Archival Research into Residential School Deaths and Unmarked Burials

Examples and Insights from the Research Being Done

by the Team At The Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre

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Our Team:

The Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre has a large team working on the project

Archaeological Investigation Team
Dave Schaepe - Overall Project Lead and Head Archaeologist
Cara Brendzy
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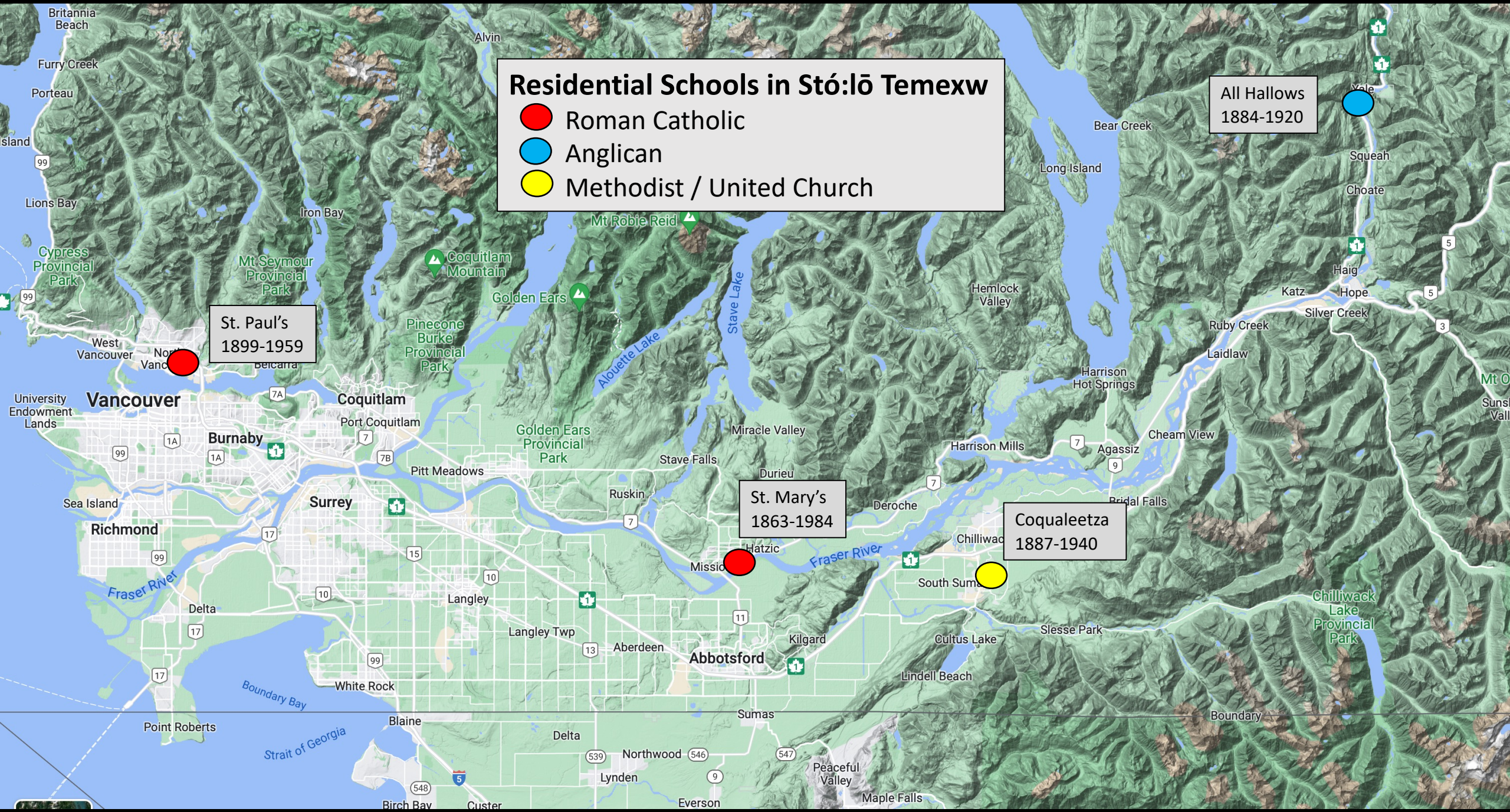
Archival Investigation Team
Amber Kostuchenko - Project Manager
Dr. Naxaxalhts'i (Albert “Sonny” McHalsie) (Cultural Advisor/Historian)
Kathleen Bertrand – Project Coordinator/Researcher
Remy Benoit – Researcher / GPR Team
Lisa Davidson, Stó:lō Genealogy Office and GIS
Kristina Celli, Archival Research Supervisor
myself

Also, the Stó:lō Tribal Council is heading oral interview investigations under the lead of Grand Chief Clarence Pennier


Residential Schools in Stó:lō Temexw
Roman Catholic
Anglican
Methodist / United Church
St. Paul's
1899-1959
St. Mary's
1863-1984
All Hallows
1884-1920
Coqualeetza
1887-1940
Vancouver
Burnaby
Surrey
Richmond
Coquitlam
Abbotsford
Langley
Delta
White Rock
Point Roberts
Fraser River
Boundary Bay
Strait of Georgia
Mt Robie Reid
Golden Ears
Coquitlam Mountain
Mt Seymour Provincial Park
Cypress Provincial Park
Pinecone Burke Provincial Park
Golden Ears Provincial Park
Alouette Lake
Stave Lake
Hemlock Valley
Harrison Hot Springs
Harrison Mills
Agassiz
Hope
Yale
Chilliwack Lake Provincial Park
Cultus Lake
Slesse Park
Lindell Beach
Kilgard
Aberdeen
Langley Twp
Pitt Meadows
Port Coquitlam
Miracle Valley
Stave Falls
Durieu
Deroche
Hatzic
Mission
Chilliwack
South Sumas
Sumas
Blaine
Boundary
Northwood
Lynden
Everson
Peaceful Valley
Maple Falls
Birch Bay
Custer
Bear Creek
Long Island
Squeah
Choate
Haig
Katz
Silver Creek
Ruby Creek
Laidlaw
Cheam View
Bridal Falls
Iron Bay
Alvin
Britannia Beach
Furry Creek
Porteau
Lions Bay
West Vancouver
University Endowment Lands
Sea Island

