
The Cultural History of the Land of the Tod Creek Watershed

A Research Report
with the Friends of Tod Creek Watershed Society
completed through the
VIPIRG Research Internship Program

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Section I: Introduction

The Friends of Tod Creek Watershed Society is a neighbourhood group with the mission “to protect and enhance the integrity and biodiversity of the Tod Creek Watershed.” The on-going project that we chose to pursue via the VIPIRG Research Internship Program is to record the cultural history of the land in the watershed. The information for our project was obtained through two comprehensive interviews with members of the Tod Creek Watershed/Prospect Lake community. By gathering an archive of stories as told through the experience of residents living in the watershed, The Friends of Tod Creek Watershed Society hopes that by sharing these stories we will create a positive, lasting sense of the communities collective shared history. The information collected will be used to inform decisions about how people live in the watershed. The Friends of Tod Creek Watershed Society publishes a journal, *Watershed Connections*, which devotes a section specifically to this topic.

This essay will summarize our interviews with two members of the community: Dave Wallace and John Steeves. Along with the summaries, we will devote a section of our paper to a report examining the various strategies for action that we have produced as well as a section relating the material to critical research strategies that we examined in this course. The long term use of the information collected (written report and audio tapes of interviews) will be archived and used to tell stories for the benefit of watershed residents and perhaps a larger audience. Through information gathered in our interviews, we hope to provide meaningful information in relation to the land upon which they live, work and play. This project was arranged for us through the VIPIRG Research Internship Program and was a pleasure to pursue.

Section II: Written Summary of Interviews

Summary of Interview with John Steeves

John Steeves arrived in the Prospect Lake area in 1966 and has been a proud member of the community ever since. Mr. Steeve’s first house in the area was a small cabin on the point of the lake. He lived there for about a year or two before transferring to his current residency in 1968, located just a handful of houses away. Mr. and Mrs. Steeves raised two daughters in the area, whom learned to swim and play on the lake. Since Mr. Steeves arrival in the area he has noticed some major changes in the community.

Upon arrival to the area, lake water was the only source of water in the area. It was very drinkable and was used purely for residential purposes. Some chose to filter the water but Mr.

Steeves never felt the need to do so. It was the sole means for drinking water and household purposes and also served as an excellent place for the children to swim and play. In 1969, a year after moving into his current place, the Prospect Lake region was hooked up for city water. Mr. Steeves noted that there were some advantages and disadvantages in doing this. The obvious advantage was that people had really good water and there were no longer health concerns. A disadvantage was that people became a lot less concerned with the quality of the lake water. Building code requirements for septic fields were relaxed because it was no longer a health requirement and people were not using the water directly for consumption purposes. Since there were no longer health concerns in drinking the water, many people turned a blind-eye to the construction of both septic tanks and septic fields that could very well lead to an increase in contamination and lake pollutants.

After various questions regarding the history of the land, the interview shifted towards the current use of the land upon which Mr. Steeves lives and the surrounding area. When asked about the current use of the land upon which he lives, Mr. Steeves replied that it used primarily for residential purposes. He also maintains a small garden on the land. Without getting to specific, Mr. Steeves commented on some of his concerns regarding the surrounding area. Mr. Steeves emphasized that people in the area are generally quite respectable in regards to land use. He also noted that there were a few things that he did not agree with. First and foremost, Mr. Steeves commented on the lack of concern for disposal fields. Mr. Steeves stated that, “for the most part people are responsible but some of the tanks are pretty grim.” Many of the fields in the area are too close to the water and do not have the elevation to sustain themselves. Another reservation that Mr. Steeves had in regard to land use in the area was directed towards huge houses being built on small lots. He believes that this is a mistake and he is sorry to see it. People can sometimes find ways to get around the bi-laws and that is not right. An excellent quote taken from Mr. Steeves in regards to the bi-laws is that “it easier to obtain forgiveness than permission.”

