

## Module #2: Musqueam Community Introduction

### **MUSQUEAM UNDER THE INDIAN ACT**

Musqueam Indian Band is a legal designation in Canadian Law under the [Indian Act](#). The Indian Act was passed into legislation on April 12, 1876. The Indian Act identifies certain Indigenous peoples, native Indians, as wards of the state, the same legal status as residents of an insane asylum, or a convicted criminal in crown custody. Other Indigenous peoples: Inuit and Metis, are not subject to the Indian Act.

By designating Indians as wards of the state the crown was able to argue that Indians did not have the competence to own land. Indian reserves set aside under the Indian Act do not belong to the resident bands thereon; but instead belong to the crown and are held in trust by the crown for the resident band. Indian Reserves are therefore federal lands and are recorded in the federal Indian Land Registry. The First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA) was passed in 1999 with the effect of withdrawing qualifying First Nations from sections of the Indian Act when they enact and adopt a Land Code under the provisions of the FNLMA. Musqueam has been developing a Land Code for many years, but it has not been adopted and enacted yet.

The Indian Act has provisions defining who can be a registered Indian. These provisions have been identified by the United Nations as violations of basic human rights. Canada and British Columbia have adopted enabling legislation for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which if enacted may see membership in First Nations determined by First Nations and not by Canada. At present there are approximately 1,350 members of Musqueam Indian Band.

**MUSQUEAM INDIAN BAND RESERVES**

IR # 1	surrendered
IR # 2	190.40 Hectares
IR # 3	6.50 Hectares
IR # 4	57.30 Hectares
Total Reserve Area	254.20 Hectares

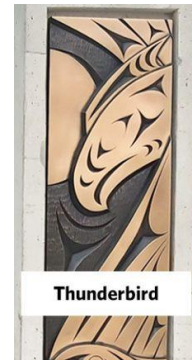
In 1871 there was a difference between the federal and provincial government on the size of Indian Reserves. Consequently, whereas Indian Reserves in the Okanagan exceeded 30,000 acres, Musqueam received only 628 acres.

IR #1 was surrendered in the 1920's when polluted water made it uninhabitable.



### MUSQUEAM CULTURAL CLASSIFICATION BY CANADIANS

Musqueam is a Coast Salish community who speak Hən̓q̓əmi̓nəm̓, the downriver dialect of Halkomelem, a Salishan language. [Coast Salish people](#) are regarded as members of the North-West Coast Cultural Group of Indigenous peoples, whose members extend from northern California to the Alaska panhandle. Cultural traits common to the North – West Coast Cultural group are an extended family kinship system, family longhouses, trade networks, political alliances, and shared cultural icons such as the Thunderbird, [Double Headed Serpent](#) and Soul Canoe.



*Double-Headed Serpent Post at UBC Campus carved by Brent Sparrow Jr.*

Musqueam also shared cultural similarities with pre-contact Mexico. The Double Headed Serpent was a cultural icon in Mexico and the North – West Coast. Bound heads in cradle boards created the distinctive “sugar loaf” head in both ancient Mexico and Musqueam. Brain surgery was practiced in Mexico, and the furthest north that this technique was used was the Musqueam village of Cesnam.

Musqueam cultural beliefs in the afterlife are virtually identical with the ideas of the afterlife in central and east Asia. Academic genealogists speculate that there were four migrations into North America that created the human legacy: Early Siberian, Athapaskan, Paleo-Inuit, Thule (modern Inuit). This theory doesn't agree with Musqueam history or law. We remember we have been here longer than the mountains, since before the last ice age.

### MUSQUEAM ORAL HISTORY

The people of the North-West Coast Cultural Group believed in an after-life followed by reincarnation. This was the tradition at Musqueam, a tradition which is now being displaced by Christianity and Evolution Theory. At Musqueam the Elders in the extended family of the siye̓ye co-founders believed that our Oral Histories are how we remember our previous lives.

We refer to our Oral Histories as snəwəyət̓, a word which may be translated literally into English as “good teachings,” or which may be given an interpretive meaning in English as law. Individual teachings of antiquity are termed sɣ̓wəyəm̓; a word which might be erroneously interpreted into English as “myth.” This error was a common occurrence in colonial academia, which trivialized indigenous culture as a dreamlike fantasy instead of a generational memory; nonetheless, our Elders used this English word when conversing with English speakers as it provided English speakers with an approximate meaning. I now use the word memories instead of myths.

The oldest Musqueam memories come from what our elders termed the “sɣ̓wəyəm̓ tem,” or “myth days.” These memories shape our culture to this day. They come from a time before the Winter Without End, which is known in English as the Wisconsin glaciation. The Wisconsin glaciation began here in Musqueam territory 87,000 years ago.

### AN EXAMPLE OF SNŌWEYƏᠤ

I would like to provide an example of an ancient snŏweyəᠤ, or lesson. When I was 12 years old my parents took me on a canoe journey. We travelled hundreds of miles to a pure ecosystem with no roads, where we paddled through a lake, a river, another lake, another river, and into a large glacier fed lake with ice-cold crystal-clear water.

