

St. Columba, Tofino

Prepared by Jesse Robertson (June 26, 2023; revised April 24, 2024)

Property Acquisition

Address	110 Second Street, Tofino, BC
Legal description	PARCEL B (BEING A CONSOLIDATION OF LOTS 1 AND 2, SEE FB456906) BLOCK 6 DISTRICT LOT 114 CLAYOQUOT DISTRICT
First private landholder	Pre-empted in 1893; Crown Grant awarded in 1900.
Diocesan Acquisition	Purchased at a nominal price in 1913; deed of conveyance never registered. Re-purchased from Province in 1955 to obtain legal title.

Narrative Overview

St. Columba is located in Tofino at the north end of the Esowista Peninsula, in the territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht people (Figure 1). The property sits on land that was pre-empted in 1893 by settler John Grice.¹ Grice received a Crown Grant to the parcel in 1900 following a required payment of \$206 (Figure 2), and soon began subdividing it for use as a townsite.²

In 1913, the Diocese purchased two lots at the nominal cost of \$1.00. Six individuals conveyed two parcels to the church on trust that the site and monies arising from it be used for religious purposes.³ The death of two owners prior to signing prevented the Diocese from registering the deed of conveyance and produced ongoing legal uncertainty as to ownership.⁴

In the early 1950s, the Diocese decided to default on its property taxes so that title would revert to the province and become available for purchase at a tax auction. The Diocese repurchased the property by this means around 1955 and received a Certificate of Title that year.⁵

¹ Margaret Horsfield and Ian Kennedy, *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound: A History* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2014), 151.

² Crown Grant Image G01141304001, District Lot 114, Clayoquot District, Government Access tool for Online Retrieval (GATOR): [https://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/pls/gator/gator\\$queryforms.menu](https://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/pls/gator/gator$queryforms.menu); Horsfield and Kennedy, 207–8.

³ The particularities of title were “a little complicated,” as an unsigned letter to the Bishop confessed. John Grice was the original owner of Lot 114, Clayoquot District. Grice subdivided and conveyed $\frac{3}{4}$ of $\frac{3}{5}$ to Nigel Campbell, Jens Jacobsen, Alan W. Neill, and J.H. Peppett; Campbell conveyed his $\frac{1}{4}$ of $\frac{3}{5}$ to John Chesterman and Jens Jensen; John Grice then conveyed $\frac{1}{2}$ of $\frac{2}{5}$ to J.H. Grice. John and J.H. Grice, Jacobsen, Peppett, Chesterman, and Neill are named on the deed of conveyance to the Diocese. Peppett and Chesterman died sometime before 26 Jan 1914. Letter, LC/RW [?] to Bishop (Anglican Synod of the Diocese of BC, hereafter ASDBC), 26 Jan 1914, text 63, Archives of the Diocese of BC, Victoria, BC (hereafter ADBC); Conveyance, John Grice, J.H. Grice, Phillip Jacobsen, J.H. Peppett, John Chesterman, and Alan W. Neill to ASDBC, 28 Oct 1913, text 63, ADBC; unsigned letter to F.W. Blankenbach (Lay Secretary, ASDBC), 16 Apr 1924, text 63, ADBC; R.E. Stratton (Provincial Assessor) to Lay Secretary (ASDBC), 23 Oct 1951, text 63, ADBC.

⁴ Letter, LC/RW [?] to Bishop (ASDBC), 26 Jan 1914, text 63, ADBC

⁵ Letter, W.F. Veitch (Surveyor of Taxes, Department of Finance, Province of BC) to Crease, Davey, Lawson et al, 23 Mar 1955, text 693, ADBC; Letter, Lay Secretary (ASDBC) to Church Wardens (St. Columba), 10 Nov 1955, text 693, ADBC.

Interpretive Summary

Decisions regarding future land-use should bear the following considerations in mind:

⇒ This land was pre-empted in 1893, formally granted in 1900, and conveyed to the Diocese in 1913. Early Diocesan ownership of this property may have contributed to the cumulative dispossession of Tla-o-qui-aht people from parts of their territory. Early episcopal policy mandated that church properties be entirely owned by the Diocese prior to consecration. The delineation of Tla-o-qui-aht land into private property through land surveys, legal pronouncements, and physical barriers gradually restricted the ability of Tla-o-qui-aht people to access parts off their territory.