An important aspect in regards to the current situation in the Tod Creek Watershed area is the community atmosphere. Over the years, Mr. Steeves has noticed a shift in community spirit. Years ago, people played a much bigger role in community activities. Nowadays, people just want to go home and do their own thing. There are a few successful events that are held by the community hall; however, it is not as widespread as it used to be. Mr. Steeves is one of the directors of the community association and believes that community events are essential in bringing people together for a common cause. According to Mr. Steeves, people actively participating in community events play an integral part in preserving the community spirit. He believes that “the prospect lake region is one of the few areas that have a physical community hall to work from, which tends to be the natural nucleus of the community.”

Following our discussion with Mr. Steeves about the current use of land, we began to talk about the future possibilities. There are various strategies for action that I would like to highlight from the interview. They will be critically discussed later on in the paper. In the near future, Mr. Steeves would like to see the lake cleaned up considerably more than it is. He also mentioned the possibility of a “community distribution system”, which would prevent the inevitable leakage of pollutants into the lake. Another problem that Mr. Steeves would like to see dealt with in the near future is regarding speeding in the area. He lives on a country road with a lot of curves, a lot of ups and downs and a few blind corners. There are many children in the area and people drive way to fast down the roads. The final future strategy for action to be highlighted includes: an increase in public awareness as well as greater participation in community events.

Summary of Interview with Dave Wallace

Dave Wallace has had contact with the Tod Creek Watershed for fifty (50) or more years. Whilst growing up Dave Wallace's next-door neighbour's grandfather was a cattle dealer and the young boys used to accompany him to the auction on the corner of Durance. Although he did not grow up in the Tod Creek Watershed area, Mr. Wallace attended school with a large number of people who lived in the Prospect Lake region, so he was very familiar with the Tod Creek Watershed/Prospect Lake vicinity before moving into the area.

Upon marriage in 1965, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace moved into the Tod Creek Watershed area, and have been living on their present property ever since 1971. Some of the major changes in the area that Mr. Wallace has noticed over the past thirty (30) or so years include; firstly, increased traffic levels; secondly, new housing developments; and finally the sub division of some of the larger properties. Some of the other major changes in the area include the elimination of some of the larger farms, "down the valley there used to be four (4) dairy farms you could see from our front window, and now there are [roughly speaking] only four on the whole peninsula"(Wallace, interview). According to Mr. Wallace the area used to have a large number of "family style farms"; their specific piece of property was previously owned by Henry Robinson, who owned about 100 acres.

Furthermore, St. Joseph's Hospital used to own and run a farm in the area surrounding Mr. Wallace's home; it included a dairy farm, pigs, and also grew produce for consumption by the hospital. Some of these once booming farm lands are now used to grow potatoes and vegetables because it is "bottom land" (flooded farm land) (Wallace). Additionally, Mr. Wallace stated that, "agriculture is moving out of the peninsula, there's just no other way around it...[because][farmers] cannot make it with only fifty (50) or a hundred (100) cows, because you can't compete...that's the whole problem with agriculture...you need to be big volume".

Although they have long since grown up and moved away, the Wallace's raised children in the Tod Creek Watershed area. Currently they use their property primarily for residential use, but moreover they "run a few sheep...[have] a few cows...and grow hay" on their property to feed their stock. Since his retirement about three (3) years ago, Mr. Wallace has had more time to work with/on the land and has since planted three (3) acres of grain that he uses "get the crops to grow better". What's more, Mr. Wallace said "I get the greatest charge out of putting something in the ground and watching it come back up...or the lambs bouncing around outside...[or the] calves playing...I enjoy that".

When asked if he had any concerns regarding the current use of land by his surrounding neighbour's and properties, he had none. He went on to mention that, "sometimes you see things happening you don't particularly think should happen but I am probably doing things that other people don't think should be happening...in fact I 'm sure I am".

Mr. Wallace is a member of the community association and feels that his community is a good one. He went on to say, "A lot of these communities are you only get out of them what you put into them", and then he mentioned some of the events his community association participates in, such as the Christmas potluck dinner along with a number of additional seasonal BBQ's.