We camped in the evening on a beach of white sand. My mother asked if I would learn a lesson in the morning, and I agreed. She did not tell me what to expect.

In the morning she woke me before dawn and told me to wear my swimsuit. When I emerged from the tent she took me to the lakeshore, no time was given to eat breakfast or wake-up slowly. I was a skinny 12-year-old and even though it was summertime, we were high in the mountains, and I shivered from the cold.

When we reached the lakeshore, she waded into the water up to her knees and turned to face me on the beach. She asked me a question that she knew I could answer, it was a lesson learned long ago as an infant, that all things are living things. She asked: "Son, do you know that this lake is a living thing?" I answered, "Yes mother."

She reached both her hands into the lake and drew out a double handful of water. "Now this water is a separate living thing." She said to me. "Do you understand that?" "Yes, mother." I replied." Then she threw her arms above her head, and the water scattered into a myriad of tiny drops which glistened as the rays of the morning sun hit them rising in the air. "Now all these droplets are their own separate living things too." She said, "Do you understand, Son?." "Yes, mother." I replied. Then in order not to forget the lesson I had to dive into the freezing cold lake just as the morning's sun's rays blessed the waters to start the day.

This ancient snŏweyəᠤ teaches that all things are living things, that the world is in a continuous state of transition, and that we as humans use ceremony to transition from one phase of our life to the next. We transition through ceremonies as a way to be conscious of our transitions. This ancient lesson comes from that ancient time of our earliest memories, more than 87,000 years ago.

There are other important snŏweyəᠤ that come from this ancient time. Of paramount importance is the law that all people are related. We are all from one family. This is an ancient sɣʷəyəm, an ancient lesson, we cherish to this day.

Modern geneticists have determined that there is a "mitochondrial Eve," a female ancestor to all living humans identified through mitochondrial DNA, which is passed on exclusively through the female line. Geneticists estimate she lived between 350,000 and 500,000 years ago. It is the Musqueam paradigm that in this way Industrial culture is relearning ancient truths that were lost when our respective family lines diverged.

### MUSQUEAM IDENTITY

Although Musqueam people are defined in Canadian law by the Indian Act; that is not our identity. We are Xʷəlmuxʷ (Wool-muxh)," people of the earth". There are many reasons we self-identify as people of the earth; however, like our language, not everything translates simply, even as a concept, let alone as a word.

Before colonialism brought the cultural expectations of the British to our land, we did not identify ourselves by place names, instead we identified ourselves by genealogy, by our family tree. Three hundred years ago we would not have said "I am from Musqueam," instead we

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would have given our parents' names; and if necessary, our grandparents' names, and if we were making small talk, we might have said incidentally in passing "I have been living at the place of the muthx<sup>w</sup>i grass all my life." To this day traditional people of the earth, or Indians as you might consider us, believe we come from every lineage and community of our ancestors.

### **EXAMPLE OF BEING PEOPLE OF THE EARTH**

More than fifty years ago I sat with my aunt on the porch of a cabin in the woods, on a lake with no road access. It was in the evening, at twilight, when the changing air temperature draws the evening breeze off of the lake into the forest. The trees gently swayed in the breeze, and their multitude of motion created a soft susurrantion that filled the valley between the mountains.

"My! Just listen to them." She spoke. "They are whispering to one another." We listened in silence for several minutes. Then she turned to me with tears in her eyes and said, "They talk to one another in the day; but, at this time of day, now, they share with one another all the news of the day, all the comings and goings that they need to know about. All the far-off news. They are like us that way. They talk to everyone. No one is left out."

As people of the earth, we are obliged to remember our lineage. I was required to learn my family tree back seven generations. I was forbidden to marry anyone connected to mutual ancestors.

When we plan our rituals and invite our family, we are obliged to contact all our relatives impacted by our ceremonies. In the old days planning our ceremonies to commemorate life transitions often took many years. We would contact as many family branches as possible; no one was left out. When my aunt spoke of the forest being like us, I better understood how we are people of the earth.

In the last twenty years or so biologists have learned that plants communicate through their root network, exchanging chemical signals and nutrients through rhizomes, or rootlets; and through the air by pheromones. This is another incidence of industrial culture relearning knowledge that was lost when our family lines diverged. This gives us hope.

### **SPIRIT DANCING**

As a child I remember sixty years ago watching our sacred winter ceremonies by the light of two bonfires in the longhouses of our people. In my earliest memories of that time there were no electric lights in the longhouses yet. These ceremonies in the winter occur because in the winter the life force retreats into the ground, and the spirit world is closer and easier to access.

Not everyone has a spirit guide. In Musqueam and our kindred communities' winter is the time when a person who has a spirit guide is intertwined with them as one being. Their spirit guide brings them both a private spiritual gift, and a public expression of their relationship which is conveyed through a sacred song and dance specific to that individual.

This is one of the sacred teachings that Canada sought to exterminate. As a consequence, although it is important to us, as a result of the cultural genocide, it is now a private matter, and it is not appropriate to ask your Musqueam co-workers to share about this. If it is appropriate, if there is a reason to share knowledge about this with you, then they will. In Module #4 a little more will be shared about the spirit world.

