gentleman by the name McMillan owned the cabins. The Fidicks rented that one out to us for about fifty dollars per month.

Int: Could you describe the best thing that you remember about living in the Cache?

Sharlene: We had a lot of fun. As kids we all got together ... play and hang out ... sleep over at each other’s houses.

Joan: Yeah, we always had each other, for good and bad times. We got to play in the floodwaters and make rafts. Play in the burners ... well not in the burners, if they were out, ... sometimes crazy things, jumping logs, jumping lumber.

Sharlene: I can remember when it flooded one year and my mother had to push us all the way down, I am not sure which street ... probably to 7th Avenue. That’s about where Ivy lived ... she had to push us all the way there, to get us high enough where we could walk to school. I can remember my mother being up to here with water [pointing to the collarbone area of her body] pushing me ... on a wooden raft.

Joan: Yeah, because of the river down here ... there was the Morins and the Carifelles and everybody lived down by the river. So things really got flooded ... the Carpenters ... and then the Boyds ... we had river on one side and slough and stuff on this side that would flood, so we got it from all sides, basically ... everybody pretty much got flooded out. We would all be going around on rafts ... just build our own little raft I guess. I don’t know where we got them. Yeah, we just kind of had them year after year because they would just sit there when the water was down, and then when the water was up again we would use them, because it flooded every year. Behind our house was a great big deep path that we used to ride our bicycles down and then it came up at the little bridge to go across the tracks into town. That place flooded back there. It was high. I mean it was over your head — you know that kind of thing. We were down there when it started flooding and it was up to here ... we were playing in the water. Our house is up the hill. I lost my balance and went under about three times and I was drowning. Sharlene said, “She’s drowning!” and saved my life. Karen, Debbie and whoever was there ... laughing because they thought I was joking around, but she saved my life ... that was the best thing. I was sicker than a dog that day because I had taken in a lot of that water and it was pretty dirty.
Int: So, you guys have been friends since...?
Since we were four. Her dad and my dad used to play violin and guitar together and drink together and have their little parties.

Int: Could you describe the worst thing about living in the Cache?
Joan: The floods! Yeah... the outhouses... we had to use outhouses. Yeah, I am sure that it was every year that it would get flooded.

Sharlene: But, not every year always came up as high. It was different every year. Some years were really bad and others weren’t as bad.

Joan: ... we had like a porthole in the floor... whenever it was high [we] would go to the cellar and lift that up... if there was water coming up, we could tell, it would get so high that it would push the floor up. Our house would get pretty flooded out. Some years were worse than others like she said.

Relations were not always harmonious — especially, it seems, for younger people.

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town boys would come up and we would meet at the tracks. I remember one of the fellows ... turned out to be a pretty good friend of mine ... hit him in the head with a rock with a slingshot and that finished our fighting that day. I nearly knocked his eye out, but anyway, you know kind of rough playing really. [laugh]

*Int: *I heard the ... boys were, how can I say this, trouble-makers?

[laugh] Oh they were, but we all were in our own way ... wasn't a place they brought up angels you know ... [laugh] No, it wasn't, you know what I mean, no they were good guys, definitely.

*Int:* So did you enjoy living in the Cache?

Oh very much so, Yeah I'm glad I did.

*Island Cache School Teacher 1958-59*

I had one boy ... he was the school bully; and I had this other kid ... he was Ukrainian ... immigrant at the time. This bully was always picking on the other one ... teachers were told that you're supposed to break up fights. I thought — this is going to go on forever as long as I break up the fights. So this one day I saw this fight starting up and Mrs. Wiley figured I should go out there. And the bully is ... looking back because you see, my Ukrainian kid was getting the best of the deal here ... the bully was fighting; he's looking back because I'm supposed to rush out and save him. Well, I didn't and, that was the end of that confrontation because all of a sudden he realized ... *Int:* [Were] there a lot of immigrant kids in the Cache?

Yeah, there [were] a number of immigrant kids in the Cache. In those days it was the worse thing you could say was “DP.” [Displaced Person] And if they got ticked off at each other they'd say, “DP.” I had an Italian boy in my class; I was 20 years old and he was 19 ... he didn't speak English very well, and if he did speak a word, and I had my back turned, I kept thinking, “Oh my God, there's a man in the classroom.” [laugh] ... but, a very nice boy, very quiet. One time they were hassling the heck out of these kids: “DP, DP.” So I'd punished these kids that were doing it, so parents were ticked off at me because I'd punished. So they sent an older son, over to see me and he's going to tell me about ... punishing these kids.... So, cocky kid that I was, I listened to him and I said, “Well you go home now and tell your parents not to send a boy over to do a man's job.” ... boom, he was out of there. Never heard another thing.... It's a passé thing, but it was very derogatory to call someone a DP. So you didn't want that going on.
I didn’t get along so well, unless you prayed for a while, but I came back anyway ... but after a few months ... I had a hard time being a single mother and ... looking after them ... [with] kids feuding and all that. So I had to move away from there. But then after that, ... probably 10 years later maybe, after we lost our Dad, [Mom] moved over there for about three years. She’s the one that organized in the community there. It’s only the bedroom and the kitchen and a wood stove, [laugh] that’s all. Some of the buildings are like that over there ... some of them got big houses but some of them small. All I could afford was $30.00 a month or something.

Int: Where did you get the water from?

Well ... a neighbour had a pump in their house — that’s where I got the water to wash clothes and stuff ... I used to borrow her washer. My distant cousins lived there, but they died, both of them — George and Mary Laboucan. They had little cabin but closer to River Road.

Int: What would you say was the best thing about being in the Cache?

Well, people get along. I guess they all know each other ... most [were] from Saskatchewan. Us Cree people, we’re from Alberta.... Mom and Dad ... moved here around ’56.... They all know Island Cache then too. Nobody doesn’t know Island Cache when they moved to Prince George. We moved in ’57 from Whitehorse ... got to know Island Cache too. Mom’s half brother [Joe Paquette] used to live over there and [we would] visit them....

Int: So what was the worst thing about living in the Cache?

One of the reasons people lived in the Cache, and returned to the Cache, was because there was a community, and they had connections — family connections — into the community.


That was quite a while ago. I lived there for a few months. But half the time I think my boy wasn’t going to school regular ... [laugh] playing hooky. He’s 48 now. I didn’t stay there very long because the kids were fighting amongst themselves.

Int: When did you first move to the Cache?

’58 I think, the year after we [came] from Whitehorse ...
Well, there was too much drinking ... about every other street there was a bootlegger or something. [laugh] ... they have quit since they’ve moved out ... now they are all bingo players. But that’s a past time now ... at that time there was quite a bit of drinking around there.

*Int:* When did your Mom live there?

About the early part of the ’60’s I guess. After that the early part of the ’70’s, I don’t know when they started that BCANSI [British Columbia Association of Non-Status Indians], I forget. We lost our Dad [in] ’66. He worked up until then as Road Foreman for Public Highways here in Prince George. He had a simple operation and passed away — gallstone operation and something went wrong ... it got infected again and around Christmas time [he] got pneumonia and passed away. We buried him New Year’s Eve. So Mom was trying to live ... moved to Dawson for a little while and then ... back again. She was kind of lost but my oldest brother supported her ... all the [brothers] work in the bush ... cat skinning and whatever, you know heavy equipment. They were older, and they learned that from the Highways when Dad worked on the highways — when they built that Alaska Highway. So finally she moved back here and ... that’s probably when she moved to the Island Cache. But that would be about ... ’69 or ’70.

*Int:* Was there a large Métis Community down there?

Well some of them joined the Métis Club, ... but they were all mixed, half breeds too....
**Rose Switzer, Cache Resident 1943-1959**

*Int: So how long did you live in the Cache?*

From 1943 till 1959 ... gee when did I move out of there? Well ... a whole bunch of people like, kind of misfits ... moved down there ... and bootleggers, you know ... and I moved out. [laugh] I said enough’s, enough! [laugh] ... you couldn’t leave an axe outside or anything, they’d steal you blind.

*Int: So you went somewhere else and came back to Prince George?*

Yeah, I came here because my family is here you see ... but I worked down there for quite a while. I looked after an old man, and was housekeeping for him ... I didn’t like that ... it wasn’t enough action for me. [laugh] So ... I went cooking at Woodbine House ... it was hard work you know ... you had make meals for each one separate ... diabetics and everything. It kept you hopping. And besides, the woman that ... run that place ... was so cheap she was stinking. She made the help eat the old crusts of bread and things like that. So I didn’t stay there, both the maid and I both walked out ... told her to stick her job. Do the cooking yourself ... just left her in the lurch, to show her what it was like. I never saw anybody that cheap. I’ve even forgotten her name it was so long ago.

**1960s Cache Social Worker**

People came and went in those days. If you were from Saskatchewan you had a job for sure. In the fall people came in ... and worked through the winter. In the spring they went home ... to put their crop in. That was very typical over this area in those days. Now we have 5, 6, 7 sawmills left ... in those days we probably had 150–200. There was also a segregated population that only stayed there for 3 months–6 months ... people with low rent. I think that a lot of people came up because they had relatives there from Saskatchewan ... from Alberta ... from maybe as far as Manitoba. I guess that they wanted to be closer to a lot of this ... at least initially and they stayed for 3 months, 6 months and then they moved on into town into a different area. But there was also a group of people who stayed there for a long period of time, maybe up to 10 [or] 15 years, maybe longer, and a lot of those were related to each other.

*Int: If you were to compare that area of the City with the rest of the City ... would you say it was significantly different than any other areas of the City.*

Let me put it to you this way — I think from the Cache you could only move up. But also understand that although I was the social worker for about 10–12 years while the Cache was there, I was never a real insider. I also believe that there were probably two groups of people in the Cache. It’s maybe safe to say that [some] people owned their houses ... longer term residents ... they had steady jobs in the mills and so on. That was one group ... then there was the other group ... a lot of homes [with people] not working — it was not always kept up.
There is no question that, over the years, the Cache became an area where the average socio-economic status of the residents fell relative to much of the rest of the City (though by no means was the Cache any worse off than some areas in Prince George proper, see Parker 1965). It would be fair to say that the general impression of the City authorities, and most of the middle and upper classes of Prince George, was that the Cache was an area of poor housing, poorer people, and profound social problems; in other words, a slum. One of the very telling aspects of this estimation though, is the degree to which people in the Island Cache disagreed with this assessment; also telling is when the transition from a poor working class district to a ghetto occurred. Even former Cache residents disagree. People who lived in the Cache tend to believe that the reputation that the area had in the City, at least while they lived there, was exaggerated, if not totally undeserved. Whether the Cache was any worse than the City is a common question in the minds of former Cache residents.
Busy people ... and friendly people. They are a friendly people. Poor houses ... on the River Road ... some poor houses. But the people ... they have not the money. Right, and they couldn’t build the house. But still, I say ... good, good, people. The Mossmans, the Doucettes, our next neighbours, the Carpenters ... old and young there. Some families, he did work and she did work and they made good money in town ... and then moved out and bought a house in town. You know, that was natural. But, not other people could ... not afford to do it this way. I worked as a carpenter ... and built my houses, and lived in the houses ... that was good. Yah, by the flood, there was not flooded one house, not one of my houses ... it was high, under the house, but not in the houses. I lifted up houses by hand.

There [were] a number of dysfunctional situations.... One time one of the parents took after one of the kids with a rifle. He ended up in the tree overnight ... the Mounties brought him into school the next morning ... in those days, we kind of thought that the dysfunction would be ... lower economic income. I’ve come to learn that dysfunction can be in any economic situation ... it can be fancied up.... I was very young, my perception was — “There’s a lot of problems here.” I had a couple little boys that weren’t coming to school, and so the school nurse, I can’t remember her name, she was an excellent school nurse, came over and we went ... to get these kids. Well, there had been a huge drinking party the night before ... there’s people all over, and these two little guys are in the top bunk and their eyes are like this [wide] — glad to see us. That was not my background, so it ... I didn’t realize in many cases what situation the kids were coming from. So my expectation was kind of unrealistic ... just the fact that they came to school was an accomplishment. You know, when I was young, I always thought maybe there was more dysfunction in the Island Cache, or in the Inner City ... than there are in other economic areas, but as I’ve got older I realized that ... with money you can cover up some of the dysfunction. I’ve seen kids that ... never see their parents because they’ve got two professional parents and ... money’s thrown at these kids. It isn’t ... as glaring a dysfunction, but you end up with ... a kid who is not functioning because he’s not being nurtured. Yeah, ... I don’t care what anyone says, money helps to hide things.
but everybody got along and helped one another out and ... visited, not like it is today. It’s way different today.

Int: So what would you say was the worst thing living there?

The worst thing is that we got condemned a lot from the people in town. Like Halloween and stuff like that they’d have signs like “Beware of the Cache Rats” and we had hard times in some of the schools ... it was like we didn’t belong on this side of the tracks ... I guess people thought well ... they’re really poor, whatever, if you live down there. But a lot of people from town used to come down ... to have their fun.

Vidia Wicks née Hakanson, Cache Resident, 1951-1970

They used to have fireworks at the School ... there was a community association I believe, they used to do different things .... Remember the bingo down there? A lot of the activities [were] around the school ’cause that was the main building ... anything to do with ... the kids and stuff like that. The little red fire hall ... I finally got to blow that whistle once and nobody would come. [laugh] Well it got so there [weren’t] too many people left. There was another flood and somebody said, “Better let everyone know,” ... so I waded across ... to this fire hall. Nobody was around ... they couldn’t even get the old wagon anyway ... I think the place got burned down.