The future of the Tod Creek Watershed and particularly the areas surrounding his property are of particular interest to Mr. Wallace. He would like to see very little or no development in the region and expressed concern over the thought of "big block stores" (i.e. Wal-Mart) in his area. The local gas station and corner store, along with the 'Big Barn' are very much pleasing to Mr. Wallace because they are "owned by individual people who live in the area

and [therefore] care about the community”. Also, Mr. Wallace likes accountability of the local shop owners for their actions with in the community. Conversely, Mr. Wallace said that he does “not want to see commercial development or auto wreckers” in the area. Additionally, the preservation of remaining green space in the area is of paramount importance to Mr. Wallace.

With regard to the Hartland Landfill in the surrounding area, although he would like to see the dump somewhere else, Mr. Wallace feels that the CRD (Capital Regional District) has been doing a good job of taking care of the landfill, and are “being as responsible as they can”.

When asked about his expectations as to the future use of his and surrounding properties, Mr. Wallace expressed hope in that the future residents will be someone with “white (picket) fences and (horse) riding rings”. Having stated that, he went on to mention that he sees the future of his area in the Tod Creek Watershed as becoming residential houses with horses, and sub divided lands with small acreages.

Section III: Suggestions for Solutions to Problems/Strategies for Action

As critical research strategies are social change oriented, the ultimate goal of the research is to, among other things, promote social change. As Institutional ethnographer Marie Campbell put it, “there is no relationship between research and action”, so inevitably the researchers themselves and the community must take it upon themselves to take the results of the research and turn them into a plan of action aimed at promoting social change. According to critical research theorists there exists a three prong activity which adds up to Participatory Action Research (herein referred to as PAR), one of them being, “means for taking action to create social change”. Additionally, the final outcome of PAR is the acting stage; drafting a report with an action plan, implementation of the action plan, and finally an evaluation of that plan.

This section is devoted to action, social change, and solutions to community problems. Throughout the interview process a number of problems were pointed out to the researchers regarding the current situation of living in the Tod Creek Watershed. As the capitalism advances, more and more of everyday life is becoming commoditized. Having said that, one of the interviews pointed out that, “agriculture is moving out of the peninsula, there’s just no other way around it...[because][farmers] cannot make it with only fifty (50) or a hundred (100) cows, because you can’t compete...that’s the whole problem with agriculture...you need to be big volume”(Wallace). This problem could possibly be overcome through the implementation of community networking, amalgamation and conglomeration of small family farms in the area in order to counter act the corporate rule and control of the agricultural industry.

Secondly, through our interviews it became apparent that there is an ongoing issue in the Prospect Lake area with regard to septic tanks leaching into the lake causing inescapable ecological issues from nutrient loading. One such solution for this problem could be the implementation of a community distribution system to get rid of the septic waste. Instead of pumping into a septic field (it is here where the septic systems are leaching into the ground, and eventually into the lake causing immense ecological problems), the sewage waste could be put through a common connector and transported away, eventually leading to the leveling off of nutrient levels in the lake.

Additionally, both interview sessions revealed a new issue that residents in the Tod Creek Watershed are dealing with, increased traffic and increased speed in the area. The introduction of speed bumps on some of the more residential streets coupled with signs reminding drivers of the

curvy and ‘up and down’ nature of the road, hidden driveways, and of the residential characteristic of the area are two possible solutions and strategies for action.

On a more general level, some of the issues facing the residents of the Tod Creek Watershed area could be addressed through an open forum in which residents are able to discuss problems and some possible solutions. The issues facing residents could also be taken up through networking, “building networks is about building knowledge and data bases which are based on the principals of relationships and connections” (Smith, p.156). This concept of networking on a community level is a method in which residents are able to express concerns and ideas about the current and future situation facing residents of the Tod Creek Watershed. Moreover, an increase in community awareness and participation could be achieved through; (a) increased circulation of community newsletters (i.e.- *Watershed Connections*); (b) an increase in the number of community sponsored events; and (c) sharing of information regarding history of the area.