### HOW SNƏWƏYƏŦ IS LAW

In Musqueam culture we inherit equally from both our parents, from our mother and our father. When a new family is created by marriage, the children inherit from both their parents, and a new chain of snəwəyəŦ is created. After thousands of years, and hundreds of generations, a great volume of snəwəyəŦ becomes what could be termed in English, “Laws of General Application.” These laws in common shaped the structure of our society, entrenching authority in a nobility called “Siem,” who led the various lineages and owned authority over the resources and the land.

Laws of General Application are things like don’t steal, don’t murder, the obligation of hospitality to those who come in peace, how to show you come in peace, etc. Within the snəwəyəŦ of a lineage might be a form of law unfamiliar to Canadians. This would be spiritual obligations that are owed to an ancestor or a spirit of nature, perhaps related to Spirit Dancing or other sacred obligations.

### EXAMPLE OF LINEAGE SPECIFIC SNƏWƏYƏŦ

When I was six years old, I was given the hereditary name of Kwes’ Kwestin. The name was carried before me by my grandfather. The name comes from my Great-Grandmother who dwelt at Quamichan. I have never lived at Quamichan, only visited there; but my Elders from Quamichan would ask me “When are you coming back home?,” because in my previous life, when I was my grandfather, I had lived there.

With this name I was given a specific obligation. Because my father was a white Canadian, and my mother was the daughter of a Shaman, I was given the obligation to be a bridge between the worlds. This is law in my family. This is an example of how snəwəyəŦ works. I am the only one bound by this ancestral law; yet my family know this law, and my obligations, and when they need a bridge, they know they can call on me. That is how I became involved in these modules.

There is also snəwəyəŦ that is ancient of years, so widespread it is common to all Musqueam and Coast Salish. Interpretation of the most ancient snəwəyəŦ occurs in the context of the family lineage. An example of this is Xhals, and I will share memories of his law with you. There are hundreds of other family lines who remember Xhals law, and some will differ in detail of the memory from one family to another. These are the memories of Kwes’Kwestin, whose ancestors dwelt at Stelax amongst the muthxwi plants.

### XHALS: MUSQUEAM’S FIRST GREAT TEACHER

Our ancestors began learning our spiritual lessons many scores of millennia ago, from our brothers and sisters of nature. This family includes as teachers the animals, fishes, birds, insects, plants, rocks, clouds, soil, and water of our homeland. These teachers also include other humans.

Our first great human teacher was Xhals. He arrived here when Tsawwassen was an island. Tsawwassen was an island from approximately 9,000 years ago until about 2,000 years ago.

Xhals came from the south, travelled east, then turned north when he encountered the ocean. He travelled with his brothers, their wives, and servants. There were perhaps 30 of them. My Grandmother called this family Xhals’ disciples.

Our ancestors told us that before Xhals came we were “Not quite right.” When the Elders told this history, they would look at the youngsters when they said, “Not quite right”, and I knew if I did not follow Xhals law, I would not be quite right.

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For thousands of years before Xhals came we struggled against Nature, because we did not understand our own nature. Xhals taught us empathy, compassion, charity, and forgiveness. Xhals taught us how to understand our human nature.

Since Xhals came we have sought to find our spiritual peace through living in balance with Nature. The primary principle of this mission is recognition of Continuous Change as the normal state of being for all things. Awareness of continuous change within ourselves is awareness of transition; recognition of our personal transition is the law which has opened our individual spirit to the harmonious teachings of nature. By recognition of our transition, we can direct that process; to become either a better person, or to become “Not quite right”.

Xhals is sometimes known in English as the “Transformer”, or “The Great Transformer”. This is because as he travelled, he rewarded good, and punished evil by transforming beings with his magic. He would punish wrong doers by turning them into stone. We know where he walked because he left a trail of stones where he punished wrong doers.

When Xhals turned people to stone, he transferred their souls from their human form into a boulder. For a people who believe in reincarnation this is a severe penalty; delaying the souls’ rebirth until that stone has “died” or transformed into sand, dust, and gravel. Not only that, but the heart of a stone seldom feels the warmth of the sacred sun.

These stones are called in English “Transformation Stones”. We remember through our Oral Histories and the Transformation Stones where he walked. When we lose track of his journey, our neighbours, our kinfolk, remember his path.

### **EXAMPLE OF XHALS LAW**

I will share with you an example of Xhals Law from my life. My mother was sent to Residential School, and from there she was transferred to the Coqualeetza Indian Experimental Hospital, where she was used in medical experiments, infected with tuberculosis, and placed in the control group. Subjects in this control group did not receive medical treatment. She told me that all the other children in the control group were the children of chiefs or shaman.

When she was on her death bed, she called me to her side and told me I must forgive the people who had done this to her. She told me she had forgiven them. I knew that if I did not forgive them, if I did not follow Xhals Law, I would be “not quite right”. This is Xhals Law.

### **RESOURCES**

[Indian Act](#)

[Coast Salish people](#)

[Interactive Map of First Nations in BC](#)