⇒ In acquiring title to the land, the Diocese benefited indirectly from discriminatory policies that preferentially encouraged White settlers like John Grice to acquire land through pre-emption. In 1866, Indigenous people were explicitly banned from pre-empting land without the consent of the Governor.

⇒ The alienation of land from the Crown has been a central factor limiting Indigenous access to land in the province. Indian Reserve commissioners often deferred to settler property rights and interests when determining reserve boundaries and generally considered private land exempt from their considerations.⁶ Today, private property is considered “off the table” for Aboriginal treaty negotiations, such as those currently being pursued by the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation.⁷

Historical Context

The acquisition of private property was central to the Diocese of British Columbia’s development. Inaugural Bishop George Hills required consecrated chapels to be “entirely the property of the church.”⁸ The policy appears to have continued at least into the early-twentieth century. In 1924, the incumbent of St. Columba described his understanding that the church had been dedicated but not consecrated owing to the difficulty in procuring title.⁹ In 1951, the Diocesan Lay Secretary wrote that the property must have been conveyed to the church prior to 1914 when it was dedicated.¹⁰

In May 1914, three months after St. Columba’s dedication, the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in the Province of BC held a hearing with the Tla-o-qui-aht to determine whether adjustments to Indian Reserves were required. Lands already privately held by settlers—including almost all of the Esowista Peninsula (Figures 3-4)—were exempt from Tla-o-qui-aht requests for new reserve lands.¹¹ Chief Jimmy Jim’s testimony shows how recent white settlement had resulted in disparate access to land:

When I was a boy there were no white men here [...] Today [the Indians] know they have so small a piece for my people. Some white men have 200 acres or more, and some have

⁶ See Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 112, 170–73, 230–31, 244.

⁷ BC Treaty Commission, ‘Land and Resources’, n.d., <https://www.bctreaty.ca/land-and-resources>; ‘Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations’, BC Treaty Commission, accessed 18 May 2023, <https://bctreaty.ca/tla-o-qui-aht-first-nations/>.

⁸ John Garrett, ed., *An Occasional Paper on the Columbia Mission with Letters from the Bishop* (London and Dublin: Rivingtons; Hodges, Smith and Co, 1860), 13, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/bcbooks/items/1.0221885>.

⁹ Letter, Rev. E.O. Robathan to F.W. Blankenbach (Lay Secretary, ASDBC), 23 Jan 1924, text 63, ADBC.

¹⁰ Letter, Lay Secretary (ASDBC) to Rev. A.H. Holmes, 25 Oct 1951, ADBC.

¹¹ Horsfield and Kennedy, *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound*, 249–51.

80 acres. And why have we such a small place here? We were born here, and white settlers have a bigger place. Why don't we have bigger lands?¹²

Indigenous Presence and Land Use

Languages	Nuu-chah-nulth
Governance	Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation; Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
Land use	No land use has been confirmed on the land now occupied by St. Columba. One settler reminiscence notes an Indigenous burial site near the area that was burned by settlers prior to 1904. ¹³
Archaeological data	No known archaeological sites recorded on property.
Historic treaties	None.
Modern treaties	Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation is in Stage 4 of the BC Treaty Process (Agreement in Principal negotiations).

Timeline

Italicized text indicates contextual information. **Bold** text indicates information specific to the property.

Date	Details
<i>12 Jan 1859</i>	Diocese of British Columbia established amidst global expansion of British Empire and Church of England (38 new dioceses established between 1814-1859). The Letters Patent creating the Diocese give the Bishop power to hold property on behalf of the church. ¹⁴
<i>Oct 1864</i>	Royal Navy gunboats destroy nine Ahousaht settlements on Clayoquot Sound in retaliation for an earlier attack on a trading vessel. Ahousaht oral histories suggest over 100 of their people were killed. ¹⁵
<i>31 Mar 1866</i>	Legislature of British Columbia removes Indigenous peoples' right to pre-empt land without the permission of the Governor. The prohibition would remain in effect until 1953. ¹⁶
<i>6 Apr 1889</i>	Anglican Synod of the Diocese of British Columbia incorporated by Act of Provincial Legislature and empowered to acquire, hold, and sell property.