Int: How would you describe the Community in the Cache?

Friendly. Yeah, you got the odd ones that were ... kind of miserable or whatever when they were drinking and that, but the next day when they were sober they were
friendly. That was about it I think. Like I say, everybody knew each other and you could always tell if there was a stranger around. What used to really get going ... we were in High School ... good kids from Central ... we used to call them the rich kids ... would come down and they would cause problems. We were ... left in a group because of where we were from ... you were from that side of the tracks so ... we all kind of stuck together.

George Lamanes, Cache Resident 1951-1966

There were lots of bootleggers down there. [laugh] ... but those guys, they didn’t bother [anybody] ... it was a nice place to live. We had no problems there. They had more problems with the neighbor guys breaking in and everything in the VLA subdivision ... but we had no problems down there. I went away for 3 months, and left the house. Nobody looked after it, it looked after itself, and nobody broke in. So they can’t say that that was a bad place to rent. We lived there OK. There [were] no building restrictions. Anybody would pick up a hammer and build a cabin or a shack and that was it.... [laugh] No restrictions on what you wanted to build or anything. There was a building inspector but he didn’t come down. [laugh]
“Cache Rats”?

\textit{Cache Resident 1948-1964}

I think it was safer by far than what the streets are now.... I ran around down there and I was just really tiny, tiny. I'd run around ... I'd be gum booting through that school yard at 3:00 a.m. in the morning 'cause I would be coming home from baby-sitting ... I was scared like a little kid would be scared, because it was dark, but I never got hurt down there. There was a lot of drinking and stuff, but we were more ostracized from the town. Like ... the first time I went to City school that was a scary, scary thing ... one girl slapped my face for nothing. It was awful ... you were called dirty Cache kids ... did we live in cardboard houses? ... You went to City school with an attitude ... you had to have an attitude, or you wouldn't have made it and most of them didn't. I look at those class pictures ... I think one or two made it to grade 12. When we went to town everybody expected it so, we played it for all it was worth. “I'm going to scare you, I'm from the Cache.” [laugh] ... actually we were probably more afraid than them. We weren't so bad you know, we did some bad things ... we did some really bad things but, not in the bad sense that they were putting on us, I don't think.

\textit{Pat Foreman, Cache Resident, 1955-1965}

I think it's a part of Prince George that something should be written on because it played a major role in Prince George for a great number of years ... it got a black eye that it didn't really deserve. It was always known that there's a bunch of bootleggers ... and a lot of nightlife down there. I lived down there, and I know for a fact that there was a lot more bootleggers and a lot more night life uptown than there ever was in the Island Cache, but yet it had the name for it. The police would come down ... there was one old fellow ... that used to bootleg. He was crippled up, he couldn't do much of anything, but he wouldn't sell booze to kids, and if somebody was having a party or if people dropped in unexpectedly after the bars closed or something, they could always go to him and buy a bottle. He wouldn't sell it to minors. So I can't see as there was any difference in him being a bootlegger there or somebody that lived up in the City of Prince George.

\textit{Int: Why do you think that is, why do you think the Island Cache got it's name or it's reputation I guess?}

Well it really got a reputation during the late '60s ... I wasn't living there at that time and I don't know why because up until ... about '70 [when] the City bought them out ... there was a lot of people lived down there; they were good, honest, hard working people. But there [were] also a lot of people that had drifted into there that ... well they left a little bit to be desired, I'll put it that way.

Even while there is a general recognition on the part of former residents that the area had problems, there is also the sense that these problems came from outside as much as within.
Robert Lewis, Cache Resident 1960s

I remember some of the places down there ... all of the houses and all the run down ... the neighbours were good neighbours then. You know you could rely on them. Mother was there, I came in on weekends only. Between there and downtown and wherever she could find a cheap place to live ... [laugh] single parent. She only had the two girls to worry about, so it wasn’t too bad.

Int: So you worked out of town and then came into... Yeah, and then I stayed at her place ... give her room and board ... help her out a little on weekends. But it was a good area, but it was a rubbydub area. I remember waking up in middle of the night and having people knocking on the door looking for a place to buy some booze [laugh] ... having to kick them out and finding them sleeping underneath the porch ... there was a lot of that down there.

I never noticed the floods so much down there. I never really paid attention to it until I was living uptown — then I realized how bad the floods did get. The worst ... would be the drunks ... at 2:00 in the morning ... coming around banging on your door looking to buy a bottle ... I don’t know how many times I’d be home on a weekend and somebody would come banging on Mom’s door and I’d have to get up and kick them out of there.

Int: Were they coming from in the Cache or were they coming from outside?

They were coming from outside of the Cache. Anybody that lived down in the Cache knew where they could go and get it.... There was no problem ... you’d just hear somebody uptown say, “I know somebody down there” so they’d go down there, buy a bottle, and take it back uptown. I don’t what they’d done without the Cache. [laugh]

A lot of people felt the prejudice of others.

Cache Resident 1952-1964

Oh yeah, that’s part of being a Cache kid. You know, like we were ... terrible. You know, we were ... the worst, and we would cause all the trouble, and ... the idea that all people who were from the Cache were either prostitutes or bootleggers, or ... [laugh] ... drunks or whatever. Yeah, there was a real stigma associated with it, and it was a rough place. There was lots going on ... lots of bootlegging joints. There [were] bootlegging joints all around our house. Our neighbours were bootleggers ... I knew all the bootleggers. I knew all the prostitutes ... well not all of them, but I knew a fair number of them.

Garry Doucette, Cache Resident 1947-1979

If you lived in the Cache, you were either a bootlegger or lived next door to one ... if you were from the Cache, you were from the wrong side of the tracks ... and it was proven time and again that when there [were] hassles, it was people from uptown that [were] raising the hell. It wasn’t the locals. Coming down the Cache ... on the weekend ... people hitting’ the bootleggers ... you get some different kinds there, different people had to be asked to leave [laugh] somewhat physically [laugh] ... I don’t think the Cache was ever ... as bad as everyone
played it up to be ... I think it’s always been there ... it’s always been kind of a tongue in cheek sort of thing with people.

Ann Fitzsimmons and Herbert Greulich, Cache Residents 1953-1957

Herbert: Well I’ll tell you if you [came] from Saskatchewan and moved to the Island Cache it was different, [laugh] ... let’s just make that clear. [laugh] It was different because ... the Prairies was all flat and your neighbours, what half a mile away or whatever ... you come out here and everybody’s living right close by ... all these people around ... it’s different, [laugh] ... it was a hard time ’cause there no money was around. I guess everybody felt that crunch, but actually it was[n’t] that bad living there ... I can’t say it was...

Int: What was the worst thing about the Cache?

Herbert: Oh. [laugh] Well I don’t know, I guess it would be the drunks and the bootleggers ... the drunks would be living in the bush by the river there ... if you walked in the bush you would stumble over somebody sure as heck. [laugh]

Ann: ... the entertainment for the Island Cache was ... to cross over and go [to] downtown Prince George ... we would sit in front of the beer parlours and watch all the drunks come out. Then it was the fights. That was our entertainment ... the old MacDonald [laugh] ... and you didn’t wear red shoes.

Int: You didn’t wear red shoes?

Ann: You wouldn’t want to wear red shoes.

Int: Why was that, what was the stigma with red shoes?

Herbert: I don’t know anything about that.

Ann: I loved these red shoes ... at a time it was stylish and I wanted a pair of red shoes so ... I bought these red shoes out of the Sears ... or Eaton’s catalogue, an ordering company anyway, and I had red shoes on. Well somebody come along and said “You better not wear red shoes,” and I said “Why?” Well they’re classed a ...

Int: A working lady eh!

Ann: So out went my red shoes, I never wore them again. [laugh]

Cache Resident 1961-1964

I think ... because of the stigma that was attached to the Cache ... that’s why they wanted to get it out of there. I think ... probably around ’72 there was a lot of alcohol, a lot more drug use and that going on down there. It wasn’t that bad when we were there, there was a lot of alcohol used [by] a lot of the people that lived there, but the drugs weren’t in real heavy ... probably in ’72 it got a lot more drug abuse and stuff like that.... As a kid being down there ... I don’t ever remember any of the guys I used to run with that we were going out looking for alcohol at that age ... we [were] just out running around having a good time ... raid the odd garden ... stuff like that, hang around the school, that’s about all. Probably a lot like some of the kids that hang around the 7-11 now. We just found the school yard a good place to hang out ... but every now and again you would get some older
kids coming through that were drinking ... as far drugs ... there weren't a lot of drugs or anything like that at that time.

_Sherry Lewis, Cache Resident 1958-1963_

We weren't even allowed a library card as children and the things we had to do to get library cards ... like lie. I had to be dishonest to get one and I didn't feel good about that, but I got a library card ... I had a [one] for quite a few years before they realized my George Street address was actually in the Cache. They took it away from us ... that was kind of a hard thing at that point, but I think it wasn't too many years after that that they accepted the people down here. Maybe we became part of the city — that would be something that I wouldn't be aware of ... I certainly didn't understand why we were any different than anyone else. I questioned them as to why! Were we going to steal the books or wreck them? ... especially [as] I had a card for several years and had been using it, and returning the books and paying fines. I don't think I ever really got an answer, we just lived in the Cache and we couldn't have a card. I can't remember them telling me it was because we were out of the city limits ... that's logical to me now — that's probably what it was. They set some guidelines and we didn't fall within them. I don't know that it was anything personal, though I felt like it was at the time. But I as an adult now ... [I realize] that was their rules. But I'm not sure why we couldn't have been incorporated into that. We didn't live out at Willow River or Sinclair Mills or somewhere where the books might disappear and never come back. So, I don't understand why they set that limit.... I think that we were very segregated from the city itself. I remember there being some difficulties with human resources when my mom needed to get some welfare ... she was quite sick ... they happened to drag the children up there and [to] prove she had children ... I don't believe it happened for people in the city, but it did for us down here. I think that they scrutinized us more.

The Cache was a thoroughly multi-ethnic community by the late 1960s. But the complex makeup of the area seems to have been less important than the fact that everyone lived “down in the Cache.”

_Peter Hudson, Island Cache Community Development Worker 1968-1970_

One of the things that I remember ... was that ... when people came together for, for clean-up, a dyke-building, a carnival, a bingo, whatever it may have been, that the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal thing did not seem to feature.... I remember ... one of the older non-Aboriginal residents saying, “My god! Like I was working along side the Morins and Princes and you know they’re not such bad people.”

Some of the tensions were there. You would occasionally hear the racist remarks. And some of the interconnections tended more to be across racial lines. So you know, friendship and familial networks were Aboriginal or they were non-Aboriginal. So there were some forms of segregation.... But there’s two things I think I can say with some confidence that offset that. One is that there was an enormous amount of inter-marriage which softened both
the racism and the ... tendency towards self-segregation. And the other thing I can say with some confidence was that it [racism] didn't seem to surface in the community. What I would say is that ... if there was a bond, at all, that it was stronger on the geographical basis than it was on a racial basis. So people would more likely identify themselves as sort of, you know, a discriminated-against person because their address was in the Island Cache and they couldn't get insurance or a library card, or whatever. Or they just got picked on when they went up town. In the stores, particularly, in the stores it was quite awful. What's your address? Oh, no credit for you. That sort of sense of, we're in this, but we're all in the same boat, the geographical sense, was much stronger than the racial sense.... I would say on balance, the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal was not hugely conflictual within the community itself — within the Island Cache. It became so in the larger Prince George community, but not so much in the Island Cache. I mean there were feuds, there were some mutterings once in awhile, but because of intermarriage and because of the general discrimination that came from their address, it tended to get subsumed.

This is a sentiment that many former residents seem to share.

Cache Resident 1948-1964

Int: What was the best thing about living in the Cache?

I think it was a sense of belonging. I belonged somewhere ... it was the strongest point but it was also your weakest point because there was that unity in Community but still, when you went across the tracks that was no longer so good anymore ... it really left a mark on you. We were Cache rats.

There [were] a couple of girls that I [became] friends with. I brought them down there and they were blown away to find out that it was quite a nice little Community — it wasn't this dirty old pit. It had a sense of freedom, like you could leave your door open, you could sit on your step in your housecoat or walk over and have coffee with your neighbours in your housecoat and it wasn't a big deal. It was that kind of place you know. I wouldn't say in every corner it was like that. I don't think that the Italians would be doing that but I think amongst themselves they did.

Kids are kids so, it just depended on what corner you were running in. I ran on River Road so, but I never got hurt down there. I got hurt when I went to town ... that's when I got the big rude awakening and it was a bit of a culture shock you know. People weren't kind ... we would walk home ... all the way from school. We'd walk through the town and we would walk through the stores ... to get warm because it was bloody cold and this is where we would warm. When we walked through the stores ... they would chase us out. I suppose you don't want a bunch of kids walking through your store but ... have a heart. Then the next thing you know ... we would go through there and we would shoplift, [laugh] ... we would really shoplift. [laugh] You had the name so you played the game. I think I found I got so much rejection in school 'cause I had this big sign on me that said I was
mean, and bad, and scary ... here I was just this scared little kid. You know I didn’t want to hurt anybody, but if you think I’m going to then okay I’ll wear it, and I wore it well. Most of us did. We were really considered to be tough and we weren’t ... We had slut names on us and all this kind of stuff. We weren’t, but they all [saw] us that way so, the strong point was the weak point. It did kind of bugger you up when you crossed over the tracks, and I mean sure, you could hang out with your buddies and stuff, but you were still excluded.
In 1965 Desmond Parker was commissioned by the City of Prince George and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to undertake a comprehensive study of the potential growth of the City. The issue of outlying regions was an important one, partly because so much of the region’s housing was in poorly serviced areas like the Cache, and partly because the absence of any planning or inspection processes was resulting in some serious housing decay. One immediate result of the report was an (unsuccessful) initiative in November of 1966 to expand the City’s boundaries.

