Economic History and Reconciliation

*Mary MacKinnon Memorial Lecture*

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Canadian Network for Economic History
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*These views are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis or those of the Board of Governors.*
What I am going to talk about today

1. Start with a historiography and what we know

2. Why I think it matters we expand on this work and include it in our classes

3. What should we keep in mind as we do this work

4. Exciting areas of economic history
Figure: Innis, then papers published by economists in Canadian Indigenous-settler economic history in economics journals until 2000.
Figure: Papers published by economists in Canadian Indigenous-settler economic history in economics journals from 2000 until 2019.
“Canadian economic history has focused on the role of natural resources exports as drivers of the extent and characteristics of economic growth. It has overlooked the role of resource ownership and focused on the development of the settler economy rather than on that of Indigenous nations, with little acknowledgment of the relations between the two.”

Figure: Papers published by economists in American Indigenous-settler economic history in economics journals until 2000.
Figure: Papers published by economists in American Indigenous-settler economic history in economics journals from 2000 until 2019.
Figure: 2, Leonard et. al (2018), x-axis % of prime land - 0 on the left, 100 on the right. y-axis is density.
Figure: A 1911 ad offering “allotted” Indian lands for sale.
Figure: 4: Mescalero Reservation (in black) with Surrounding counties (in pink), Ancestral Homes (in white), and Gold and Silver Mining Clusters, Dippel (2014)
“Much of the land in question is of good quality, and it is very desirable, from a public point of view, that it should be placed in possession of white settlers as soon as practicable”

- Joseph Trutch (Commissioner of Land and Works, British Columbia) in 1866
Figure: Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library 1892.
Shaping the Land

< insert image of bison and the great plains >
Shaping the Land

< insert image camas field >
Cultivation of Modern Crops

< insert image of corn, beans, and squash >
Large scale Agriculture

Figure: Lithograph of a Wichita village. Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.
Figure: Sample Native American Trade Routes. Map by Cartographic Concepts, Inc., NMAI
Figure: A Dakota Woman wearing Dentalium shells, 1886. “The Worldwide History of Beads” by Lois Sherr Dubin. 2009 edition. pg 281
Property Ownership and wealth

Figure: Lekwungen weaver and loom with “woolly dog”, Paul Kane, 1847
Complex Financial Systems and Record Keeping

Figure: Artistic reconstruction of a potlatch ceremony on Haida Gwaii titled 'Kiusta Potlach.' Gordon Miller, 2013
Common historical narratives are passively exclusionary

- alienates Indigenous students and people from economic conversations

- acts to invalidate Indigenous experiences of the world

- also excludes economics students in general from being informed contributors to public policy

- perpetuates “invisibility” and self-serving narratives about the past
“Economic questions asked about historic events are vitally important because [Indigenous] communities are still grappling with economic growth and the associated difficulties of surviving in a non-[Indigenous] economy.”

- Trosper 1988. p.219
A history that supports reconciliation

We affect social narratives which generate social policy

Thus our work must...

▶ be grounded to the best we are able in truth
▶ be mindful of the language used
▶ make the counterfactual salient
Figure: A4. Auld and Feir. 2019.
A history that supports reconciliation

We are affected by social narratives which generate social policy

Some thoughts on moving forward...

- focus on incentives and constraints
- there is a case for focusing on nations as the unit of economic analysis
- make a tie to modernity
- engage with people your work impacts
- keep in mind what traditional archival and census data can tell us
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<th></th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1900</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No. of missionaries</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>29</td>
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<td><strong>No. of houses occupied by Indians</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td><strong>No. in &quot;civilized dress&quot;</strong></td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td><strong>No. of Indians who can read</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
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<td><strong>% of subsistence from civilized pursuits</strong></td>
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<td><strong>No. of Indians killed by Indians</strong></td>
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<td><strong>No. Indians killed by suicide</strong></td>
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<td><strong>No. of whites unlawfully on reserve</strong></td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td><strong>Wealth in individual property</strong></td>
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**Figure:** Annual Reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1870 through 1900. Number of years a statistic is reported by agency.
What were the development strategies or policies of Indigenous governments when they had the power to implement them? What kinds of investments were made by Indigenous leaders? What was immigration policy?

How did Indigenous people acquire capability in the use of new techniques? What was the cost of acquiring them? What barriers were placed in the way? How fast did technology transfer occur?

And what were the benefits of new relationships with settlers? For example, Indigenous people learned from missionaries, spouses, lawyers, and Indian agents
Some other questions where economists can contribute

- The creation, handling, and importance of “Indian money accounts”
- The treaty process, terms, and fulfillment and the factors that contributed
- Leasing of Indigenous lands to non-Indigenous firms or individuals
- Numerous changes in federal regulation that affect First Nations governments
▶ Expanded quantitative research of transfer of resources

▶ How Indigenous economic activity impacts the settler economy

▶ Expanded cross-border research

▶ Post confederation experiences of wealth in First Nations economies and its persistence
To summarize

Economists are contributing to writing indigenous-settler history but our contributions are incomplete.

There are a lot of resources economists can draw on.

Indigenous change makers want engagement in narrative change.

There is a lot of good work waiting to be done.
Our work is most effective and fulfilling when it is grounded in truth, respect and dignity.

- Reclaiming Native Truth. 2014. p.1