

SALISH
pa 7 Pa 7ikn
WOOLLY
DOGS &
WEAVING



pa7Pa7iḱn

“The pa7Pa7iḱn, literally translating to “fluffy haired dog” in the Sk̓w̓w̓ú7mesh sníchim (Squamish language), is omnipresent, embedded within accounts, tales and legends that have been orally passed down through generations for thousands of years” (Kerr-Lazenby, 2023).

*“Yes they were a source of wool
but they were so much more than
that. They were great companions
to us, they were members of the
family”*

(Senaqwila Wyss, 2023)



Senaqwila Wyss

Senaqwila Wyss is Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), Tsimshian, Sto:lo, Hawaiian and Swiss. She has a Bachelors of Arts degree in Communications, Arts and Technology, and a minor in First Nations Studies from Simon Fraser University. She also has a First Nations Languages Proficiency Certificate and Diploma in the Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh Sníchim, and is the Indigenous Cultural Programmer at MONOVA: Museum and Archives of North Vancouver.

Wyss created a six-part #WoollyWednesdays series for MONOVA highlighting Indigenous perspectives and demystifying colonial narratives about the Salish woolly dogs and their relations with Salish Nations.



[#WoollyWednesdays with Senaqwila Wyss.](#) | [MONOVA Youtube Channel.](#)

A Breed Apart: What was the Coast Salish woolly dog, and can we bring it back?

by Mina Kerr-Lazenby 2023

Mina Kerr-Lazenby is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter for the North Shore News who covers Indigenous matters and civic affairs. She writes and researches stories that recognize the history, culture and traditions of First Nations communities, especially those of the local Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations. In her piece, *A Breed Apart: What was the Coast Salish woolly dog, and can we bring it back?*, Kerr-Lazenby highlights the historical context and implications of the Salish woolly dog and speaks with Senaqwila Wyss.

Drawing on Wyss, Kerr-Lazenby details that the Coast Salish woolly dog was an integral part of community living for Indigenous peoples living throughout British Columbia and along the border of Washington State before colonization and settlement. Woolly dogs were small/medium dogs with thick white hair, pointed ears and a curled tail. Most unique was how the woolly dogs were kept on designated islands so they would not breed with other dogs. Similar to the use of sheep wool, woolly dogs fleeces were sheared and spun with the hair of mountain goats to create wool. This wool was used to weave blankets and clothing by women in communities that became symbols of status and wealth and used in ceremonial occasions and passed through generations.

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by Mina Kerr-Lazenby 2023

While eurocentric scholarship described the decline of Coast Salish woolly dogs as a result of Indigenous peoples abandoning them because of trading posts and the arrival of sheep wool blankets, Wyss explains this reasoning does not align with stories she was told growing up. Instead, Wyss says the dwindling woolly dog population was a direct result of colonialism and Indigenous genocide through the Canadian government's implementation of colonial policies, including but not limited to Indian Agents enforcing the Indian Act on reserves, potlach bans, and residential schools.

"Through my different Indigenous communities, it has been shared with me that many communities actually had the RCMP or government kill the dogs on the shoreline. The Salish woolly dogs were part of the colonial genocide that happened to Indigenous peoples"

(Senaqwila Wyss, MONOVA, 2023)

In conclusion, Kerr-Lazenby highlights Wyss's work with Iain McKechnie, a zooarchaeologist with the Hakai Institute and the University of Victoria, about the woolly dog's genetics and the possibility of creating a new type of woolly dog that could be used for weaving.

The Dogs That Grew Wool and the People Who Love Them

by Virginia Morrell 2021

Virginia Morrell is an American author and contributor to *Science* and *National Geographic*. In her piece, The Dogs That Grew Wool and the People Who Love Them, Morrell discusses the history of the Salish woolly dogs, and their relationships with the Indigenous women who used their fur to weave.

Morrell explains that the care of Salish woolly dogs was the responsibility of Indigenous women of the Pacific Northwest's coastal regions who would visit the islands where they kept the wool dogs to feed and take care of them. According to research by Ian McKechnie, the Salish woolly dogs were fed salmon, herring, anchovies, and marine mammals which was a rich diet symbolizing their importance. Once or twice a year the women came with a supply of food and came to shear their wool. Once back home, the women would mix the wool dog fur into yarn with goat wool, plant fibres and goose down for weaving.



The Dogs That Grew Wool and the People Who Love Them

by Virginia Morrell 2021

“The finely woven blankets symbolized wealth, and also a connection to ancestors and the spirit world. They represented a person’s generosity, too—great numbers of blankets were given away at potlatches”

(Virginia Morrell, 2021)

“They beat the yarn with white diatomaceous earth to deter insects and mildew. They dyed some of the yarn red with alder bark, tinted it a light yellow with lichen, and produced blue and black threads using minerals or huckleberries. The rest—an ivory-hued yarn—they set aside. Then the women set up their looms and began to weave, turning out twill-patterned blankets of various sizes, some with elaborate and colorful geometric designs, others with simple stripes” (Morrell, 2021).



Wool Dogs, Whorls, and the Coast Salish World

by Qwul'thylum (Dylan Thomas) 2020

Qwul'thylum is a Coast Salish artist of Lyackson and Snuneymuxw First Nations, whose influences include Buddhism, and Coast Salish art practices like wood and stone carving. In his essay, Thomas describes the woolly dog as a breed that lived with his Lekwungen ancestors for over a thousand years, and as a breed that shaped many aspects of Salish culture.