The Island Cache and South Fort George were considered by many in the City to be slums, and worse. For example, a 1969 editorial referred to the Cache as a “festering sore” and “a potential breeding ground for crime, disease, and social disorders” (PGC, Jan 8, 1969: 1, “Festering Sore”). Pressure was mounting from within the City itself to do something.

In the late 1960s, the Province offered a lot swapping deal to Island landowners, where in exchange for their Island property they could take a lot elsewhere in
the region. Very few people took advantage of the offer — it turned out that it wasn’t really a “swap” at all, but rather more simply an attempt to buy people out, with the residents paying the difference in value between their lots and the lots the Province was offering.

**Cache Resident 1947-? and Garry Doucette, Cache Resident 1947-1979**

Int: I’ve heard some people talk about the Minister of Forests Ray Williston, coming in the 60s and making an offer for people in the Cache, saying “If you give up your lot, to the provincial government, we’ll give you a lot on the Hart Highway.” Do you remember that?

L: Yeah, they offered Dad a lot in Aberdeen subdivision.

G: Oh Aberdeen subdivision, yeah, he had 6 lots [in the Cache], and they wanted him to trade [them] for one lot on Aberdeen Road, if I’m not mistaken. Yeah, he and about half the population turned them down.

Things were also happening inside the Cache. From 1968 on, Peter Hudson — who was assigned as a community development worker to the Island — began actively working with the community.

*Peter Hudson, Island Cache Community Development Worker 1968-1970*

I was basically all on my own. I had no idea what the hell I was doing. But I started by … just going around banging on people’s doors … and saying: “Okay, here you are living in the Island Cache, what does it feel like? Are there some things that you would like to see happen here that would, might, make your life better? And are you prepared to do something about that with your neighbours?” Essentially those were my questions. And I probably spent three months doing just that. And then it went from, you know, one person to three people in somebody’s kitchen. And it grew from there to a … formal meeting at which the Island Residents’ Association was launched. And people actually marched up, you know, with a dollar or something like that, a sort of token membership. I mean we never did that again, but it was just a way of sort of showing support and formally launching the thing … a slate of officers [were] elected and so on and so forth. It was probably all a little bit too formal. That was my white man’s sort of overlay on the thing that I probably shouldn’t have done, but people didn’t object and it went forward from there.

In March of 1969 the Island Residents Association (IRA) was working to promote improvements in the community. The IRA and the Cottonwood Island Improvement District, co-sponsored an “Urban Renewal Proposal.” The document appealed to the Province to be proactive in helping solve the problems in the Cache instead of simply doing nothing, and hoping people would eventually move
away. In their request they wrote:

_Cottonwood Island Residents Association and Cottonwood Island Improvement District 1969:_ 4

We can’t talk about all these problems in this proposal. We just want you to know that we know they exist and we are sure they can be overcome. They should not be used as arguments against our request for action.

We are not experts on the subject of housing. We are pretty sure from what we have read and heard about it, especially during the Hellyer Commission, that nothing has been set up or will likely be set up to help improve an area like ours. Most of the laws that have been passed in recent years which are supposed to help people get better housing just don’t apply to somebody whose income is only $300.00 a month. To improve housing here needs something extra to the schemes that already exist.

We have made some suggestions here. You may have some better ideas. If you do we would like to hear them before the decisions get made. We are a bit fed up with decisions being made which affect us without even being told let alone consulted.

Nothing was done.
That spring the residents organized a massive clean-up campaign on the Island.
The Province, which owned a number of the unoccupied lots in the Cache, had to be bullied and begged...
to take responsibility for the trash on their lands. By the end of 1969 moves were underway to incorporate the Cache into Prince George — these negotiations did not, however, include the Island’s residents.

In May 1970 the Island and the area directly across the Nechako (occupied by a number of pulp mills) were annexed by the City of Prince George. According to one former city official, the City was particularly interested in annexing the mills to expand the tax base.

*Chester Jeffries*

The 1970 boundaries of the City were still quite restricted and the … objective was to expand them into Provincial-ly controlled territory. The Island Cache was still in the Province in 1970, and so were the three pulp mills. The City had the problem the mills brought — such as overflowing schools, drinking problems, etc. requiring additional police work but we never had the additional tax revenue from the mills to help solve the problem... The Province proposed the City take the Island Cache and they would expand the boundaries sufficiently to include the pulp mills into the City. It was very difficult for the Province to deal with the Island Cache from Victoria.

Residents had mixed feelings about the annexation. According to Pete Hudson

Peter Hudson, Island Cache Community Development Worker 1968-1970

In 1970 ... we knew it was leading up to some kind of amalgamation ... and people were examining what they thought, and what they believed about that. There was a community that was pretty much divided on that one, fifty-fifty — right down the middle. But it wasn’t bitterly divided. I mean people weren’t punching each other out in the streets, or screaming at one another at meetings or anything. There were people — this was more the older, European settlers who were saying, you know, “I won’t be able to have a horse anymore.” “You wait when the city comes in ... some of the freedoms we now value will be gone. And your little store that you’ve got in your living room where you sell a few rolls of toilet paper once a week, that will be gone.” You know those kinds of things? [And there was] a population that would be largely Aboriginal, who really didn’t know. They really did not know what to expect from City Hall, but they had some hopes, as I naively did, that with amalgamation and with a closer relationship to the City of Prince George, as opposed to the remote relationship with the Province, that there was at least a possibility that something good could come out of that.

If the Mayor and the majority on City Council were ever interested in maintaining or enhancing the residential areas of the Cache, it was a very weak and short-lived
Incorporation

interest. The relationship between the City and the Island’s residents started on a tentative note, soon turned bitter, and continued to deteriorate over the next three years. Although (as the Island residents pointed out) the annexation of the island provided the City with approximately $200,000 of additional tax revenues from the mills annexed at the same time, the property taxes from the newly incorporated residential area were minimal. In conjunction with the low taxes, were almost non-existent services. Annexation brought garbage collection to the Cache, but little else; residents began to organize to press for improved services from a very reluctant City council.

In July of 1970, Hudson prepared a report to the City at the conclusion of his 2-year stint on the “Cottonwood Island Project.” He urged the City to work cooperatively with the IRA and the new CYC (Company of Young Canadians) volunteers. Hudson’s report also provided a brief but measured and informative picture of the Island Cache and its history.

The Problem and the Task

Cottonwood Island all began as far as I can gather with a few white settlers connected with the Pacific Trunk Railway and the local logging industry, as well as a few trappers, clearing the land and building a few modest but sound homes. The land had been surveyed and subdivided as suitable for residential purposes in 1916 but remained for many years very sparsely populated. Between 1945 and 1950 the area was settled by some of the large post-war influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Germany and Italy who found cheap land on the Island. This group working at menial tasks, moonlighting and having fairly small families clawed their way to relative affluence and sought more luxurious homes elsewhere in the growing city. They were aided in this effort by the peak of their ambitions coinciding with the Indian and Metis immigrations from Northern Saskatchewan and Alberta. This group of immigrants came from very economically depressed areas of Canada attracted by rumours of the economic boom in Northern British Columbia. It was this group who took the place of the upwardly mobile white people by renting or buying their homes and cabins from them which enabled the latter to afford the higher cost of their new living arrangements. Tragically the newcomers were poorly equipped to partake in the boom.

Irrationally, this group of people have contributed immeasurably to the economy of the Prince George area and still continue to do so. They have always provided a large pool of surplus unskilled and semi-skilled labour almost made to order for the irregularities and insecurities of the woods industries. At times of underemployment, seasonal layoffs and soft markets they were the first to go. A farmer feeds his animals when they are not working but the woods industry employer, who could not survive without his labour pool to come running at the drop of a hat, relies instead upon welfare payments and unemployment insurance. One wonders who is actually getting the subsidy - the employers or the labourer for hire. This insight into the important function this group has in the economy of the area should lead to a change in attitude from viewing them as a parasitical element and a social problem, to a view of a group which has done a lot and suffered only abuse and negative attitudes for their contribution.

Hudson 1970: 2
He also urged the City not to assume that the reputation of the community was an accurate reflection of the community itself. Finally Hudson’s concerns about the future in terms of the City’s intentions regarding land use were to be realized in due time.

In more informal terms Hudson later described the relationship between Prince George and the Cache like this:

I want to tell you a story about something that happened while I was there that gives you an example of the interaction between the two places, the Prince George and the Island Cache. There was some bloke whose name I don’t recall, who was a gospel minister, bit of a fundamentalist bloke. He came down one day, one Sunday I think it was, with his great big bus, all painted up ‘gospel mission’ or whatever. And he literally went around and he collected the kids from the streets. Now he ha, no by your leave from the parents ... and off he went and took these kids to his church to have a Sunday School lesson. Well the funny thing about it was the kids [laughing] ripped the hell out of the bus. They ripped the hell out of the church.... He never came back again. The sad thing about it was ... I mean nobody would've gone to uptown subur-
ban Prince George with a bus and gone around picking up kids. This is like these kids don’t have any parents … but they do have parents. Right?

A.C. [came] knocking at my little hut door the next morning with this little waif, one of her kids in tow, with a huge black eye saying “Look what happened, what kind of Sunday School is that?” … At the time, her main concern was that her kid came back with a black eye. And then I said to her, “Alice what’s going on? Can you think about what’s going on here?” And then she began to get angry. So there was a flurry and exchange of correspondence and letters to the editor and stuff about that. But, that wasn’t the point. The point was, that seemed to me to be absolutely a quintessentially sort of capturing the relationship between uptown and the Island Cache.

**The Company of Young Canadians**

In 1970 the Company of Young Canadians (CYC), a federally sponsored community development organization, was invited by the Island Residents Association
and the BC association of Non-Status Indians (BCANSI\textsuperscript{14}) to send a volunteer continue Hudson’s work and help the community organize. Competition for the job was stiff, and in the end two strong candidates were tied in the selection committee vote. No tiebreaker was cast; instead both Mark Holtby and Bob Parris were invited to join the community.

This they did — Bob and Mark (with his partner Ronni) moved to the Island in the summer of 1970. Ronni remembers learning a lot.

\textit{Ronni Entwhistle, formerly Holtby, Cache Resident 1970-1972}

I had traveled through Africa, hitchhiking, with my husband-to-be at the time, when we were young, so I had a real passion for different cultures. So that part of it was interesting for me. Some of my neighbors, they’d take the washing machine to the river to get water ... then somebody would use it ... you’d see them dragging the washing machine to the next house, and ... to the next house. That was good experience for me, to see that. There was a lot of laughter, all the time. People had really hard lives, but they laughed, and had big hearts, and [when] somebody got a moose, everybody got a piece ... and that was really, what do you call it, softening, ... a really touching aspect of life....

Actually I prayed like mad that my husband wouldn’t get this job ... because he’d got his PhD, and then we got to live in a slum, and I wanted a new couch, so I was kind of the resistant middle-class, bourgeois person ... so we entered the Cache. It was sort of semi-family, or everybody was related at some level ... we had a cute little house, which was nicer than a lot of the people had. It was on the river. The people had varying kinds of either “shacky” houses, or houses that were a little more together. They were safe there, in that they trusted each other. There was a lot of bootlegging and what not ... that was one of the veins of energy that ran through. There was also a whole lot of support. I had come from a middle class upbringing, and I still say it was the time I learned that the heart isn’t necessarily well-dressed ... because the people cared about one another ... there was a sharing that went on there. You could say, “Well, somebody’s a bootlegger, somebody’s a prostitute, or somebody’s been in jail,” but there was a sharing, and looking after one another. There was a lot of gossip, too, but people really looked after

\textsuperscript{14} BCANSI was formed in 1969 as a province-wide organization to represent the interests of non-status Indians and Métis. Eventually the organization had over 70 locals, though there was a consistent tension between the Métis and non-status elements of the organization. BCANSI effectively ceased to operate in 1975, but in 1976 it was reborn as United Native Nations (UNN), an organization that continues to operate to this day. UNN was affiliated with the Native Council of Canada, and also committed to the interests of Métis and Non-Status people. Tensions between the Métis and non-status Indian constituencies eventually led to the separation of political representation of non-status Indians (by UNN affiliated with the Congress of Aboriginal People) and Métis (by the Métis National Council). This occurred in 1982, but at times previously the Métis forged separate locals in BC as well (see Tennant 1983).
Incorporation

one another, which I have never experienced in the city or the White community.

I was 27 when I came ... I had no brassiere on ... I was into the 60s long hair. I remember the guys ... sitting around on Christmas ... they used to call Mark “whole B,” and me “half B,” and they’d chuckle ... the guys would say, “For Christmas, I’m going to take up a collection and give half B a brassiere.” [laughs] They thought we were kind of, you know, cute.... We weren’t hippies ... but we were kind of intellectual radicals ... revolutionaries if you want, but they treated us like one of them, in a way. So if Mark was all over town and going to meetings, and stuff, and I wanted to meet him at the pub after the meetings, which is a pretty strong tradition, I could walk up in the pitch black ... through the worst, through people beating each other up ... and I was as safe as safe could be. They’d just kind of wave, you know, they’d be doing some unruly stuff, and they’d just.... [waves] I don’t think I’ve ever felt that safe in the city. So I learned to live ... with a paradox ... ’cause these people were safe with one another ... but that didn’t mean that the guy next door didn’t take a tire iron to his wife, or somebody else got her arm shot off in a fight. But then, they took back the men when they came out of jail, ’cause they were all ... connected and they were looking after each other. It was kind of ... different, isn’t it, than what we lived? There was something really adorable ... I was really resistant, I did not want to go, you know. I’m pretty much a do-gooder ... but I was scared, and I wanted a new couch ... I wanted a life that wasn’t so poor and all that.... But

Pete Hudson and Leo Prince at Hudson’s Farewell Party 1970: Photo by R. Hull courtesy of the PGC
anyway, we moved there, and we learned a lot. I still consider it a really precious time in my life, of learning about support.