Beyond the particulars associated with student deaths and unmarked graves, archival sources can help reveal the broader workings and consequences of settler colonialism.

- Settler colonialism is a structure, not an event. Therefore ongoing.
- It is premised on the desire to control Indigenous lands (as opposed to labour).
- An insatiable need by settlers to displace and replace Indigenous people
    - Stó:lō people recognized this when they attached the name Xwelitem (insatiably hungry people) to white settlers.

Settlers did not create residential schools became of racism. They created them as part of a system of settler colonial dominance and control that aspired to first displace, and then replace, Indigenous people from their lands.

Racism was a convenient way to rationalize and justify residential schools.

Beyond important facts about deaths, archival sources (when approached sensitively) can also reveal Indigenous voice and perspective; Indigenous philosophies, and beliefs.

Archival sources also lay bare the prejudices, the patronizing condescension, and the arrogant ethnocentrism of the people who implemented Canada's settler colonial agenda.

Archival sources reveal that residential schools too often hired staff who likely could not, and would not, succeed or even fit in in elsewhere in settler colonial society.

Archival Sources reveal that the men who were associated with residential schools were often motivated by desires and goals that were sick and cruel even by the standards of settler colonialism. But they were tolerated and protected by officials because so few others were willing to work at the schools given their low pay, isolation, and religious rigidity.

And occasionally they can also reveal examples of kindness, compassion, and regret by empathetic settlers, priests, nuns, ministers, and staff. This can be important for helping communities to lay the groundwork for building future reconciliation.

Types of archival records, and their issues

Were the records preserved? If so where are they now?

Government records (some destroyed in Indian Agent office fires, some transferred to Ottawa; some ended up in hands of collectors, etc….)

Church / Missionary records (have been transferred around to numerous repositories as Church organizations have shrunk; records have been lost or destroyed along the way, etc….)

Who controls them?

Some records restricted due to containing personal information relating to students, some restricted by the Churches due to containing personnel information about priests and teachers, etc…)

Types of archival records, and their issues (cont…)

What was the purpose of their creation, and the perspective of their creator?

Some church documents were designed to celebrate the missionaries and teachers and attract funding from their settler congregations and the government.

Some church documents were designed for internal consumption.

Some government records were designed to highlight success of policy, some were created to provide reports by local or regional agents to senior officials who were geographically distant.

Some government records provide critical appraisals of what the churches were doing at the schools.

Issue of language

Some church records are in French or Latin.

Most government records are in English. But many are handwritten and sometimes difficult to decipher.

Indigenous placenames, and community names, and individual student names are rendered in different ways by different government agents, and even in different ways by the same government and church officials over time. This can make it difficult to determine the community and family affiliation of students at schools.

Examples of types of archival records that we have been examining:

Missionary and Church Records

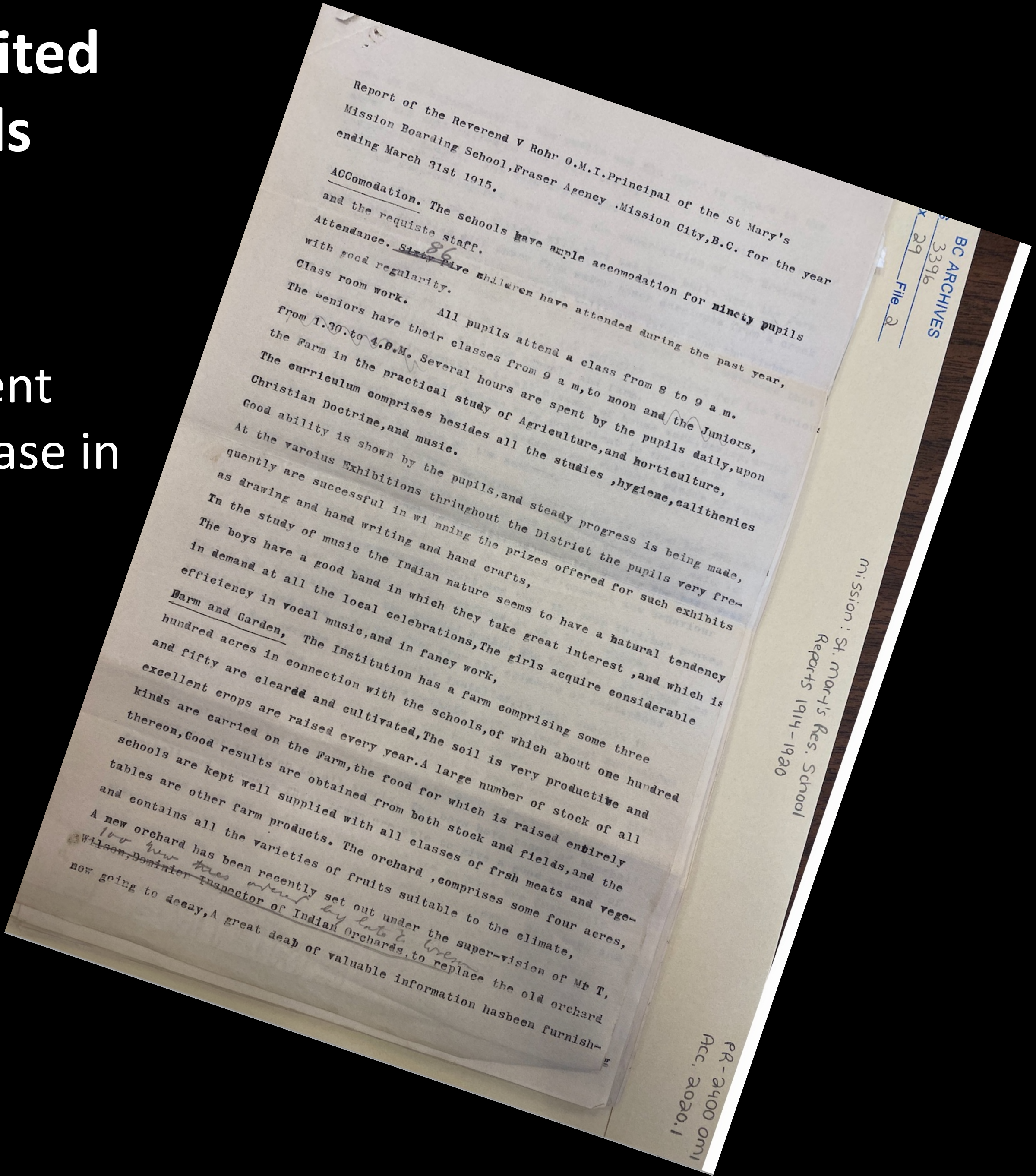
The OMI Archives in Rome have records that describes several children in mid-late 1900s who died soon after being baptized. Their parents had brought them to Mission for baptism when the children were sick with influenza, measles, and tuberculosis. Recently identified records indicate that several children and early adult converts who had been buried at St. Mary's were later brought back and re-buried with their families at Sqwah and Chehalis First Nations after the CPR Railroad construction forced the original mission and residential school to relocate several hundred meters away from the Fraser River. Research into the more recent era is ongoing.

"April 8. We had to transport the dead, who had been buried at St. Mary, to the newly-consecrated cemeteries. Along with Reverend Father Chirouse the younger, Mgr. Durieu left St. Mary escorted by a flotilla of five canoes bearing six coffins. As soon as the canoes came into view, the Sqwah church bell rang out…. on Sunday, we held a procession to the new cemetery and blessed it. They filed slowly toward the final resting place, half a mile from the church, singing pious prayers and reciting the rosary. Once we arrived, Monseigneur presented an eloquent homily on the worship of the dead, emphasizing with well-chosen words the goodness of the Church, which not only cares for the souls of the deceased by praying for them, but also honours their remains and watches over their burial ground… The next day, there was a general communion in memory of the dead ."

OMI and Sisters of St. Anne Records, United Church Records, Anglican Church Records

We have only started to review.

Have found internal school reports that document serious medical issues related to infectious disease in the early 20th century.


Report of the Reverend V Rohr O.M.I.Principal of the St Mary's Mission Boarding School,Fraser Agency .Mission City,B.C. for the year ending March 31st 1915.

ACComodation. The schools have ample accomodation for ninety pupils and the requiste staff.

Attendance. ~~Sixty five~~ 86 children have attended during the past year, with good regularity.

Class room work. All pupils attend a class from 8 to 9 a m. The seniors have their classes from 9 a m,to noon and the Juniors, from 1.30.to 4.P.M. Several hours are spent by the pupils daily,upon the Farm in the practical study of Agriculture,and horticulture, The curriculum comprises besides all the studies ,hygiene,calithenics Christian Doctrine,and music.

Good ability is shown by the pupils,and steady progress is being made, At the varoius Exhibitions thriughout the District the pupils very frequently are successful in wi nning the prizes offered for such exhibits as drawing and hand writing and hand crafts,

In the study of music the Indian nature seems to have a natural tendency The boys have a good band in which they take great interest ,and which is in demand at all the local celebrations,The girls acquire considerable efficiency in vocal music,and in fancy work,

Farm and Garden, The Institution has a farm comprising some three hundred acres in connection with the schools,of which about one hundred and fifty are clearded and cultivated,The soil is very productibe and excellent crops are raised every year.A large number of stock of all kinds are carried on the Farm,the food for which is raised entirely thereon,Good results are obtained from both stock and fields,and the schools are kept well supplied with all classes of frsh meats and vegetables are other farm products. The orchard ,comprises some four acres, and contains all the varieties of fruits suitable to the climate,

