



P.O. Box 553
108 Mile Ranch, B.C. V0K 2Z0
tel: 250.706.1610
fax: 250.397.2769
email: grahamleslie@shaw.ca

May 2023 Special Edition The Northern Secwépemc Groundbreaking Ceremony

On the favourably warm and dry afternoon of Friday, May 5th and in defiance of the earlier forecasts of rain, a large assembly of Northern Secwépemc First Nation leaders and community members gathered on our site at the 108 Mile Lake to participate in and watch a simple groundbreaking ceremony. The event was organized by Society President Irene Gilbert, and was attended by representatives of all five of our participating Bands.



The event started with an opening prayer beautifully sung in Secwépemctsin by a large group of children from the Eliza Archie Memorial School at Canim Lake, under the direction of Antonette Archie and Elsie Archie.

The beautiful prayer was followed by the drumming of a distinguished group of leaders and elders from our various communities that included WLFN Chief Willie Sellars and former CLB Chief Mike Archie.

Singers from Eliza Archie Memorial School at Canim Lake



The Opening Drumming featuring WLFN Chief Willie Sellars and former CLB Chief Mike Archie

Among the many distinguished guests watching the opening drumming were three Band Councillors from the Williams Lake First Nation: Rick Gilbert, Ann Louie (formerly Chief) and Chris Wycotte Jr. who served as the Society's Vice President for many of its early years.



l to r: Rick Gilbert, Ann Louie, Chris Wycotte Jr., and Graham Leslie.



Then came a simple ground breaking to mark the imminent start of the excavation work that was expected to begin the following week, and that indeed did.



I to r: Joseph Alexis Archie, Chief Willie Sellars, Irene Gilbert, Harold Duncan and Kerry Chelsea

That ceremonial ground breaking was followed by a series of short but inspirational speeches from leaders of our member First Nations. They were delivered by our President Irene Gilbert on behalf of the Canim Lake Band, Chief Willie Sellars of the Williams Lake First Nation, Band Councillor Harold Duncan on behalf of the Stswecem'c/Xget'tem First Nation and Kerry Chelsea on behalf of the Esk'etemc First Nation. All the speeches had a common theme of honouring the many years of dedication by numerous individuals and Band Councils that had led to this extraordinary moment, as well as rejoicing in the opportunity to preserve the language, history and culture of the Northern Secwepemc peoples for the benefit of future generations.



Chief Willie Sellars for the WLFN



Councillor Harold Duncan for SXFN



Councillor Kerry Chelse for the Esk'etemc First Nation

Further remarks were delivered by Elizabeth (Liz) Pete of the Canim Lake Band who was the first Northern Secwépemc member to be associated with the idea that gave birth to the entire project, by a tearfully thankful Alana Dixon, the long-time Band Administrator of the Canim Lake Band who was a founding member of our Society when it was incorporated in 2006, and who has played a prominent role in its affairs ever since, and by the Society's newest Director David Archie of the Stswecem'c/Xget'tem First Nation.

1st image: Alana Dixon's tearful remarks.

2nd image: Alana Dixon with Society President Irene Gilbert





Elizabeth (Liz) Pete of the Canim Lake Band, who was the very first person to become involved in our project in 2003.

The final remarks were offered by Society Secretary Graham Leslie who took the opportunity to acknowledge the significant contributions to the project that had been made by members of the Williams Lake First Nation and of the Xat'sull First Nation during the important early years of the project. He was permitted to name them all and to include former Williams Lake First Nation Chief Ann Louie who had been a staunch supporter and promoter of the project throughout all her years as Chief.

The event concluded with a final drumming session that wrapped up this historic occasion that is leading to the construction and eventual opening of a cultural centre that will take place almost exactly 20 years from the time the idea was first born.

Group including Kerry Chelsea, David Archie, Sabrina Jeff, Phyllis Rosette, Trish Meraw and former Chief Mike Archie with CLB elder Brian Bob and CRD Director Al Richmond watching

Prior to the final drumming session there was a brief photo op that allowed for a shot that included all of the Society's current directors in the company of Chief Willie Sellars and Joseph Alexis Archie. [next page]





The Society's current Directors with WLFN Chief Willie Sellars and Joseph Alexis Archie

The final word is to acknowledge the absence of numerous significant individuals with prior commitments who were unable to attend the event. Those we particularly want to mention are Chief Helen Henderson of the Canim Lake Band and Rhonda Shackelly, former member of the Society and recently elected Chief of the Xat'sull First Nation.



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