The CYC began work with the IRA on July 1, 1970, replacing Hudson who left to take a position in the Department of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

According to the philosophy of the CYC, the relationship between the new volunteers and the community was to be one based on community direction and self-help. The volunteers were to facilitate, not direct. The first order of the day was to conduct a survey of the Island residents to determine socio-economic conditions and community goals. In August of 1970 the survey was completed.

This survey established that there were just fewer than 600 people living in the Cache (300 of whom were under 18 years of age).\textsuperscript{15} There were 160 households included

\textsuperscript{15} The methodology for defining a household is not clear in the documents. The survey summary reports 137 families and 37 single persons living in the Island Cache. Assuming families are equal to households, and each single person equals a one-person household, the total number of households is 174; although complete participation in the survey seems unlikely, non-participation is not reported, only the 160 household total is given. Nonetheless, the results of this survey were subsequently used by all parties as the best available data, and, presumably, an accurate reflection of the demography of the community. Note also that these figures were consistent with earlier numbers — the 1961 Canadian census reported 617 persons in the “Island Cache” (reported in Parker 1965: 5-24).
in the survey. Of these households, 103 were rented and 57 were owner-occupied (25 houses were vacant). The average estimated value of the owner-occupied homes was $12,500 (ranging from $3000 to $30,000), while the rental units ranged in price from $12 to $125 per month, with an average rent of $55. According to the survey, the total value of residential property on the island was just over $1.75 million, with owner-occupied and rented homes belonging to people living on the island accounting for two thirds of that number; in other words, only one third of the real estate value was held by non-resident or absentee landlords.

Perhaps more important from the CYC perspective was that fully 75% of the households surveyed were willing to “fight city hall” with other residents, help sandbag to prevent flooding, and supported residential zoning. The goals identified in the survey included “flood prevention and urban renewal; improvement of streets and transportation; and, improvement of social services and facilities.” On July 21, 1970, the Cottonwood Island Association and the newly formed Prince George BCANSI local published a statement of goals in the PG Citizen.

16. 123 of 160 said they would fight city hall, 120 said they would help sandbag, and 132 wanted the zoning residential and 121 wanted nearby recreational parks.
In July of 1970, the City and School district cooperated to fund an improvement to the Island Cache School sports facilities — a positive initiative, to be sure.
Also in July, there was a protest to stop the City from dumping garbage into one of the Island flood channels. The use of the flood channel as a dumping ground put the City and Islanders into direct conflict. Islanders worried that the dump posed a health hazard to residents, especially as the dump was being used for both organic and inert materials. There was also concern that filling the flood channel (a process which had been going on for many years) was making the flooding problem on the Island worse. On July 29th the Island Residents Association mobilized people for a picket line at the dumpsite.

17. In a memo from John Garry (Medical Health Officer) found in the City records regarding a 1969 application to the Pollution Control Board, he suggests that the organic materials going into the dump would leach into local water supplies, but that these supplies had been subject to “intermittent pollution” for some time. This was a far cry from when “there were people uptown who used to come down and get water out of our well cause it was so fresh and cold” (Cache Resident 1933-1955). In this context the 1967 Water Rights Board permit, or at least the City’s understanding of the benefits of “sanitary land fill” in the context of that permit, seems detrimental to the Cache. The City position was that the pollution problem was a result of the outhouses on the Island, and the water already tainted.
The next day the PGC reported that the dump-site was in fact operating under a permit issued in 1967 by the Water Rights Branch of the BC Government, but without the appropriate permit from the newly created BC Pollution Control Branch (PCB). In mid-September the PCB denied the City application for a permit, allowing instead only inert materials (soils, building material etc.) at the dump. The victory of the Island Cache residents was short lived. In October, after an appeal from the City, the PCB reversed itself, and issued a permit for the dump to operate until the end of 1971.
The IRA in turn appealed this decision un成功fully. Then residents got a sizable petition from concerned citizens in support of dumping construction and trade wastes (i.e., not organic materials), sending it to the City and the PCB in late October. In the end, the permit was maintained. The controversy over the dumpsite resulted in what might be considered at least a partial victory for the Island Residents Association, but antagonism between the IRA and the City deepened.

In August, the IRA asked by telegraph to be included in a visit by Pierre Trudeau scheduled for late August; unfortunately the Prime Minister’s agenda was already full.

18. This petition, signed by 70 residents from an indeterminate number of households, states that the fill going into the dump will protect the south part of the Island from flooding; the petition also supports inert fill, not the organic fill the City wanted, and eventually received permission to dump. A 1970 City memo acknowledges the support of these residents, but notes that the usefulness of the petition is limited because the City’s garbage processing facilities are not capable of separating inert from organic wastes.

19. The dump was not closed until January of 1972 (PGC Jan 27, 1972:13, “Protest moves dump”)
Nonetheless the IRA Chairman, Mrs. Gail McGillivray and Island resident Cecille Murray tried to speak with Prime Minister Trudeau as he arrived at the Prince George Airport. Using a classic ‘bait and switch’ tactic, Mrs McGillivray drew the attention of officials attempting to block access to the Prime Minister, while Mrs. Murray flanked the crowd and the security, and managed to speak directly to Trudeau. She was unable to convince him to visit the Cache.

As the dump controversy cooled, the City began its own clean up. In October they issued demolition orders for 23 “unlived in and nuisance type” buildings. Unfortunately, not all the buildings were unlived in, nor, for that matter, were all the demolition orders issued for the correct lots.
Demolition notices issued in error were cancelled, but shortly thereafter, new restricted tenure notices were placed on some occupied houses. All of this activity was part of a city blitz to clean up the Cache; the IRA cooperated and helped organize a blitz on the garbage and abandoned cars that had accumulated, but worried about this new use of demolition and condemnation notices to remove unwanted buildings. It was not clear that any residential buildings, or even residents, were wanted in the Cache by the new City authorities.
Nonetheless, with the help of the new CYC volunteers Holtby and Parris, the IRA continued to agitate for infrastructure improvements. The IRA worked to establish some form of flood protection, asking the City for help. The City investigated the feasibility of raising the dyke along the Nechako. The City engineer reported that the cost of raising the dyke to the appropriate level would be $4200; the cost of raising River Road above the high flood mark was estimated at $1500. The city elected to raise the road rather than the dyke — much to the disappointment of the IRA and the people living between the dyke and the road. The IRA had other plans. In the second week of November 1970, Operation Sandbag began. In two days, volunteers raised 1900 ft of dyke 2 ft in height using some 1000 cubic yards of fill donated by the Department of Highways.
The operation was a great success, and received support from within the Island community and the wider Prince George community as well.

IRA Thank You Notice from the Nov 10/70 PGC
The work on the dyke came not a month too soon. On Dec 1, 1970 an ice jam raised the level of the Nechako above the height of the old dyke, but there was now 2 extra feet of dyke. Operation Sandbag had stopped a winter flood. Perhaps coincidentally, on December 2, 1970, the City announced that its work crews would begin work to raise River Road.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20} A report completed by the Water Rights Branch in 1969 estimated the cost of the necessary dyke improvements and pumping facility to protect the island at $18,235 p.a. or $46.30 p.a. per lot (including capital costs).
In September the IRA, in a letter signed by Mrs. Letti Ormerod, requested that an urban renewal initiative be undertaken.

In October, the City (in cooperation with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) commissioned a study. All through the period in which the City was moving to clean up the Cache, uncertainty dogged residents. Building permits were difficult to get, and the future of the Cache was uncertain. The City held that until a planning document was in hand, any decisions would be premature.

At the end of November planner Desmond Parker released his report and recommendations for the future of Cottonwood Island. Parker’s report paid close attention to the social, economic, and physical contexts of urban planning. He rejected the assumption that the Island Cache was uniquely blighted with social problems, and emphasized the strengths of the community. Although he assessed the condition of just under two thirds of the housing as “below average or worse,” he held that the Island was certainly no worse than other fringe areas — and more impor-
tantly, that other fringe areas made up half the housing stock in Prince George (see also Parker 1965).

Parker called for “continued use of the Cottonwood Island as a residential area” and “enlargement and enhancement with recreation and some tourist development.” In his final remarks he wrote a point-by-point assessment.

Although the report urged the City to work with residents to improve the Cache, no action was taken. In response the City began work on their own, internally produced planning document through their Advisory Planning Commission.

The College of New Caledonia student newspaper, in an article titled, “Parker survey revolts city hall heavies” (QUUN Jan 8-26, 1971: 6), reported:

Prince George city hall was bombed recently, and the culprit was Planning Director Desmond Parker, respected local architect.

His explosive weapon was better-made than most revolutionary devices, weighing just one pound and measuring 9x11¼ inches. It was disguised as a book.

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**THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF NEED FOR THE LAND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF INSOLUBLE SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE EXISTING RESIDENTS.**

**THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION FOR SUCH RESIDENTS.**

**THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF A FUNDING SYSTEM OR ORGANIZATION TO SATISFY THE BASIC SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC CRITERIA FOR FORCED RELOCATION.**

**HOWEVER**

**THERE IS EVIDENCE OF AMENITY PECULIAR TO THE AREA.**

**THERE IS EVIDENCE OF A VIABILITY OF THE AREA AND ITS CAPABILITY OF ENLARGEMENT.**

**THERE IS EVIDENCE OF A NEED TO CURTAIL INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE VICINITY AND IN FACT TO RELOCATE THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE AREA.**

**THERE IS EVIDENCE OF THE AREA'S PHYSICAL SUITABILITY FOR HOUSING TYPES WITH SOME IMPROVEMENTS.**

**THERE IS EVIDENCE OF THE CAPABILITY TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO SATISFY SUCH HOUSING.**

**THERE IS EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL GOAL SETTING, ACHIEVEMENT, WORTH AND DIGNITY OF THE PRESENT RESIDENTS AND THE ASSOCIATED LAND USE.**

We should therefore seek to confirm the residential character of the area, retain the amenity for the residents, our whole community, and visitors to our community. We should seek to enrich the life style and activity patterns of the residents. We should seek to enhance the viability, socially and economically of the area and embrace it as a residential recreational area as a vital part of the whole community.

Parker 1970: 16
The blast disengaged several city fathers' tongues from their centers of reason, and caused widespread bleeding of pricked egos.

The City rejected Parker's report, disputing the feasibility of enhancing the area, and suggested that the report was flawed because it did not adequately deal with economic issues; a new report was commissioned, and another period of waiting and uncertainty began. Again, new permits were denied and improvements stalled. When the IRA requested the City complete the dyke project begun in 1970, the City responded that they would study the request (PGC Feb 11, 71:2, “Cottonwood tiff not over”). Ironically, the possibility of such actions was envisioned in Parker's report; in a section containing “Methods available for causing change” (i.e., bring about a new, non-residential, land use), Parker outlined six options.

21. Interestingly enough, the report was received Nov 30, and was to be considered by council Dec. 14th, but the Mayor's rejection of the report is dated December 10. Also significant in the Mayor's rejection is that the calculation of the cost of raising the appropriate areas of the island above the flood mark is based on elevations subject to “6 ½ ft. of compaction.”
PART SIX

THE 1971 PLANNING PAUSE

A School District #57 Special Services Survey conducted in February 1971 gives a good snapshot of the community as the wait for another report began. A total of 158 homes were surveyed, 5 were not, and 8 were vacant. In the homes surveyed there were 239 adults and 269 children; 83 of the homes had children present, 75 did not (and of the 75 without children, 46 were single-person households). The length of residence reported for the 83 homes with children present is most instructive; 40 had been present for less than 5 years, and 43 for more than 5 years; over 2/3 of the families surveyed had lived in the area for more than 3 years. In addition, 64 intended to stay on the Island under the present conditions, and 19 intended to move. Also of interest was the previous residence of these 83 households, 36 had come from Prince George and area, 16 from elsewhere in BC, 9 from Alberta, 16 from Saskatchewan, and 6 from elsewhere.

COTTONWOOD ISLAND RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
R.R. 1, Prince George, B.C.
March 31, 1971

To His Worship the Mayor and
Members of the Council
City of Prince George, B.C.

The members of the Cottonwood Island Residents Association believe that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in any decision-making which may affect him. We therefore strongly urge that you consult with us as quickly and as thoroughly as possible before you make any decisions which affect the present residents of Cottonwood Island.

The members of our association agree on the following ten issues:

1. The Island should remain residential.
2. The city garbage dump should be relocated outside the city limits without further delay.
3. Better flood protection should be provided:
   a. Improve the dikes.
   b. Clear the flood control channels and install gates if advisable.
   c. Earth fill where needed.
   d. Provide pumping facilities if advisable.
   e. Bridge the Nechako and Fraser Rivers if necessary.
   f. Control the flow of water from the Kenney Dam.
   g. Viden the Fraser Canyon if necessary.
4. City water and sewer should be installed now.
5. Public parks should be created in the Island vicinity.
6. A community hall should be built on the Island.
7. Assistance should be provided for more and better housing now.
8. Safer access across the railroad property should be provided (a new Nechako bridge should be linked with the Island).
9. City buses should serve the Island regularly.
10. An eight-classroom school and gymnasium should be built on the Island.