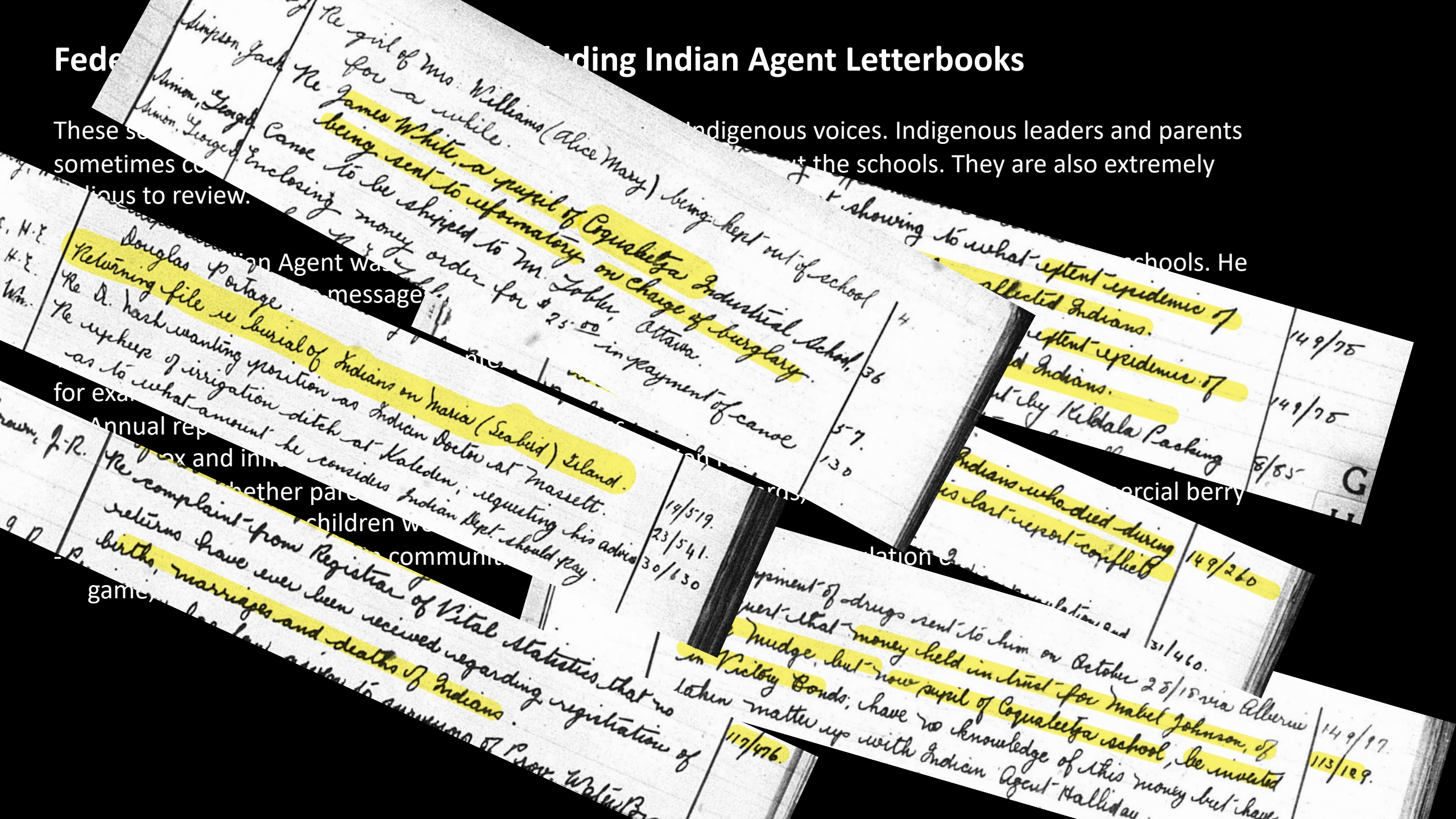
A new orchard has been recently set out under the super-vision of Mr T, ~~Wilson,Dominion~~ Inspector of Indian Orchards,to replace the old orchard now going to decay,A great deal of valuable information hasbeen furnish-

Fede ding Indian Agent Letterbooks

These s ndigenous voices. Indigenous leaders and parents sometimes co t the schools. They are also extremely ious to review.

an Agent wa schools. He message

for exa ercial berry Annual rep ex and inn whether pare children w communi game



As the archival research progresses we will be examining many more record collections, including those of the Provincial Police, the RCMP, the Attorney General's office, and the Coroner's Office – records that hold the potential to shed light on criminal activities and murder.