¹² "Meeting with the Clayoquot Band," West Coast Agency, pages 84-85, Agency Testimonies from the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia, 1913-1916, Our Homes are Bleeding – Digital Collection, Union of BC Indian Chiefs: <https://ourhomesarebleeding.ubcic.bc.ca/Testimonies2/index.html>

¹³ Horsfield and Kennedy, *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound*, 144.

¹⁴ "Letters Patent of the Bishop of Columbia, 1859" (copy), 85.36, ADBC.; G. Hollis Slater, 'New Light on Herbert Beaver', *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1942): 14.

¹⁵ Horsfield and Kennedy, *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound*, 87; Barry M. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-90* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984), 118–21.

¹⁶ Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990), 41–42, 121.

<i>Jun-Jul 1889</i>	Indian Reserve Commissioner Peter O'Reilly visits Clayoquot Sound to determine reserves for the Tla-o-qui-aht and Clayoquot peoples. ¹⁷
1 May 1893	John Grice pre-empts 206 acres at the head of the Esowista Peninsula, including much of what is now Tofino. ¹⁸
<i>1895</i>	Northern portion of Esowista Peninsula surveyed by provincial authorities. ¹⁹
<i>1900</i>	Roman Catholic Church opens the Christie Indian Residential School on Meares Island, Clayoquot Sound. ²⁰
1 May 1900	John Grice receives Crown Grant for District Lot 114, Clayoquot District following payment of \$206. ²¹
Circa Jun 1900	John Grice surveys and subdivides District Lot 114 into lots for a future townsite. ²²
<i>16 Mar 1911</i>	A meeting of the West Coast Mission in Clayoquot determines enough money has been pledged to establish a local church. ²³
<i>13 Oct 1913</i>	First service held at St. Columba. ²⁴
28 Oct 1913	Six individuals convey property to Diocese for \$1.00 upon trust that site and monies arising from it be used for church purposes. The death of two owners prior to signing prevents the Diocese from registering the deed of conveyance and produces ongoing legal uncertainty as to ownership. ²⁵
<i>5 Feb 1914</i>	Church dedicated by Bishop Roper. ²⁶
<i>15 May 1914</i>	A Royal Commission holds hearings on reserve allotments with Tla-o-qui-aht tribe. Chief Jimmy Jim testifies:

¹⁷ Peter O'Reilly was an Anglican and served as a Trustee for the Christ Church Estate from 1876 to his death in 1905, as is described in the Christ Church Cathedral Precinct Property History. Horsfield and Kennedy, *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound*, 242.

¹⁸ Horsfield and Kennedy, 151.

¹⁹ Provincial Survey Field Books 58/1896 and 59/1896, box PH002, Clayoquot Land District, Land Title and Survey Authority of BC, Victoria, BC; T.S. Gore, *Plan of Portion of the West Coast of Vancouver Island Clayoquot District*, 1895, 1895, Land Title and Survey Authority of British Columbia Maps, University of Victoria Libraries, https://vault.library.uvic.ca/concern/generic_works/121fda2b-c288-44ad-9f17-1db4a5b4bbed.

²⁰ National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 'Christie (Tofino)', 21 January 2021, <https://nctr.ca/residential-schools/british-columbia/christie-tofino/>.

²¹ Crown Grant Image G01141304001, District Lot 114, Clayoquot District, Government Access tool for Online Retrieval (GATOR): [https://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/pls/gator/gator\\$queryforms.menu](https://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/pls/gator/gator$queryforms.menu).

²² Horsfield and Kennedy, *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound*, 207–8.

²³ "St. Columba, Tofino, BC, 1913-1983: Seventy Years of Service," Parish Histories, ADBC.

²⁴ "St. Columba, Tofino, BC, 1913-1983: Seventy Years of Service," Parish Histories, ADBC; Horsfield and Kennedy, *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound*, 234.

²⁵ Peppett and Chesterman died sometime before 26 Jan 1914. Letter, LC/RW [?] to Bishop (ASDBC), 26 Jan 1914, text 63, ADBC; Conveyance, John Gmrice, J.H. Grice, Phillip Jacobsen, J.H. Peppett, John Chesterman, and Alan W. Neill to ASDBC, 28 Oct 1913, text 63, ADBC; unsigned letter to F.W. Blankenbach (Lay Secretary, ASDBC), 16 Apr 1924, text 63, ADBC; R.E. Stratton (Provincial Assessor) to Lay Secretary (ASDBC), 23 Oct 1951, text 63, ADBC.