RESIDENTS OF COTTONWOOD ISLAND

LIST OF SIGNATURES ATTACHED TO ORIGINAL

COPY TO: all residents, School District 57, Regional District, Provincial and Federal Ministers, and the press.
Residents on the Island continued to argue for the implementation of the Parker Report. They began with a petition, and at one point appealed to the BC Minister of Municipal Affairs (PGC, Aug 25, 1971: 1, “Cottonwood asks Campbell to help”), but to no avail.

Meanwhile, on the Island itself, the CYC volunteers continued to work the with the IRA and BCANSI, producing a newsletter (the Moccasin Telegraph), and organizing a Poor People’s Protest in February, and projects like a film night, recreation opportunities for the community’s youth, and a small community library.
The IRA newsletter dealt with everything from feuding neighbours to community announcements.

COTTONWOOD ISLAND NEWS LETTER
MAY, 1971

Well, here we go again hoping to bring you an interesting newsletter. We haven't been printing one every month because of the shortage of news. This month, however, we hope to bring you an outline of all we are trying to do. I guess bad news should come first.

Mrs. Mossman resigns:

Our chairlady, Mrs. Lucille Mossman, has resigned. We will miss her ideas and intelligent wit, but I guess everyone has to do their own thing. In a letter to the Island Residents Association, Mrs. Mossman said, "I hereby tender my resignation as chairman of the Island Residents Association. I will retain my membership. I also will be chairman of the centennial committee. I feel that now that we are included into the city of Prince George that we are no longer functioning as was originally intended. We have two company of Young Canadians who are paid wages. We also have a recreation committee who are receiving money. I do not feel that we should make all the working decisions for the whole island and remain unpaid for my time, direction, and reputation." - Signed, Lucille Mossman.

Entertainment Nights

We have heard complaints (by way of the grapevine). Some people are not happy with the way the entertainment nights are being run. It seems the BBF being charged is outrageous, especially if your children can't tell the time and come at 8:30 instead of the proper time of 7 o'clock. It seems to me we shouldn't play favorites. Because of this incident I was threatened by a mother; she was going to the school board to have all recreation stopped at the school. It would be too bad to have anywhere from 40 to 60 children out of recreation because of one complaint. The money is used for spot dances, street dances, and go-go girl contests, also we borrow a record player and records from a young man whom we try to pay $2 every time. We have a door prize also. This way the kids get the money back. We have given the kids pop when we get enough in the kitty. I'm very sorry one person feels we are trying to make money from the children, but this is untrue.

City Hall

Some interesting things have been going on at city hall. The Island's recreation committee met with Prince George recreation commission. We had one ball of a pizzazz with them. Skipping all details (they get boring) we were allocated $1500 from city hall. We do not have this money yet. It will be put in an account (at city hall's insistence), we have to get purchase orders for all we need. No cash is being made available.

Family Films

On Wednesday, May 26, we are hoping to start a family films. Our
The Island residents continued to pressure city hall as well. An editorial from the PGC on September 2, 1971 gives a sense of the tensions of the time. Everyone was waiting for a report — again.

**Not an enclave**

Contrary to the strident voices heard with increasing regularity from Cottonwood Island, that particular sector of the city is not an enclave subject to foreign domination.

It is a part of the city and as such is subject to the benefits incorporation with a municipality implies.

Whatever the future holds for the residents of Cottonwood will be consistent with what the city deems will best serve the interests of the residents of the city as a whole.

It is understandable however when residents of the area express anxiety about what the future holds. Some of them have lived there for many years and are fearful of change.

On the one hand, we are persuaded to believe that Cottonwood should be preserved as a residential and park area. On the other, there are suggestions that it be an industrial area.

At this time however, neither proposal can be entertained until a report by the city's advisory planning commission is handed down.

The report seems to be a long time in coming, but then when the lives of many people are involved perhaps this is as it should be.

Certainly there will be no snap decisions made on the future of Cottonwood.

But until the city council is presented with a planning report for Cottonwood Island, some spokesmen for the residents there might serve their purpose better if they were to desist the name-calling along with their playing the role of martyr and wait for the chips to fall.

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Editorial, PGC, Sept. 2 1971
PART SEVEN

NO MAN’S LAND

In September, 9 months after the Parker report, the APC released its analyses and recommendations. One main difference between this second report and the Parker report was that Parker had included social factors in his analyses. The APC rejected this, and explicitly denied the importance of any consideration of the “aspirations of existing users” (APC 1971: 3). Indeed, the committee never sought input from Island residents; instead the “commission, upon request met with a delegation of three of Cottonwood Island residents to explain the purpose and scope of the report” (APC 1971: 1 emphasis added). A report on the Results of interview with residents, June 10, 1971 is included in the Commission’s findings — although no explicit input was sought at this “informal” meeting, the Commission was nonetheless able to report some “results,” all of which added to the argument against enhancing the area’s residential potential (APC 1971: 5).

Results of interview with residents, June 10, 1971.

It was apparent at this informal meeting with delegates that there are varied points of view, in brief:-

There are vested interests - absentee owners of land and buildings making excellent returns on their investment - who rent to tenants that could live elsewhere, if accommodation were available at an affordable rent.

Tenants classed as family status would by choice live elsewhere, and this is quite a large percentage of total residents.

These are owners living in reasonably good dwellings (Appendix VII) that have selected the area by choice although this percentage is relatively small.

Many residents have lived in the area a very short time, and are there by budget necessity, some by choice, some are owners, however a large percentage would be classed as non family status and of a transient nature.

The large percentage of residents have never experienced flood conditions in the area.

Some land owners envision sale of holdings at a gain, to the City or commercial interests.

The Commission concludes that there should be no change to the existing zoning, that substandard structures be phased out, and that any future building be to City standards. It is further recommended that any utility services provided to the Island be provided only if the cost can be fully self liquidating.

Respectfully submitted,

ADVISORY PLANNING COMMISSION

SEPTEMBER 1971
The Commission’s chief concern was flooding and the cost of servicing — this, the commission held, was far in excess of economic feasibility, and certainly far beyond the financial means of the current residents. The result was that there was to be no designated land use, or as Mayor Moffat commented “no man’s land, no land or no land use” (PGC Sept. 21, 1971 “Island Dubbed ‘no man’s land’”)

The conclusion of the commission occupied one paragraph and did not differ significantly from the Mayor’s initial reaction to — and rejection of — the Parker report some nine months earlier.

A serious flaw in the report was the elevation figures used. In this report, and most other planning documents of the period, a key elevation figure was 1,867.3 feet — the high water mark of the worst recorded flooding in 1948. Because of an error in calculating the elevation, the Commissioners were under the impression that the highest point on the Island was 1,862 feet, rather than the correct figure of 1,868 feet. This also ap-
pears to have been the source of the Mayor’s reference to “6 1/2 feet of compaction.” Figures were being taken off a CNR map incorrectly. This error threw all the servicing cost calculations hopelessly out of line; this is particularly important because it was, in fact, the calculation of serving costs ($869,000), including the cost of fill to elevate the Island, that led the Commission to its conclusion that providing service to the residents was not feasible. The IRA analysis is worth reproducing in full.

3. ELEVATION OF COTTONWOOD ISLAND: COST OF SERVICES

There has been some confusion about the true elevation of Cottonwood Island. The APC report states the highest point on the Island is 1862 ft. above sea level. City Engineer E. Obst recommended that the roads be raised to 1868 ft. - costing $841,000 - and that the property be raised to road level - costing $305,000. Mayor Moffat’s report of Dec. 10, 1970 also refers to 6½ ft. of compaction. Of the total of $869,000 to put in water and sewer, $545,000 is for fill plus road construction. It is thus of some importance to establish the true level of the Island and thus the true amount of fill required.

The mistake in previous reports was due to the fact that the CNR map used (#330-1146 April 26, 1967) includes a note which went unnoticed: "Equation to obtain geodetic elevation: add 5.95 ft. (Confirmed by field check)." Thus the figures used in the previous reports are 6 ft. too low. The true elevation of Cottonwood Island is between 1861 ft. and 1868 ft.

The last three spring floods in Prince George, measured at the old Fraser Bridge, were at the following levels: 1866.7 ft. in 1948; 1864.6 ft. in 1964; and 1864.25 ft. in 1967. These values of course are true geodetic levels and do not require the 6 ft. correction. On the basis of these flood levels, Des Parker has recommended in his report that the minimum floor level of any new building on Cottonwood Island be 1864 ft.

It is of interest to note that The Pas Lumber Co., Ltd. mill is at 1869 ft. - just 1 ft. higher than the Island houses along the bank of the Nechako. In addition, the property of Lakeland Mills, Ltd. to the south of the Island has the same elevation range as Cottonwood Island proper: 1861 to 1868 ft. Both these mills have city water.

Planimeter measurements from the CNR map show the following levels on Cottonwood Island: 26 acres at 1861 ft.; 19 acres at 1864 ft.; and 13 acres at 1866 plus ft. In addition, much of the lowest land is vacant. This means that at most 40% of the Island has to be raised 3 ft. - not 100% by over 6 ft.

IRA Comment on the Island’s Elevation
Though the Commission argued, against Parker, for no change in land use, the recommendations were consistent with Parker’s options for causing a land use change (see above). The PGC reported that Tom Norton, Chair of the APC “told city council that there is no demand from any source strong enough to justify development of the island at present” (PGC, Sept 21, 1971: 1, “Island dubbed ‘no man’s land’”). Indeed, the report, and the City Council’s reaction to it, made it clear that the Island Cache residents were not a “source strong enough” to affect the outcome. The IRA was not even strong enough to get a meeting on the Island about the report — in Oct 1971 the council rejected a request from the IRA to meet at the Island Cache School, opting instead to meet only at City Hall (PGC Oct 19, 1971, “Meeting at Cottonwood rejected by aldermen”).

This second report was much more to the City’s liking, and it was on the basis of the report that any notion that sewer and water could be provided was rejected (PGC Nov 9, 1971: 3, “Sewer, Water denial to Cache proposed”). In light of the report, the city asked if property owners would be willing to sell out, and moved to survey the Island Cache

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**Landowner’s Comments to City’s 1972 offer**

"I have no property for sale. That the only home I have. I have no place to go. I can’t work no more and I am on medical care and a few years left to get old age pension. I have plenty of good water."

"Do not have any..."

"In regard to your letter of Dec 71. You ask if we have any..."

"Do not have any..."

"So I am told..."

"So I am told..."

"So I am told..."
property owners about their willingness to sell to the City at 2 ½ times the assessed value of their land and buildings.

The IRA conducted this survey for the City; the results were resoundingly negative. Of the 117 private landowners (holding 357 of 444 lots), 95 responded; 82 said no (64 named an alternate price\(^\text{22}\)), 13 said yes. In fact, the City received a number of offers to sell in 1970 and 1971 — the rate of these offers, and the willingness of the owners to accept 2 ½ times the assessed value, increased over time, and as it became clear the City was against better services in the area. The owners’ comments are most instructive.

In early 1972, yet another survey, this one undertaken by the City, was undertaken to assess whether property owners would be willing to pay for water services.\(^\text{23}\) The survey results are somewhat difficult to interpret\(^\text{24}\) because letters were sent to 150 owners, and some people received more than one letter because they owned more than one lot. 28 owners said they wanted water (it is not clear how many lots this represents) at the costs outlined, $150 per lot plus $.35 per frontage foot, while 50 disagreed (again, it is unclear how many lots were represented by these 50 responses). This, the city took as a rejection of the idea of providing water services, or certainly a statement that property owners were unwilling to pay the costs for water (PGC March 27, 72, Cottonwood residents turn backs on hook-up). The IRA pointed out that many of the respondents to the survey were absentee landlords (though just how many is impossible to tell).

\(\text{22. A very serious problem was the estimation of the value of the properties; a number of landholders believed that the assessments were far too low. All through the 70s the City consistently maintained that 2½ times assessed value was the price they would pay. Also significant is that residents of the Island, and not absentee landlords, held 200 of the privately held lots.}\)

\(\text{23. It was in discussion leading up to this survey that Mayor Moffat made it clear that he believed the area would eventually (within ten years) be zoned as ‘heavy industrial.’}\)

\(\text{24. Of all the surveys undertaken in the 70s, this was the weakest in terms of both response rate and methodology.}\)
People continued to undertake community projects however. One important project was the development of a youth centre.


Sharlene: I was referring to Baby Boy [Rock and Roll band] remember? They would get all of the kids to come and they would put on musicals. Yeah we all had a really good time, they had dancing and everything.

Joan: That was the best. They had their guitars and they played, they created a band. Everyone would come and sing and listen to them. That was a really good thing.

Sharlene: They never had anything planned ... just happened.

Joan: You see a lot of the old people remember more stuff, it’s like having a great big family, I never realized how many people lived down there.... It was like everybody knew each other ... it was just like a great big campground. That is how I picture everybody, just ... camping on the family gathering, living together, that is how I thought of it.... We had a lot of fires and houses ... burning — always something happening. It was never boring.