“Through selective breeding, the Salish people (for at least fourteen hundred years, according to archeological research) purposely bred dogs that produced a thick, long, and woolly coat of hair, which could be sheered once a year, mixed with various plant and animal fibers, and then spun into yarn. This tradition of dog breeding meant that Salish communities were the only culture to have a reliable and plentiful source of wool on the Northwest Coast...



“Weavers and Wool” silk screen print by Dylan Thomas, 2021, used with permission.

Wool Dogs, Whorls, and the Coast Salish World

by Qwul'thylum (Dylan Thomas) 2020

Aside from its cultural impact, wool also became an incredibly valuable economic resource for Salish communities. Since wool was in such high demand in the area, Salish communities were able to trade for other valuable resources with their coastal neighbours. This helped maintain stability within Salish communities and helped promote good relations with other tribes on the coast. Due to their economic significance, wool textiles almost became a type of universal currency in the Salish world – allowing for reliable and fair exchanges between various people and various families” (Thomas, 2020).

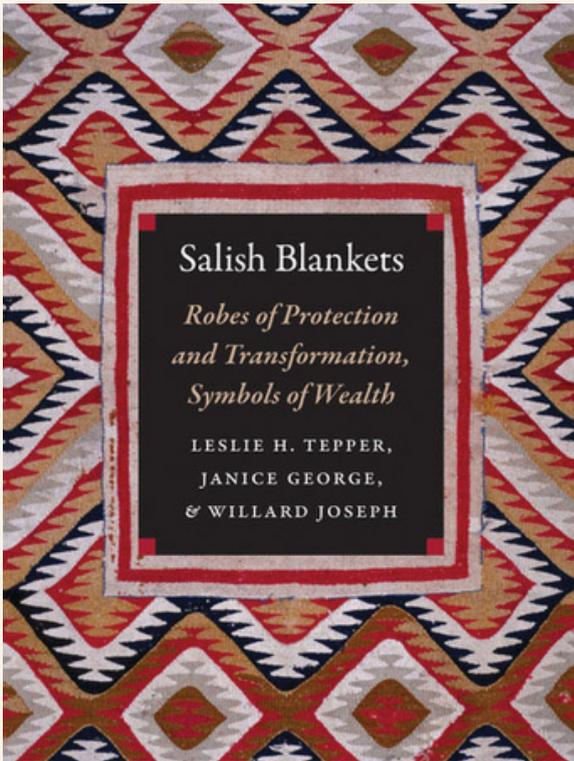
Expanding on the historical and cultural context of Salish wool dogs, Thomas also describes the interconnections he sees between the wool dogs, spindle whorls, and Salish weaving:

“I see more than the art and its history as a tool. I see a symbol of my culture, an homage to my ancestors, a celebration of the Wool Dog, and a small fragment of the long and enduring story of the Coast Salish people – past, present, and future”

(Thomas, 2020)

Salish Blankets: Robes of Protection & Transformation, Symbols of Wealth

by Leslie H. Teppet, Janice George & Willard Joseph 2017



Leslie H. Teppet is the curator of Western ethnology at the Canadian Museum of History. Chepximiya Siyam'Janice George of Squamish Nation is a hereditary chief, trained museum curator, and educator who graduated from Capilano University and the Institute of American Indian Arts. She co-organized the first Canada Northwest Coast Weavers Gathering, with other Squamish Nation Weavers.

George explains that her formal education helped her excel as a teacher adding to her most importance traditional teachings. Skwetsimeltxw Willard 'Buddy' Joseph of Squamish Nation is the former director of the Squamish Housing and Capital Projects and currently consults on capital projects for First Nations communities. Both George and Joseph have numerous ceremonial and cultural responsibilities in their community.

Salish Blankets: Robes of Protection & Transformation, Symbols of Wealth

by Leslie H. Teppet, Janice George & Willard Joseph 2017

Together, these authors detail the blankets of the Salish First Nations, including their designs, their history, how they are woven, and their significant cultural importance. They write about the complexity of ceremonial blankets and robes and their connection with both the natural and supernatural worlds, and combine material culture analysis, archival and ethnographic research, and fieldwork.

Threading the knowledge of library research, elders who offered cultural teachings, spinners, weavers and knitters who shared knowledge through their practices, ethnologists, ethnobotanists, historians, and archeologists who examined the geography, climate and natural resources, and museum curators analyzing records are what the authors use to frame their understandings of Salish weaving.

“Every aspect of Salish textile production is bound by an awareness of the spirit world and a respect for the Ancestral gifts of knowledge”

(Teppet, George & George, 2017, p. 1)

This bibliography was created to highlight the connections between the Salish woolly dogs, colonial implications impacting Indigenous peoples, Salish weaving, and contemporary weaving practices. While there are various sources about these topics that exist, I purposefully chose to highlight only those which focused on Indigenous perspectives, and not include various sources I found written through colonial perspectives.

*Annotated bibliography prepared
by Courtney Vance, 2023.*



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Images used

Cover: A woolly-haired dog in British Columbia captured in a photograph during the first half of the 20th century. Photo: University of Victoria/WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council.

Page 8: "Weavers and Wool" silk screen print by Dylan Thomas, 2021. Image copyright Dylan Thomas, used with permission.

Page 12: "Bring Back the Salish Woolly Dog." Image copyright Senaqwila Wyss, used with permission.
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