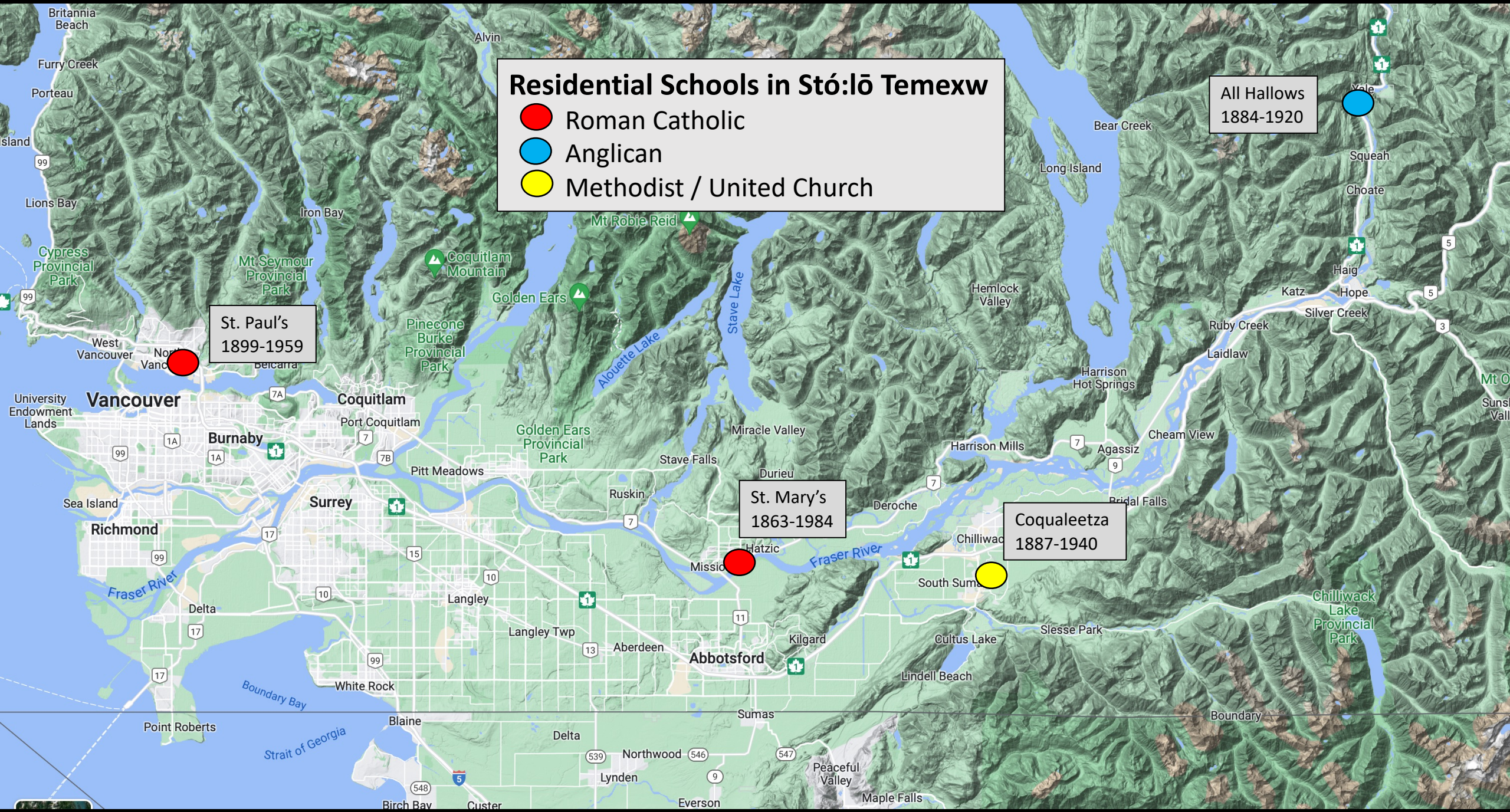
This work is being done in concert with ongoing consultation with residential school survivors and the conducting of oral history interviews that are pointing to potential homicides and hidden burials.

Timeline of Indian Residential Schools in Stó:lō Territory

- 1858 - Fraser River Gold Rush (large-scale violence against Stó:lō and Nlakapamux people, introduction of whiskey, alienation of lands and resources.
- 1863 - Catholic Boarding School at St. Mary's Mission (students appear to have been a mix of orphans / illegitimate children who resulted from unwanted relationships between miners/settlers and Stó:lō women, and the children of elite families who sent one or two of their children to St. Mary's to learn English). Daughter of Chief Alexis of Cheam is early graduate. She established a day school on her home reserve for other Indigenous children which was praised by the missionaries, but that seems not to have received broader support from the government.
- 1867 – Stó:lō reserves are reduced, without consent, by 92%.
- 1885 – Amendments to Indian Act outlaw Stó:lō self-governance (potlatches) and spirituality (Tamanawas Winter Dance).
- 1885 – Remains of children and adults buried at original St. Mary's site are returned and re-buried with family when CPR construction forces the mission and school to relocate.
- 1887 - Methodist establish boarding school at Coqualeetza to compete with Roman Catholic missionaries. Over the years many students came from regions far outside the Fraser Valley on the north coast (regions where Methodist missionaries were more active).
- 1892 - Federal government begins to pay tuition fees to Church-run schools (aprox. 60% of what provinces paid public schools). Missionaries become more active in trying to recruit students. Schools would operation on the "half-day system" (academics in morning and applied training / labour in afternoons). Federal tuition covered cost of supplies and infrastructure, churches were expected to fund and provide the staffing costs.
- 1884 - Anglican boarding school for girls at All Hallows (originally for white girls only, Indigenous girls invited to boost tuition and to do labour for white students).
- 1886 – federal government prohibits Stó:lō from selling salmon caught upriver of Mission.
- 1900-1918 – Numerous Stó:lō parents start to work out arrangements with local settler teachers and principals for their children to attend provincial public day schools. Missionaries oppose this. Children experience racism.

Timeline Continued…

- 1917 – Indigenous students transferred to St. George's res school in Lytton. School closes in 1920.
- 1920 – Federal government makes school attendance mandatory.
- 1920s – Indian Day Schools open in several of the largest Stó:lō communities (Seabird Island, Chehalis, Skwah, and later Sumas). Smaller communities and more isolated communities are compelled to send their children to one of the residential schools.
- 1933 – RCMP appointed as truant officers to enforce school attendance.
- 1940 – Study shows that 40% of residential school staff lack even the most basic skills to be teachers and care givers.
- 1941 – Coqualeetza closes. Stó:lō students are transferred to Port Alberni and St. Michaels (Port Hardy) residential school.
- 1957 – Federal government increases funding to residential schools making it similar to provincial school funding.
- 1960s – More and more Stó:lō students are being registered into Indian day schools or provincial public schools. Residential schools become increasingly reliant on policies that mimic child welfare apprehension legislation (taking youth from families in distress) for recruitment. By 1966, 75% of residential school students are there because officials have determined they were suffering "neglect" at home.
- 1960 – New federal Regulations require all teachers in residential schools to be certified teachers. Priests and nuns and brothers replaced as teachers (though they still remain and oversee religious training).
- 1969 – Federal government formally takes over direct control of residential schools. Indigenous leaders, such as Joe Alex at St. Mary's, are hired into senior administrative positions.
- 1969 – Federal White Paper recommends phasing out all Indigenous status and rights. Indigenous leaders resist and the federal government reverses this policy.
- 1984 – St. Mary's closes.