But many people felt embattled by the City; the youth centre and community activities helped.
Well I know there was a lot of hatred — well not hatred I guess, really, but bad feelings about everybody else that wasn’t involved down there ... like in town... I remember being down there ... people would ... drive down there looking for bootleggers, and if nobody knew them they got beat up. They got their car stolen, they got robbed and everything like that.... But, for me, I didn’t see too much of the goodness down there because I was on the other side of it all the time ... being a bad guy. I remember when my mom and dad, in 1970, 1971 or so started trying to do something down there, trying to get these kids involved in culture ... and whatever. They got some money from the First Citizen’s Fund and ... bought some instruments, and these young guys down there started a band — a Rock and Roll band. Then they got regular dances and things like that happening. At the time, I ... believe anyway, there was no sense of an identity with anybody down there ... either you were Native or non-Native or ... a Half-breed or ... White or whatever. But there was nothing like, “I’m Native and I practice my culture,” or whatever ... my parents had a really hard time trying to get people to understand this ... to let these kids do something for themselves. There was very little support for it. I mean, the kids were involved quite heavily into it, but they had very little support from the parents and the community members. That’s one of the things that stands out for me. I mean, see a lot of people today — even who lived down there — they still live with the idea that they’re rough and tough ... and this is the way we are, we’re still against the world, and all that other stuff.... It’s sad they’re so mixed up in the sixties and now they’re getting up to be sixty, seventy years old, and they still believe that. The saddest part is that they’re passing on these behaviors to their kids and grandkids and great-grandkids.... I remember the Cache as a fun place to be, in spite of all the crap. It was a fun place. I had a good time. But like I said, I had a good time because I did what I wanted to do ... that’s the part I remember. I don’t remember any good community stuff, you know like all those kids and beautiful picnics, and whatever. We played ball, the community would get together and play ball. And dances at the little school there — stuff like that. That was good.

Freda Evans née Garnot, Cache Resident 1958 - ?

Father Rainier ... got us the bible studies and the bus and stuff like that ... the bible studies were always at the school and we’d make crafts and stuff too ... we had a guy that [would] come in to teach us like Judo for blocking and all that ... at the old school. And the Friendship Centre ... we [did] all our practicing for our Indian dancing ... we danced in parades, we danced when the Queen [came] and ... in the “Beachcombers” ... but I didn’t get to go there.... We had ping pong tables. There’s the band there, everybody went there ... the older ones, the younger ones, you know like the 19, 20 year olds right from the 6, 7, 8 year old kids. We all went there and they all made sure we were all right, the older ones, and we all got along.... It was a lot of fun, ping-pong tables ... then there [were] all kinds of beads, and leather, and buckskin ... we’d go to Nick and Irene’s and everything was free for us to make all of our stuff ... they transported us to a lot of places, back and forth from town and that. Then
we’d go around and take up collections to try and help out for going … travelling and all that ... for the Native people, Indian dancing and that. We [did] fundraising ... we used to come out up, up town and bottle drives and all that too.

Sometimes people just felt embattled.

Joan Paulson, Cache Resident 1959 – 1973?

Int: Was there a lot of community spirit that you remember
Well, at our age I don’t think ... I can’t really say. I just remember I was getting beat up a lot, and picked on, and we kids would fight a lot, maybe because we weren’t Native, I don’t know. I always had to ... watch.... They would have little gangs ... there were some families that we had to watch out for because they were just getting hard core, as far as being roughnecks and being tough.... Just stayed away from them....

The final City-sponsored report on zoning on the Island Cache came in May of 1972, in the form of an inter-office memo from the Technical Planning Committee (TPC) — a committee made up of city officials. A paragraph on the bottom of page one of the memo is most instructive.

The following report deals only with the problem of servicing the 39.74 acres of subdivided property lying west of Queens Street, north of the C.N.R. property and South of the Nechako River extending westerly to River Road bordering The Pas Lumber leasehold in the C.N.R. complex. The cost estimates given by the City Engineer to the Advisory Planning Commission have been rearranged and some corrections to wrongly reported geodetic elevations in previous reports have now been supplied by Mr. Obst and are appended to this report.

City of Prince George Technical Planning Committee 1972: 1
This is as close to an admission to the error in elevation the City was going to make. In fact the only adjustment to the cost estimates made were for supplying water to the Island, an adjustment that had been made when the City re-investigated the water issue in 1971. With the exception of this cost, which was reduced from $129,000 to $105,000, the figures used for discussing the feasibility of enhancing the community were the ones developed (in error) from the APC report (see for example PGC, “City requested to reject bid,” May 15, 1972). This was despite the fact that the error was known, and so large, that the cost estimates were ludicrously high. In fact, the report continued to imply that the “the land would have to be cleared, any of the existing buildings raised and the area raised by gravel fill.” This claim, made first in the APC report, was simply wrong. The new TPC report repeated that the City should not install any services, and that all levels of government and the CNR should cooperate to purchase all the land on the Island and relocate the residents. An editorial in the PGC on May 16th, 1972 agreed.

**A moral dilemma**

The recommendation by the city’s technical planning committee that a proposal to supply water services to Cottonwood Island be rejected places city council in a highly moral dilemma.

The fact that the cost of supplying water as well as other services to the Island is not economically feasible does not remove council’s obligations toward the residents there.

Those obligations were imposed on the city the moment it agreed to incorporate the Island Cache into the city.

What then to do about this benighted area that is like an unwanted growth on the corporate body of the City of Prince George?

This gathering of standard and sub-standard homes cannot be allowed to just sit there and fester, as city manager Arran Thomson indicated to council.

They constitute a problem that will not go away of its own accord.

It is not enough to say that the people are there of their own free will and that nothing should be done to rectify what has become an intolerable situation.

The city, surely, recognized when the island was annexed that sooner or later, the problem would have to be faced.

If the area is only suitable for industrial development because only industry would be able to underwrite the cost of water, sewer, drainage and road construction, then the people of the Island should be relocated as soon as possible.

If the city is unwilling to provide a very basic service such as water, it has no alternative but to relocate these people.

Surely it should not be beyond the scope of the city to find federal-provincial co-operation for such an undertaking.

Many of the island residents are already a charge on the taxpayers. If they are permitted to remain in an environment which can only continue to deteriorate, there never will be incentive for them to break out of the welfare cycle.

It is a problem that is only going to worsen and it is not going to be resolved by the flood waters of the Nechako River.

It is only going to be resolved by strong decisive leadership from city hall.

[Editorial, PGC, May 16, 1972]
The Prince George City Council and many citizens shared the sentiments expressed in the editorial — residents disagreed, but in the end, Council prevailed.

City Councilor Sympathetic to the IRA, 1970-72

Well, in those days I didn’t have a background in the Island Cache.... I didn’t know they got flooded all the time... it stands to reason being beside a river. I come from a Country that gets floods all the time. In the Netherlands... it’s standard procedure, but these rivers I didn’t know. When the flood came of course... this can happen every spring... depending on the snow belts. It could happen this spring, with this warm weather we’re having. So... in all fairness to... the rescue people... and the rest of the City, it’s something that needed to be done. You can’t have people living in a flood area... things are going to happen... so we wound up... in agreement on that end. The question of fairness... it always comes into place. Business people — and I was a businessperson myself — get a little hard-nosed at times, but I think you sort of have to temper it. That’s basically what my role was I guess.

There were two of us [on City Council]... saying okay, something needs to be done, we all agree to that, but the method of doing things.... We didn’t necessarily agree upon that... you don’t just move people away from a community that’s been there for eons. They have established their own community... the children go back to live there and on and on it goes. Now whether they’re good, bad, or indifferent, [if] something needs to be done, then let’s do it, go for it! Fairness had to be there... and that’s basically what we were working for... there was only the two of us. Harold [Moffat], he’s pretty right-winged... he likes fairness as well. We had to realize after the flood that... it could be an every year problem so something needs to be done, but let’s do it in fairness so... that was our goal. I think eventually it came out that way. I’ve talked to the people afterwards... the owners that owned, owned again, and the tenants were tenants, rented, in different areas... I think the ultimate outcome... was fairly handled.

The battle of the reports was pretty much concluded, but how relocation was to be achieved was still an issue — the Municipal Act did not easily allow for expropriation. The final lines of the editorial above were, as it turned out, incorrect. The fate of the Island Cache was resolved by the floodwaters of the Nechako River.
In the late spring of 1972, a high snow pack and rapidly warming weather caused concern over possible flooding.
Member of the Ad Hoc committee studying the situation following the 1972 flood

Well, that area, the Island Cache, Cottonwood Island, had always had a series of distributaries that, when the Fraser and Nechako were in flood, would cause these particular little tributaries or distributaries to be used at various times. Over the years it became kind of blocked up by log jams and that provided something of problem. But in 1972 was the year that had the highest flood since 1948, the major flood on the Fraser. It was just one of those unfortunate circumstances that we seemed to have avoided this year, of the extremely high snow pack, a wet spring, and warm temperatures — rapid release of flood waters and so on. What simply happened was that the flood waters from the Nechako came down, hit the waters of the Fraser and backed up ... there had never been any sort of planning or thought given to having a community on flood prone land and it just happened that in 1972 it was the highest flood that we had an entire Fraser, Thompson, Nechako system in a long time.

In May flooding of low-lying areas in the Cache began.

On June 2, the Medical Health Officer issued the following warning.

June 1972 Health Warning
On June 13th people began to evacuate. By the 14th the river was in full flood (it reached just a foot below the high water level of 1948), and most of the Island Cache was underwater.
Initially many residents stayed in the Fairgrounds, even temporary housing was at a premium in the city.
Earlier, the City had repeatedly told residents that there would be no assistance in the event of a flood. At one point (June 15th) angry residents had to occupy offices in City hall, but some relief was provided. A number of families were put up in motels.

*Rose Bortolon née Cunningham, Cache Resident 1969-1972*

I remember when they had the flood, and the people had to go to city hall. They stayed at city hall, and then McDonald’s actually donated hamburgers. They stayed at city hall ... until they found them places. A lot of people were at city hall. I and a few others were in charge of getting the hamburgers and stuff from McDonald’s.
When the waters started to recede, several Island Cache homes were declared unfit for occupation immediately.
Elsewhere, the clean up began.
On June 26, less than two weeks after the flood began, under the banner of “Homes on Cottonwood facing Condemnation” the PGC reported that

City council took the first step today to rid Cottonwood Island of all homes....

Thirty-four homes already are condemned and, before inspection is completed, more than one-third will be ordered destroyed. Others will stay on borrowed time.

Under the urging of Mayor Harold Moffat, council today endorsed what amounts to a statement of policy which declares that the status of Cottonwood Island be ended as a residential area.
Ironically, the City did allow a temporary reoccupation by some residents because of the housing shortage.

Int: Do you guys remember any of the flooding that happened in the Cache?

Rose: Just the main flood, the big flood, basically [1972].

Ruth: All I remember is . . . get your stuff — we got to go [laughs]. Wasn’t it in the middle of the night?

Rose: Yeah, and then in the morning there was lots of water there. Water all over the place . . . people were just put in boats . . . I don’t even know if we grabbed anything, or . . . debris floating all over the place . . . wood and logs and clothes — clothes all over . . . Yeah, it was a mess when it went down.

Int: Did you have water in your houses?

Oh yeah. But people moved back in afterwards . . . a lot did, because they had to have some place to live. That’s right. Where would you go?
Despite the housing shortage, the City used the Municipal Act, and the Sanitary Regulations of the Province of BC to produce notices of condemnation for buildings on 52 properties soon afterward.
Less than 2 weeks later, a further 23 properties were condemned. And then the demolitions began.
It is pretty clear that many people at City Hall never believed the Island Cache should be residential.

**Harold Moffat, City Mayor**

Yeah, we cleaned [it] out ... it used to be the garbage dump. Most of it, all that on the right hand side of the road ... was our garbage dump for years and years. Filled all those gullies in ... with garbage and back-filled it. Lamb’s had the sawmill there ... early days [it] was ... the railroad storage yard for when they built the railroad. People lived around there that worked at the sawmill and gradually those places were taken over by less-fortunates ... quite a few Métis and Indians lived there.... It was a real hangout for all the rubby dubs ... they lived down [there] and built shacks and places under the trees.

**Int: Would you say it was the poorest area of the City?**

Oh I would say so yeah. Then when the floods came, we decided that we’d had enough of moving people in and out of there.... Run a motor boat all around it ... how you picked the people up ... that’s really what got the City going.... We were charged search and rescue ... and old Ed Neff was down there with a motor boat loading people, ... and their crap, and kids. So we decided that was enough of that — won’t do that anymore. Risking his life and everybody else’s.... It got too strenuous so I set up a committee ... and they were the negotiating team ... to find a place for the displaced people in exchange for whatever ... they had down there, or if they had holdings.

**Elizabeth Carifelle, Cache Resident 1965-1972 and Cache Resident 1965-1972**

Elizabeth: They wouldn’t give fire insurance after the flood so you had no choice — you had to move. When you buy a house you have to have insurance for fire,... They wouldn’t give that back after people moved back, so everybody started selling to move.

**D:** I’d say they were pretty well forced to move.... I was pretty young but I remember some of the people ... didn’t want to move but ... they were trying to buy
everybody out so they can use the land for mills and whatever they needed it for. People were there but they couldn’t afford to keep the Cache going. They wanted people out so they could use it for the land instead of looking after the people. They didn’t want to look after the Cache [got] all the people out of there, so that they knew what they were looking after. [laugh]

An ad hoc committee was formed to make recommendations, but there was never any doubt that they would endorse the City position that the Cache no longer be used as a residential area. The committee did, however, recommend that the City take responsibility for both short- and medium-term relief efforts, and negotiate to purchase property from resident land owners on a displacement value basis; absentee land owners were to be paid on a formula using assessed values.