²⁶ Letter, Lay Secretary (ASDBC) to Rev. A.H. Holmes, 25 Oct 1951, text 63, ADBC.

	“Some white men have 200 acres or more, and some have 80 acres. And why have we such a small place here? We were born here, and white settlers have a bigger place. Why don’t we have bigger lands?” ²⁷
23 Jan 1924	Legal title to property remains uncertain; Rev. E.O. Robathan writes of his understanding that the church has been dedicated but not consecrated owing to the difficulty in procuring title. ²⁸
Circa 1952	Diocese stops paying property taxes in order to acquire title via tax sale. ²⁹
Circa 1955	Diocese purchases property from Province at a tax sale for a total cost of \$319.73, including taxes in arrears and Land Registry fees. ³⁰
20 Oct 1955	Diocesan ownership recognized by Certificate of Title. ³¹

²⁷ “Meeting with the Clayoquot Band,” West Coast Agency, page 85, Agency Testimonies from the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia, 1913-1916, Our Homes are Bleeding – Digital Collection, Union of BC Indian Chiefs: <https://ourhomesarebleeding.ubcic.bc.ca/Testimonies2/index.html>

²⁸ Letter, Rev. E.O. Robathan to F.W. Blankenbach (Lay Secretary, ASDBC), 23 Jan 1924, text 63, ADBC.

²⁹ Letter, W.F. Veitch (Surveyor of Taxes, Dept of Finance, Province of BC) to Crease, Davey, Lawson et al, 23 Mar 1955, 85.36, ADBC.

³⁰ Letter, Lay Secretary (ASDBC) to Church Wardens (St. Columba), 10 Nov 1955, 85.36, ADBC.

³¹ Certificate of Indefeasible Title, 20 Oct 1955, 85.36, ADBC.

Figures

Figure 1. Map showing current extent of St. Columba.

PMBC Parcel Cadastre 028915267, iMapBC, Province of British Columbia.

Figure 2. Map of Crown grant to John Grice.

Crown Grant Image G01141304002, District Lot 114, Clayoquot District, Government Access tool for Online Retrieval (GATOR): [https://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/pls/gator/gator\\$queryforms.menu](https://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/pls/gator/gator$queryforms.menu)

Figure 3. Detail from Clayoquot District survey map showing purchases by John Grice and other settlers.

Figure 4. Detail showing alienation of land on the northern portion of the Esowista Peninsula.

Details from T.S. Gore, "Plan of Portion of the West Coast of Vancouver Island Clayquot District," 1895, Land Title and Survey Authority of BC Maps, University of Victoria Libraries: https://vault.library.uvic.ca/concern/generic_works/121fda2b-c288-44ad-9f17-1db4a5b4bbed

References

Archival

Archives of the Diocese of British Columbia, Victoria, BC.

Provincial Survey Field Books 58/1896 and 59/1896, box PH002, Clayoquot Land District, Land Title and Survey Authority of BC, Victoria, BC.

Published

BC Treaty Commission. 'Land and Resources', n.d. <https://www.bctreaty.ca/land-and-resources>.

BC Treaty Commission. 'Tla-o-qui-Aht First Nations'. Accessed 18 May 2023. <https://bctreaty.ca/tla-o-qui-aht-first-nations/>.

Garrett, John, ed. *An Occasional Paper on the Columbia Mission with Letters from the Bishop*. London and Dublin: Rivingtons; Hodges, Smith and Co, 1860. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/bcbooks/items/1.0221885>.

Gore, T.S. 'Plan of Portion of the West Coast of Vancouver Island Clayquot District'. 1895. Land Title and Survey Authority of British Columbia Maps, University of Victoria Libraries. https://vault.library.uvic.ca/concern/generic_works/121fda2b-c288-44ad-9f17-1db4a5b4bbed.

Gough, Barry M. *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-90*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984.

Harris, Cole. *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002.

Horsfield, Margaret, and Ian Kennedy. *Tofino and Clayoquot Sound: A History*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2014.

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. 'Christie (Tofino)', 21 January 2021. <https://nctr.ca/residential-schools/british-columbia/christie-tofino/>.

Slater, G. Hollis. 'New Light on Herbert Beaver'. *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1942): 13–30.

Tennant, Paul. *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990.