Residential Schools in Stó:lō Temexw
Roman Catholic
Anglican
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St. Paul's
1899-1959
St. Mary's
1863-1984
All Hallows
1884-1920
Coqualeetza
1887-1940
Vancouver
Burnaby
Surrey
Richmond
Coquitlam
Abbotsford
Langley
Delta
White Rock
Point Roberts
Fraser River
Boundary Bay
Strait of Georgia
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Miracle Valley
Stave Falls
Durieu
Deroche
Hatzic
Mission
Chilliwack
South Sumas
Sumas
Blaine
Boundary
Northwood
Lynden
Everson
Peaceful Valley
Maple Falls
Birch Bay
Custer
Bear Creek
Long Island
Squeah
Choate
Haig
Katz
Silver Creek
Ruby Creek
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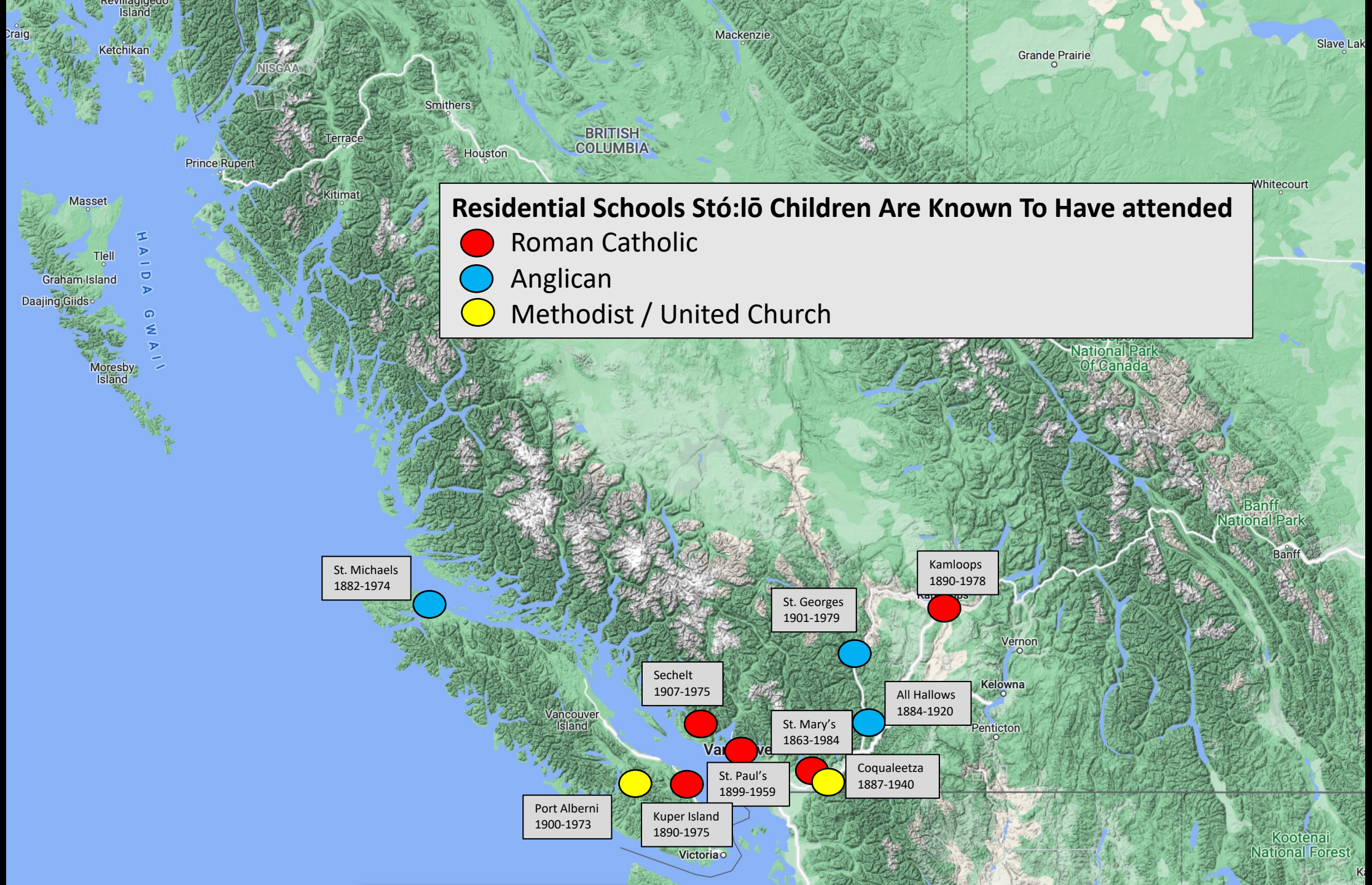
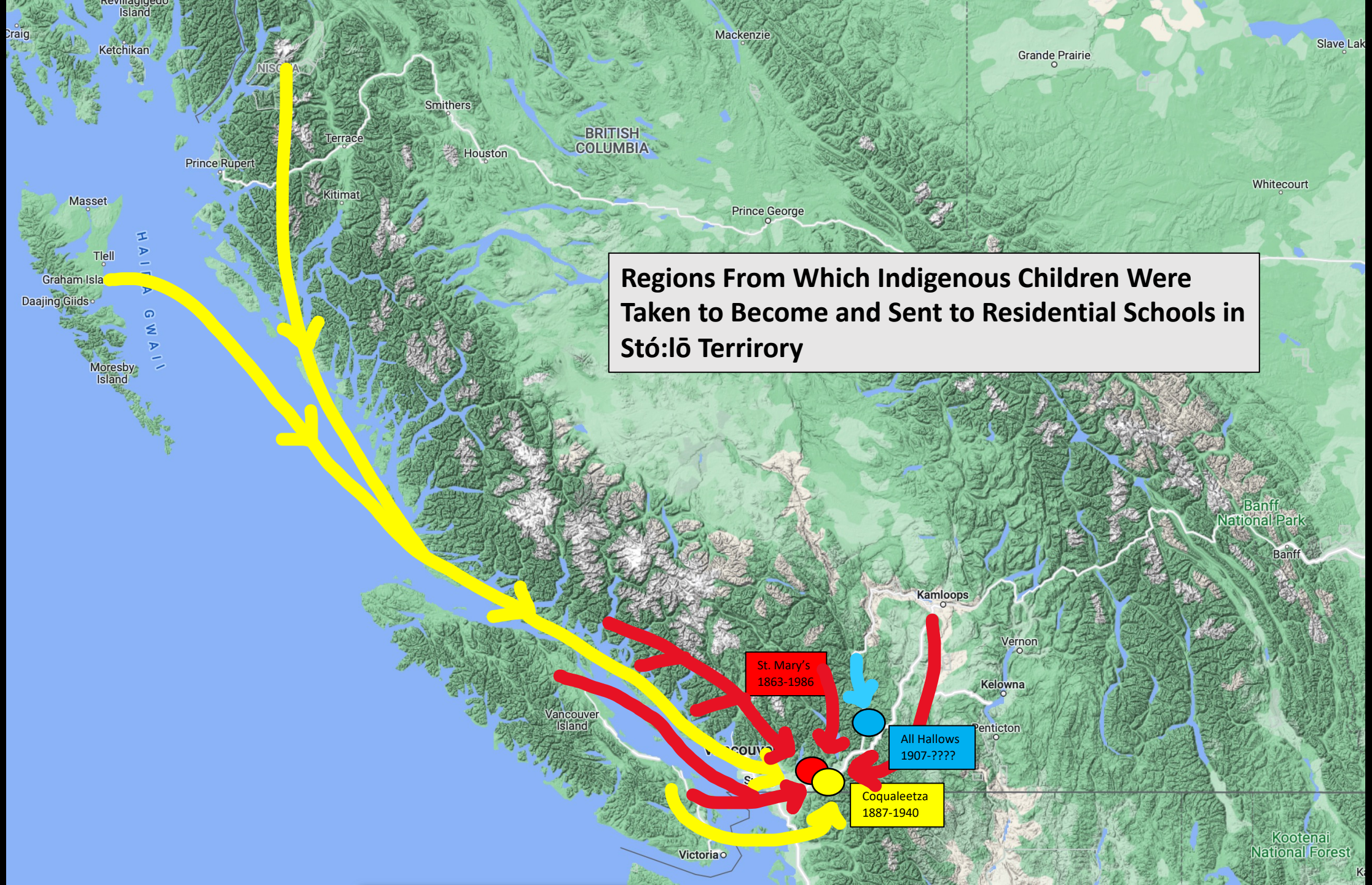
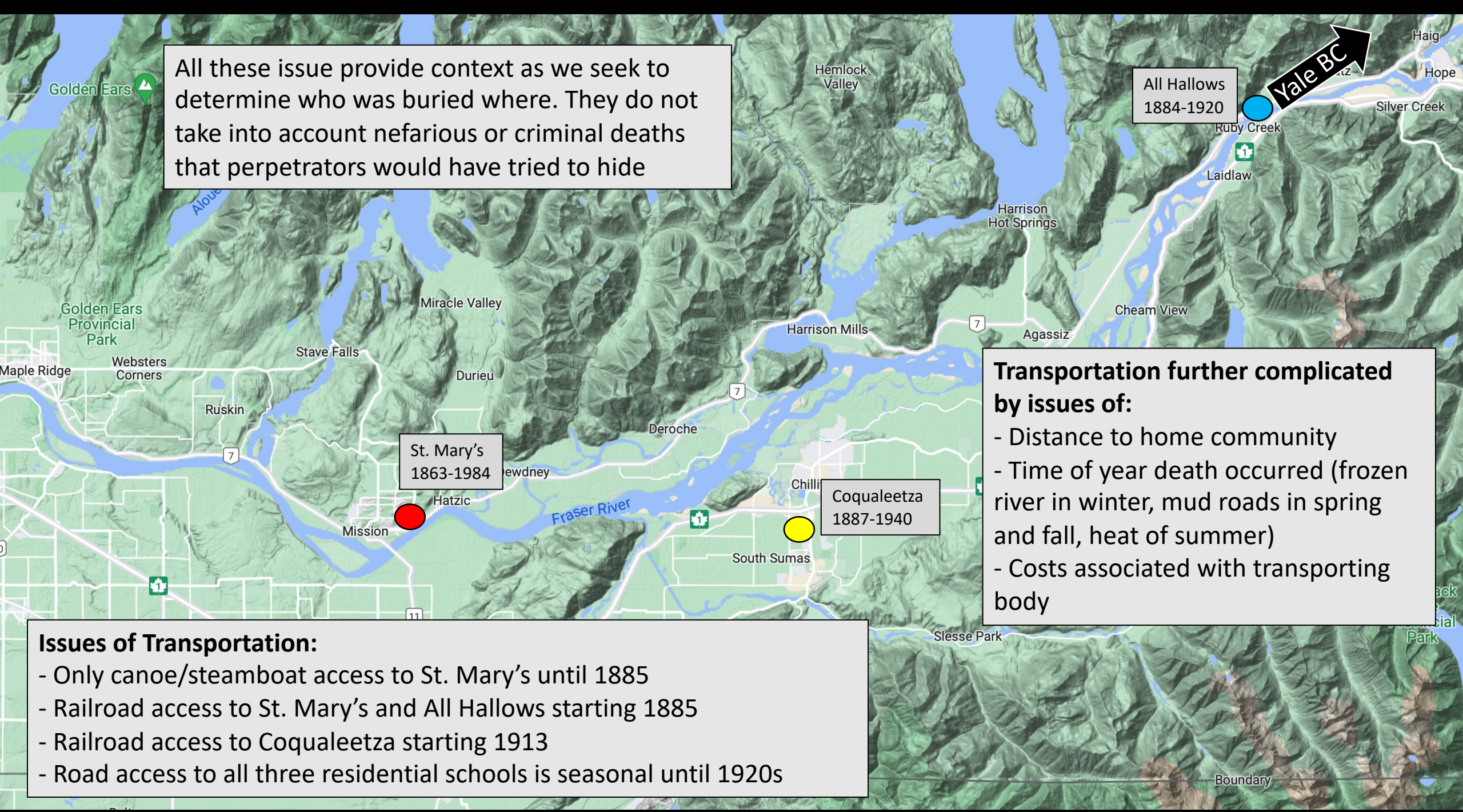