Member of the Ad Hoc committee studying the situation following the 1972 flood

The situation was really bad. I participated in the committee ... it was quite a good committee because it came up with a series of recommendations that I think were sort of helpful to the City. It was an interesting experience for a young geographer to be involved in that because it brought together the whole issue of hydrology and flood, flood control, flood plains, urban planning, community planning, and of course the whole issue of dealing with a community in severe distress.

The committee met with various civic authorities and representatives of the residents of the Island Cache region to get as much input as possible, because we had to know what sort of problems we were dealing with. There were health issues. There were some houses that were considered to be in really dangerous condition because of sewage backing up. Secondly there were safety issues with regard to electrical wiring and so on coming in contact with water so the electrical inspector had particular problems. But also there was a significant problem in that many of the houses were in very, very poor condition, particularly those that were owned by absentee landlords. We didn’t really have a very clear idea of where most of those landlords were ... they were retired. They just had properties and they were continuing to rent them. It was pretty clear ... many of the houses were in very poor condition, so the flooding simply made a bad situation worse, a variety of authorities in the City recommended that ... certain buildings just be out and out condemned and, even with the receding of the flood waters and clean up, they were still not fit for habitation.

The residents were made up of two distinctive groups, the renters and the owner-occupiers and ... they were all extremely concerned about the damage to their property — rented or owned, and the loss to themselves. They were very, very upset. They were very angry — they were angry at the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal authorities and they wanted help. They wanted something to be
done about the flood. The obvious thing to do first of all was to make sure the people who were rendered homeless were looked after. Federal money was sought and we recommended that if there were any shortfalls in funding ... that the City dig into its own revenues to assist people to find decent temporary accommodation until something could be sorted out. The committee accepted that it was a responsibility of the entire community, all residents, to assist those of our fellow residents who were in distress. So we didn’t just say it was up to one agency or another to look after them and to pass the buck; it was the City’s responsibility to make sure that homeless people were given at least temporary shelter.

Any replacement housing for people living in the Cache, should we felt, be elsewhere, simply because of this being a flood plain zone ... solving a residential problem ... was not the issue, ... it was dealing with distress and compensation and longer term solutions to a really particular problem — those were the concerns that we had.

The City did undertake some short-term relief measures, but it did not accept the idea of different treatment for resident and non-resident landowners. This was made worse by the fact that many resident landholders had undertaken improvements that were in effect, not assessed. The City files are full of correspondence from irate property holders trying to convince
The Beginning of the End

the City to take into account improvements — to no avail.

In the end, most people accepted 2½ times the assessed value, and sold. Some who would not sell were forced out — again using things like sanitation and public health legislation.

By December of 1974 there were only 39 households (1/3 owner occupied and 2/3 rented) with 124 people remaining (Regional Development Commission 1975). Some of these properties were later expropriated to facilitate a land swap between the City (to create Cottonwood Island Park) and Lakeland Mills (to expand their operations).

_Bruno Randt, Cache Resident 1955-1982_

We had in the city ... enemies, I tell you ... they pushed people out... Not me, I didn’t go. The other people ... [they] paid these people out for cheap price. They couldn’t do that with me. So, ...

![Nechako Fraser Junction 1973: Photo courtesy of the City of Prince George](image)

26. Note: this report also makes the six-foot elevation error when discussing the impact of flooding on the Island.
all my land, all the houses, 5 houses, 3 big houses and 2 small houses ... all the houses had running water.

Some people stayed, and watched as the land was taken over by the mills. In 1981, the Mossman house finally fell to the bulldozers.

*Stephanie Lode, Cache Resident 1969-1985*

The mill is sitting on that now ... they’re quite raised up. When they did finally take over all this property they must have raised 10 or 15 feet. You would have to ask Lake-land Mills, but I know they did because of flood level ... it was so low. I’m sure they went up high ...
we remember because we lived there for so long. All of this property right here ... we remember dumping, dump trucks and dump trucks, you know the big long dump trucks. We remember them doing it ... around in circles and raising the ground up really high. Oh it was atrocious ... as they were getting closer and closer ... it just drove my Mom bananas.
The end of the Island Cache community was rapid, and almost complete.

The dyke the residents raised in 1970 had stopped the winter floods, but not summer ones.

*Bruno Randt, Cache Resident 1955-1982*

We had a small one [dyke] before. That was one thing ... then ... the Nechako River — people ... came from the town, and helped us to build a dam ... to build a wall. But the wall was good, for a short time when the flood came up. Then the water was pushed through, out of the ground.

All through the late 1960s and early 1970s people in the community were busy building a kind of political dyke too. There is no doubt that the CYC volunteers were very effective at working with the local leadership in the Cache to mobilize the community.

*City Councilor Sympathetic to the IRA 1970-72*

I think they did a wonderful job ... they sort of brought the respect within the Community. Unfortunately Mark died very soon thereafter ... then Ronni stayed on for a little while longer.... Bob Parris ... disappeared along the while there, so everything sort of fell apart. But I know there was nothing but admiration [for them] at that time.

Island Cache School during the 1972 Flood: Photo courtesy of the PGC
The Company of Young Canadians and ... to come into a community and in a strange city ... takes a lot of guts. You know ... we had had good times with them and, and I personally learned a lot from them, no doubt about it.

For three turbulent years, the Island Residents Association, the BC Association of Non-Status Indians, and the Company of Young Canadian Volunteers battled City hall. They organized petitions, protests, and effective community participation.

“Crowd In” Protest at City Hall Winter 1972: Photo by R. Hull courtesy of the PGC

Rose: It was a pretty close-knit community. Everybody helped ... everybody just chipped in, and then they had a community organization there, I can’t even remember the name ... the Cottonwood Island ... Association. They did as much as they could for the community. They had little bingos, and little dances, and all kinds of little stuff ... do you remember that?

Ruth: And everybody, when it flooded, everybody at the river with those sandbags, too eh?

Rose: Yeah, yeah. And then when they’d go petition City Hall ... there would be a whole group of Island Cache residents who would go, just to be supportive towards our spokesperson. I was involved in that, but I was just basically a support person.... We went with the Company of Young Canadians — actually with Mark Holtby and Bob Parris — to the council meetings. They would petition, bring briefs about the river, how it was flooding, and how to improve Cottonwood Island, but nothing really came out of it.

Int: Who started that? Who got the Company of Young Canadians into the Cache?

There was a group ... I know my Auntie Elizabeth Gauthier was one of them, my Mom [Alice Cunningham] ... a few Métis people. I’m not sure if it was BCANSI or a combination of both groups. Gail McGillvary. Mrs. Mossman. Mrs. Mossman was really a great, great advocate of the Cache.

Ruth: She hated us kids though. [laugh] She used to get mad at us all the time, ... hollering at us all the time....

Rose: I remember that. But I think that you guys, because she was a really heavy-set woman....

Ruth: Everybody would tease her.

Rose: That’s what it is. But she was always helping ... in the community.

Ruth: There [were] hippies that came there, remember? They took a whole bunch of us to Jasper, in a bus, all us kids. I can’t remember what their names were. They used to do a lot of stuff with all the kids down there.

Int: And they just packed you guys up and took you off to Jasper?

Yeah, they asked all the parents first ... we camped there for 2 days. In a bus, took us in an old hippie bus. [laugh] ... they had signs all over the bus. I think they took about 27 of us with them. Think it was about every kid that was there. [laugh] Yeah, it was fun though. Used to do lots with the kids down there, those guys.

Int: Really? Were they just living there, or?

Yeah, I can’t remember whose house it was. Small house ... I can’t remember who owned that place. It was just a small little place, anyhow. They enjoyed it down there, those guys, ’cause they get along with everybody down there.
Whatever Ronni Entwhistle’s early fears, she remembers her time in the Cache positively.

_Ronni Entwhistle, formerly Holtby, Cache Resident and community activist, 1970-1972_

What was really fun is ... everybody would collect, and ... do bees about something like, for example, the dykes. They raised the dykes to stop the flooding themselves. People came from all over ... all the Cache people. They called it “Up the Dyke Day.” It was really goofy. Everybody was out there, and you had ... people from uptown who were real helping kinds of characters, driving diggers and loaders ... everybody built a dyke. And another time they [the City] were bringing the garbage down, and Lucille Mossman ... she was always yelling at city hall. She’s standing here, with her arms up in front of the dump trucks, going “You try drinking this shit!” and she was yelling at them, and she was 70 at the time, 75. There was always something going on like that. That was invigorating.

Ronni and Mark Holtby left the community in 1972, shortly before Mark’s untimely death at the age of 33. In some ways, Bob
Parris never left the community — rather he joined it; Bob married Elizabeth Gauthier in 1975.

By almost any measure, the community and the CYC volunteers were committed, organized, and engaged.

*Rose Bortolon née Cunningham, Cache Resident 1969-1972*

... before the flood ... I don’t know if they knew, or what happened, why they were ... dyking ... people were just working hard dyking the river. They were just sandbagging and sandbagging ... the river, and it just seemed like there was just ...

(Int: We found out that the water, too, doesn’t just come up over the edge, it comes up underneath the ground ... it comes up through the bottom).

That’s why the sandbag didn’t help. Yeah, well, we didn’t know that. [laugh] Everybody just worked side by side.

Through the period 1968-72, the people of the Island Cache built two kinds of dykes — one political and one physical. In the end, neither was successful. What was successful was the creation, however briefly, of a committed and organized community movement. It is hard to know the impact of that movement, but it is important to know that a lot of the people involved continued to work for people like those in the Island Cache.²⁷ In 1973, BCANSI launched a major campaign for social justice in BC — housing was the central issue (BCANSI 1973). Dykes are raised one foot at a time....

Sometimes what comes out of building things is the capacity to build, rather than a thing itself. Certainly, for Peter Hudson this was the true measure of the Island Cache, regardless of its demise.

*Peter Hudson, Island Cache Community Development Worker, 1968-1970*

When I heard about the flood and the relocation, I remember being very sad about it ... because I do think that the maintaining of that community as a mixed-use area as part of the City of Prince George, recreational park, residential, with adjacent, industrial, could’ve enriched both the lives of the residents who were now there and future residents to come.... So I think that that was an opportunity that was either unwisely or deliberately and crassly squandered.

But looking back on four years [1968-1972] of the more intense community activity, I am, despite the final outcome, I was very impressed. I was very heartened, and my faith in people’s inherent goodness was restored or reaffirmed by not just the goodness that I found there, but also the incredible talent and the skills of the people who were there. I remember, just for example, in the

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²⁷ This link between ongoing political action and relocation is made by Clairmont and Magill (1976) in reference to Africville, Nova Scotia.
three-room school there were three things that were prohibited. One was dancing or something and music, and one was gambling, and the other was liquor. And we had a huge carnival one Christmas, with the school Principal turning a blind eye. This was the Christmas of ’69, I guess it would’ve been, maybe ’68. The first big thing the IRA organized and we raised good money for recreation programs later, summer recreation programs. There was Jules Morin and his group, and his son and others playing some wonderful toe-tappin’ country music in one room, with people dancing and having a hell of a good time. Liquor being openly sold, but very, very carefully policed by the residents, in terms of it not getting out of hand in another room, and a blackjack and some other games in another room. And that was a huge, huge success, that the community talked about for months and months afterward. It was a huge success not just in terms of raising money, but in terms of how they felt about themselves, and a manifestation of the kind of talent and organizing ability and skills that they had if they bothered. I really think that, I like to believe anyway, that what happened there in terms of the development of some people, people knowing their skills, but also developing them. That that endured after the Island Cache was disbanded. And that carried on in people’s future lives and future work.

Int: In your life?
Yes I think so. I think so. I’d be the first to admit that ... I took every bit as much as I gave to that community. But the main thing that I took, was the kind of respect for people who have these great big fat files in the welfare office — and actually what they are, who they really are, and what they can do, and how their lives, are really lived out. And how they are so capable of giving, and they’re not just like clients.... I think that those who don’t live closely to that kind of community and that kind of lifestyle tend to ignore the strengths and concentrate only on the weaknesses and the problems.

**AT THE END**

The old Island Cache School building is now a storage shed for one of the mills.

A handful of houses, and only a few streets remain of the Island Cache today. River Road is still there, but most the rest of the streets are gone.

All the re-development in the area has been designed to service the industrial areas. For the residents who remained in the area the longest, this is a bitter pill.

*Stephanie Lode, Cache Resident 1969-1985*

... they actually developed River Road when everything was finalized. That’s when River Road finally became accessible ... when they finally moved us all out ... it became River Road and ... paved ... that was the worse day of my mom’s life. Why couldn’t they have paved it when we lived there? We always wanted it paved, and Mom said if they would have paved it, she would have never sold. My mom was so pissed off. [laugh] They, my parents, didn’t like it cause they wanted to live there forever.
A final irony can be seen on the one street sign you can find today.

The irony is that this sign, which is about 50 meters from the old flood channel and on the Island itself, refers to Foley. Of course the Island and Foley’s Cache are two different things, and certainly there was never a street in the Island Cache called Foley Crescent. Not only was the Island Cache removed, it has been erased from the history created by street signs, and replaced with the much earlier, and more westerly, image of Foley and his railway. The Island Cache is not just gone — it has been replaced. No matter, people can still remember.
The Island Cache is gone, but people still have their memories both good and bad. For a lot of people there is a nostalgia for a now lost sense of community and family. For others memories of the place are clouded by some of the problems in the community, and the problems of being from the community.

Cache resident 1959-?