Section IV: VIPIRG Research and the Connection to Critical Research Methods

Through out the semester we have explored a “plurality of social critical approaches to social inquiry, that can in different ways contribute to a sociology for social justice” (Carroll). The five distinct, yet overlapping approaches covered this semester have given us a methodological toolkit, which allows critical examination and ‘problematization’ of the everyday thru unmasking injustices, by way of teaching us to question the hegemonic "truths" presented to us ‘from the top’. These praxicalogical critical research strategies allow us to effectively move away from the previous research methods in sociology which taught students a set of techniques for ‘knowing the social’ in a certain scientific way: certain quantitative research methods may objectify its subjects and reduce the complexity of our social world to the “bloodless language of variables and correlations” (Carroll). It is of paramount importance to think in a critical manner because our social world is distinctive; it is imperative to remember our social reality is not a scientific laboratory where some variables are constant. Rather, our social world is dynamic and fluid and therefore so too must be our methods for social research.

Standard methods of social research are problematic because they accept the social world as is, and then attempt to work with in it. As all of the five critical research strategies were each developed out of a dialogue between activism and reflection –theory and practice, and therefore do just the opposite from the standard methods; they provide a collaborative and more democratic way to develop social policy by means of shedding light on research and policymaking by the ‘experts’, and creating an environment that welcomes new community participants to the research process (Fagan and Vera, p.192)(Carroll). Participatory Action Research is one of the tools in the critical research strategies toolkit. PAR, which places an emphasis on praxis, is comprised of three activities; firstly, it places an emphasis on the method of research- full participation with the community- meaning members of the community are not just sources of data; secondly, it is an educational process which is oriented towards changing consciousness; and finally, it is a means for taking action to create social change (changing existing social structures). Additionally, one of the key primary components of PAR is the development of relationships between the researchers and the community which should promote feeling of equality rather than “experts” vs. “laymen”. This is what we, the researchers, attempted to do with our research- develop a real relationship with the people we are

interviewing because it the research is not only *about* them, but also *for* them. Furthermore, this method of critical research insists on a “two-way dialogue between scholars and communities”, which is exactly what transpired in our research for VIPIRG and The Friends of Tod Creek Watershed.

Institutional ethnography is another critical research method explored in this class which is directly related to the research conducted for the Friends of Tod Creek Watershed and VIPIRG. A main starting point for institutional ethnography is becoming familiar with how people are living their realities, and analyzing how things are organized. Furthermore, institutional ethnography looks what is happening in the “local” setting and how the “extra-local” shapes the “local”. More specifically, an example would be looking at the current agricultural situation in the Tod Creek Watershed, and attempting to understand exactly how it is affected by the “extra-local” (commoditization of agricultural lands by corporations).

Section V: Conclusion

The Research Internship Program is a project of the Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG). The objective of the program is to link the research needs of community groups to University of Victoria students undertaking research projects for academic credit. As stated earlier, The Friends of Tod Creek Watershed Society is a neighborhood group with the mission “to protect and enhance the integrity and biodiversity of the Tod Creek Watershed.” In undertaking one of the on-going projects arranged by the Friends of Tod Creek Watershed Society, we have helped in the pursuit of that mission. Even though our project will only play a small role in gathering an archive of stories as told by the members of the community, we hope that by sharing these stories we will contribute to the history of the Tod Creek Watershed and the people who live there.

In these neo-liberal times in which we live there are “accentuated political contention and social justice struggles, whether over matters of material distribution, cultural recognition, or ecological well being.” (Carroll). Such initiatives can take on many different forms, one of which is local community organizing to meet specific human needs. We have utilized many critical approaches to social inquiry in our course, in hopes of contributing to a sociology for social justice. This project has helped demonstrate the importance of democratizing knowledge and the value of increasing peoples access to information. Access to that information may grant them access to the discussion making arenas from which they are usually excluded (top-down planning) in hopes of helping them make decisions that affect their daily lives. One of the long-term goals of this project is to create and develop a watershed management plan: additionally, the information and stories may also be used as material for the journal, “*Watershed Connections*”. Furthermore, the data collected in the interviews will be used to inform the residents about the Tod Creek Watershed/Prospect Lake community. Playing a role in a project of this type has certainly been an educational experience as well as pleasure to be a part of.