Residential Schools Stó:lō Children Are Known To Have attended
Roman Catholic
Anglican
Methodist / United Church
St. Michaels
1882-1974
Kamloops
1890-1978
St. Georges
1901-1979
Sechelt
1907-1975
All Hallows
1884-1920
St. Mary's
1863-1984
St. Paul's
1899-1959
Coqualeetza
1887-1940
Port Alberni
1900-1973
Kuper Island
1890-1975
Ketchikan
Prince Rupert
Terrace
Smithers
Houston
Kitimat
Masset
Tlell
Graham Island
Daajing Giids
Moresby Island
HAIDA GWAII
BRITISH COLUMBIA
Mackenzie
Grande Prairie
Whitecourt
Vernon
Kelowna
Penticton
Vancouver Island
Victoria
Banff National Park
Banff
Kootenai National Forest


Regions From Which Indigenous Children Were Taken to Become and Sent to Residential Schools in Stó:lō Terrirory
St. Mary's 1863-1986
All Hallows 1907-????
Coqualeetza 1887-1940
BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ketchikan
Prince Rupert
Terrace
Smithers
Houston
Kitimat
Masset
Tlell
Graham Isla
Daajing Giids
Moresby Island
HAIDA GWAII
Prince George
Mackenzie
Grande Prairie
Whitecourt
Slave Lak
Kamloops
Vernon
Kelowna
Penticton
Vancouver Island
Victoria
Banff National Park
Banff
Kootenai National Forest


All these issue provide context as we seek to determine who was buried where. They do not take into account nefarious or criminal deaths that perpetrators would have tried to hide
All Hallows
1884-1920
Yale BC
St. Mary's
1863-1984
Coqualeetza
1887-1940
Transportation further complicated by issues of:
- Distance to home community
- Time of year death occurred (frozen river in winter, mud roads in spring and fall, heat of summer)
- Costs associated with transporting body
Issues of Transportation:
- Only canoe/steamboat access to St. Mary's until 1885
- Railroad access to St. Mary's and All Hallows starting 1885
- Railroad access to Coqualeetza starting 1913
- Road access to all three residential schools is seasonal until 1920s
Golden Ears
Hemlock Valley
Haig
Hope
Silver Creek
Ruby Creek
Laidlaw
Harrison Hot Springs
Golden Ears Provincial Park
Miracle Valley
Harrison Mills
Cheam View
Agassiz
Maple Ridge
Websters Corners
Stave Falls
Durieu
Ruskin
Deroche
Hatzic
Mission
Fraser River
South Sumas
Slesse Park
Boundary

Causes of deaths at Stó:lō-region residential schools identified in archival records during preliminary research completed to date:

Disease:

smallpox, chickenpox, influenza, tuberculosis, etc….

“Accidents”

working in sawmill or on farm, activities on school site

Conclusion:

Despite being colonial records, the archival documents can be especially valuable.

The documents need to be understood within their historical context, and the changing history of residential school policy and application.

Preliminary research suggests that the earliest unmarked graves may be primarily those of orphans and children dropped off by women and girls who had been violated by miners and early settlers. In later years the graves may be principally associated with students whose home communities were distant from Stó:lō territory.

But the deaths that occurred at residential schools in Stó:lō territory included Stó:lō children, and the archival documents can assist in determining the cause of these deaths so as to help with oral interviews and ultimately bringing closure to families.

We are carefully following-up all oral histories that point to criminal or other nefarious deaths and burials.

Le hò:y, th'ítolétsel
(Halq’eméylem)

I’m done now, thank you
(English)

Ko-pet wa-wa, máh-sie
(Chinook Jargon)

J’ai fini, merci beaucoup
(French)