The simplicity... there was less to worry about. [But] then I’m always having to look at it from a kid’s point of view. Having Mom and Dad together, having your own little house... it was very small, but to us it was just big enough. We had a friend living right next door, and Mom used to bundle me up at night when I was really young, and take me over there and she would have tea and I'd sleep wherever... on somebody's bed, or I would sleep on the couch beside them when they were having tea and chatting away... sometimes she would leave me and sneak out alone. As I got older I started realizing what she was doing [laugh]... but at that time I was very ill, off and on, and at that time doctors made house calls... the doctor had to come and see me. I don’t know if was a biweekly thing but I have a strong memory of him coming.

Int: So the opposite of that, what would you say was the worst thing about living there?

Well, from my point of view, [the flooding] was taking me out of my surroundings. I was young and kind of into myself for one reason or another, I was an introvert. I just didn’t like to be taken out of my house, out of my surroundings. As far as I was concerned we could go up to a higher hill somehow and still stay there. I hated change, I liked to be with... the animals and my dog, which I did lose during the first flood, he ran off with somebody else.... Although, my mom and dad didn’t get along all the time, they had some problems but... I just reflect back on that as simpler times and the area was quite beautiful as I grew up I realize[d] how nice it was. I spent a lot of time outside and I just hated having to leave that little house, but... it’s a long time ago and you have to spend a certain amount of time reflecting back.

Cache Resident, 1970-1973

Even though there [were] some screwed up lives down there, they were still close, you could count on each other. And so I guess — to me it was like everyone down there was an outcast from society. I mean they stuck us on the other side of the tracks, you know, the Métis and the Half-breeds, the Crees and the Carriers and the
poor White people. We were all stuck down there. And when we were together it was ... us against the world sort of thing, or against society. We didn’t conform to everything else in Prince George. Actually, in 1969, Prince George, per capita, had the highest crime rate in Canada. It was as a result of a lot of the people who were down there. There was a lot of crime ... a lot of bootleggers, and booze cans. Parties ... you could find a party any night of the week down there, a few parties actually. There was no shortage of that ... fights and people getting shot or stabbed. And I remember when I moved down there, I was 15 years old, and part of a gang down there. Trying to fit in, because the Carriers didn’t fit in too much with the Crees ... and the Métis ... for me anyway, it was sort of like breaking new ground. That’s because I have to prove myself and be crazier than everybody else, so I could fit in with everybody else ... I think when the Cache flooded there [were] a lot of people who didn’t want to leave there because that was in their comfort zone, “I
Memories

don’t want to go from here, because I know where I stand here,” when they moved out here it was tougher.

*Carmilla Canino, Cache Resident 1955-1965*

You lost a lot of roots ... with us coming over from another country altogether, you really set down roots ... that was that was our home. That was the house that my dad built. That was ... everything to us ... the house we grew up in. When I think about it now, it’s difficult for someone else to try and comprehend, but I lost roots when I came to this country.... I lost them again having to move from that area. You came to a place where people were together and friendly, and went somewhere else, and by this time, [pause] you didn’t have it anymore....

That is the sad part ... couple years ago I went down ... I hadn’t been down for years and years. It was just too difficult ... but my daughter was working for the railroad museum a few years back. I had to drive her down there and pick her up, and this one particular time I said, “You know, I’m going to show you where I used to live,” and we went down the road ... it’s all the way down the River Road, and then coming around where the school is, and everything else is gone ... it just had these great big lumber piles. Whatever it has there now, I don’t know, but it was a real sinking feeling ... knowing that a part of what we were, what we had built isn’t there anymore. We were ... together ... a thriving community. People had roots there ... and it’s gone. I can understand how the Native Indians feel, very much so ... to have something totally obliterated from your life....

*Elsie Christianson, Cache Resident 1947-1967*

It was nice down there. They sure spoiled it. Our house was right ... where the police have their dock now ... straight across the street. We used to pick cranberries down there. I don’t think there’s anything else I can say. We lived there for a long time and saw many people come and go.

*Cache Resident 1952-1964*

Can’t say I really liked anything about living there.... It was nice, there was lots of bush, and the river was right there, and it was pretty free. You could pretty well do what you wanted down there, nobody cared. But, when you look at living there and living in Central Fort George, it wasn’t a very nice place to live.

*Int: What would you say was the worst thing about living there?*

No flush toilets! [laugh] Although you [didn’t] really know that ... until you were 6 and you started going to school, and people actually had flush toilets.

Not surprisingly, there are a lot of different opinions about whether what happened to the Island Cache was a good or bad thing. When people were asked if the community had been treated fairly during the events of the early 1970s their responses were often pointed.

*Carmilla Canino, Cache Resident 1955-1965*

I don’t know whether I should be so bold as to say it, but I think that the agenda was to get rid of, or obliterate,
or whatever, part of the Native heritage that was down there. It was, you know, probably [in] the back of people's minds ... and maybe it's not a very nice thing to say but ... that's it ... that's what it was. We didn't know what racism was in those days, when we were there, but we certainly learned it when we came to town....

*Int:* Did you find when you moved into the city ... did you feel prejudice because you were Italian, or did you just notice it more....

I think we noticed it more. We noticed it, not toward us specifically ... we don't speak English with an accent, we're White. But we saw the racism, and we experienced the hurt that ... the Native Indians were feeling, because they weren't Native Indians to us — they were people ... they were our friends.

*Heinz Bartkowski, Cache Resident 1953-2003*

Oh, I don’t know, a flood’s a flood. It didn’t make much difference at all, if there was flood. Our place never really got flooded. It was one of the few places that didn’t ... I know the water was on our yard ... but we just lived with it.... They tried to get us to sell and we wouldn’t so ... you can’t force anybody to sell.

*Int:* How did you feel about the city’s attitude towards that particular flood?

I think the city just wanted cheap land, to tell you the truth. Figure they got ... all the people sold for dick all! Must have gone, “your land’s no good ... here’s two or three thousand dollars for your whole house, or five thousand dollars for your whole house, and we’re going to condemn this area....” They just wanted [us] to get out of there. So if you’re in despair, whose going to buy? Before, the previous floods ... we had lots of floods before ’72 ... we probably had one every two or three years. They didn’t really care then. So I guess in ’72, Oh that’s a pretty good raw piece of real estate back there ... that’s what I think.

*Cache Resident 1952-1964*

I think they could’ve been treated a little better. I think when they started dumping garbage and stuff ... while there [were] still people living there [it] was kind of a slap in the face.... The people down there never really felt like they belonged to the city of Prince George ... it was a separate community.

*Int:* So being incorporated, I think it was in 1970, was just ... move by the city to take over...?

To take over, to buy the land, to get the people out of there, and then use it for an industrial park. Yeah, it wasn’t fair. [laugh] It would’ve been a nice place. It could’ve been a nice place. If they would’ve ... taken the money ... to fix the place up, build a dyke, put services in — it could’ve been a nice community. But there [were] a lot of shacks down there. We had a little tiny shack of a house. [laugh] I think they tore our house down ... I never really went down there that much after. I lived out in the country and didn’t have a car or anything, so.... Went down there to buy a bottle of wine every once in a while [laugh], when we were teenagers, you know.
Pat Foremen, Cache Resident 1955-1965
Well that's a matter of opinion. I just as soon not comment on that one. Someday I may want deal with the City again on something else. [laugh] I don't think the people of the Cache were given all that sweet of deal ... a lot them had everything that they owned financially sunk into that area, and they were given next to nothing. There [were] homes down there, they were poor, but there [were] also homes that were very nice. When the City made the offer there wasn't any difference ... they were just going to condemn it and that's it.

Sherry Lewis, Cache Resident 1958-1963
I don't know. I suspect not ... I don't know who took it over but I would say that ... there was probably a lot that wasn't good. Hopefully a lot of them were treated fairly but I don't have that information. I'm sure it was hard for families to be scattered, just in my own personal life to get married and leave the area was hard enough you know, to not have that closeness.... But maybe that's part of our evolution, that we've all gone our ways and we've got vehicles and all kinds of transportation. We have changed the system of our families. They're not as close knit as they use to be. I find that to be a sad thing where a child would have ... a whole community to raise a child. We don't have that anymore, we're scattered too much ... some children see their grandparents once a year. Maybe they never see them 'cause they're to far away.... It's been hard I think for everyone. So I suspect ... it couldn't have been easy. Some of the elderly people must have had homes here for many years. I would be interested to know what happened to them, how were they treated and where did they make them go to or did they just buy their houses and say good-bye and left them to fend for themselves.

You might assume that people who lived in the Cache in the 1970s, the people who were actually forced to move, would think the loss a shame, but not everyone agrees.

Mike Lamanes, Cache Resident 1951-1962
Int: When you go down to the Cache now, there's nothing there, you can't even tell that there was ever a Community that existed there. Do you think that's a great loss to Prince George?
I think [if] the City and Victoria would have gotten together, we could have done something [to keep] that community alive ... because we were on the wrong side of the track, they didn’t seem to want to do anything for us, that’s my opinion.... We were sort of looked down on ... that happens in every city. But I had my pride, and I wouldn’t let that worry me at all. I said “prove yourself that you’re a better man just because you’re living on the south side of the track and I’m living on the north.” I said, “That doesn’t make you a better person.”

Ron Hilde, Cache Resident 1940 – 1942
Well I think that’s progress ... what’s maybe a loss to some people is not to others. A problem has been resolved ... the area is being used for something else ... more industry ... especially on the west end ... now it's become a park. It’s an asset. With the railroad park there have been im-
provements. At what cost, I don’t know but I think it was a wise move. Because when a city is growing there has to be changes. You can’t have areas like that and expect them to remain the same, because most areas like that deteriorate … and they were deteriorating during that time. The flood was the main contributor to the problems … now you’ve got parks, you’ve got the trail along the way … I think it’s a real improvement … but probably the people who lived there wouldn’t think so, … but you can’t live in the past forever … that’s what they were doing. And you can’t live with the problem and expect people to … help out all the time. There is a cost involved … I can see that. I don’t know … not living in that community … I really can’t say … a lot of the people that I knew weren’t living there anymore. They had all moved to other areas in the City…. The Métis community I imagine … to them it was a community … their community … I never lived in it, so it’s not for me to judge.

Sherry Lewis, Cache Resident 1958-1963

I felt deep sadness when I came back to Prince George in ’86 and found out there was really nothing here. I brought my youngest child and the sibling above her down here to … show her some areas, and all I found was part of the school. I felt sadness. It was a deep loss. I’m not the only person that’s happened to that’s for sure, and this isn’t the only area that’s changed. But it’s sad that there’s nothing here, like it’s industry now. I don’t even know if there are any houses left at all. So it was sad, very sad. I really enjoyed going to the school here. It was such a small school … there were three rooms when I went. Some of the older grades went into the one room that was separated from the piece that’s left standing here. We had wonderful times together at Christmas concerts and all that kind of stuff. There was such a closeness … everyone turned out. The whole community would come. I think probably everyone was interrelated or felt like they were. I think I remember that the best. And even if you didn’t know someone, it didn’t seem to be like you didn’t know them … you felt like you did.

James Larson, Cache Resident 1966-1970

After dark, it wasn’t a good place … but I never … felt unsafe as a kid. I think now as an adult, I don’t think I would’ve wanted to live down there. Not by choice, anyway … so…. It probably wasn’t a good atmosphere…. The older people that were established … it might have been a problem for them to relocate after … a lifetime…. Who knows how long they were down there, a lot of them? That might’ve been a problem for them, whether they were house owners and were bought out, or whatever. I don’t really know where a lot of these people went. Going through the newspaper every once in a while … I’ll see a name I recognize…. Over the years … a lot of these people … they ended up in jail or dead. These were the guys I used to hang around with … in the daylight, and not at night? So it was probably a good idea they closed it up.

Cache Resident 1958 -?

I think they could have done something to help the community down there, … especially if they were willing to live there and keep up. We weren’t asking for mansions
or inside cans or anything. It was all outhouses in most places. I never lived in a house with an inside can until I was fourteen years old [laugh] but it was all worth it. I think they should have helped more and tried to prevent the flooding. Once everybody moved to town it seemed like everybody just kind of split up. It was different. There was some bad things that happened down there, but it was like a big family — where everybody cared and thought about other people. Not like it is today. Today you don’t even know who your family is half the time ’cause you don’t see them anymore. We all live here and I hardly see some of my family, sometimes for a couple years.

Freda Evans née Garnot, Cache Resident 1958-?

My Dad, before he passed away, hoped it would be something ... the park was nice ... but it’s still flooding and the mills pretty well took over our little community there. A lot of people still work at that mill ... lived in the Cache too. At Lakeland, there’s quite a few ... that still work there ... lived in the Cache.

Int: Is there anything else that you wanted to add, anything that we may have missed that you think is important to include?

I think it’s worse off ... as far as family ... sticking together and ... celebrating special occasions ... being there for one another. I’d ... rent there — everybody wants to move back there. It’s just a wish I guess ... all we can keep is the memories.

Indeed.
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Finally, we would like to add a word about authorship. In a project with so many people involved, many of who contributed greatly, it is a bit difficult to say who is responsible for the final product. Nonetheless, authorship matters, both in the currency of academics, and in the responsibility for the final representation of the research. We have decided that Mike Evans (the Principal Investigator and the person who wrote most of the text above) should be first author; and Lisa Krebs (who wrote some of what is above, discussed endlessly the way this book should be written, co-ordinated the day-today research, and actually did a great deal of it as well) should be the second author. These two people are responsible for any errors and omissions, but a number of others made contributions so large and so important that they must be recognised as well. For this reason, we wish to recognise John Bogle, Heidi Standeven, and Bob Parris, as major contributors to the book. The authorship therefore reads as “Mike Evans and Lisa Krebs with John Bogle, Bob Parris, and Heidi Standeven.”
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