



K'ómoks First Nation

## K'ÓMOKS FIRST NATION: AMALGAMATIONS AND MERGERS

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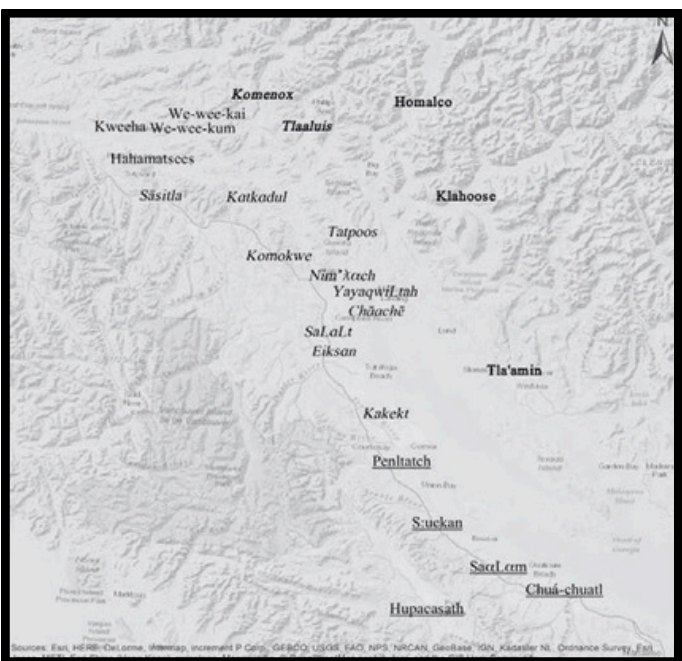
As set out in the K'ómoks Treaty, the K'ómoks people or K'ómoks “...draw their identity from the Island K'ómoks, Kwakwaka'wakw and Pentlatch traditions, from their lands, waters and resources and from the rich culture, heritage, language and traditions passed on from their elders...”. The complexity of K'ómoks identity results from the history of amalgamations of formerly distinct peoples. Like many First Nations, K'ómoks is composed of culturally related, but distinct groups or tribes, that have, through various historical processes, come to be organized together as a single modern First Nation. The organization now known as K'ómoks or the K'ómoks First Nation was first recognized by Canada as a distinct Indian Band in 1876, with the formalization of what was then referred to as the Comox Indian Band, at its current location on the K'ómoks Estuary. The Reserve Commissioner of the time (G. Sproat). At that time, Sproat (1876) wrote:

**“The Indians now known as the ‘Comox’, are composed of the Punt-lahtch, the Comox and the A-élk-sun tribes. The two later came from Comox which is near Cape Mudge, to the Punt-latch (or Puntledge or Courtenay River) which flows through the beautiful district now called Comox. The Punt-lahtches claim to be the old owners of this district, but with their consent, and following our own judgment, we decided to regard the three tribes as one people.”**



The peoples Sproat is describing are the Pentlatch (“Punt-lahtch”), speakers of the Pentlatch language who originally occupied territories spanning from Little River to Englishman River, including Hornby and Denman Islands, the Sathloot, Säsitla and Xa’xe (K’ómoks), and the Ieeksan (“A-élk-sun”), who were ayajuthem speakers (the language formerly known as Island Comox) who collectively occupied territories spanning from Salmon River to Little River, including Quadra Island. From 1876, onward, K’ómoks has assumed responsibility for their people’s relations to the Crown and governance of their territory.

The background to these amalgamations of separate tribes into what was then referred to as the Comox Indian Band lies in the tumultuous period of disease and warfare in the late 18th through mid-19th centuries on Vancouver Island and adjacent mainland coast. First, in the 1780s, a major smallpox epidemic swept through the Coast Salish world, including the K’ómoks and Pentlatch peoples, decimating the population, and triggering the consolidation of formerly distinct peoples. Second, in the first half of the 19th century, during several decades of warfare between Lekwiltok and Coast Salish people, ayajuthem-speaking tribes (including the Sathloot, Säsitla, Xa’xe and Ieeksan) allied both against and with the Lekwiltok, fought on both sides of the conflict, and led to mergers between some groups – especially the K’ómoks people at Salmon River - the Säsitla. The last phase of this war turned the Lekwiltok against their former K’ómoks allies. Finally, around 1850, after several attacks on K’ómoks-speaking tribes’ settlements, most of the surviving K’ómoks peoples relocated to the Comox Valley, the territory of the Pentlatch. One of these Lekwiltok tribes, the Hahamatsees, also known as Walitsma, were a group created at Salmon River around 1800, by merger of some of the resident Säsitla and some incoming Lekwiltok. By around 1918, the population of this once numerous tribes had been reduced to only a few families, and these families began to live primarily at Cape Mudge, Campbell River, and Comox.



Descendants of these former tribes described above are now represented by modern extended families within and beyond K'ómoks. The local Pentlatch people remained in their territory, and, as the first people of the region, they retained their hereditary rights to this territory, and highest rank among the newly settled tribes. The Billie family at K'ómoks are the primary descendants of the ancestral Pentlatch people, but the Franks also trace connections to these ancestors.

The Säsitla tribe of K'ómoks held Salmon River as their territory, as they were the first people to occupy that region. Those Säsitla that did not remain at the mouth of the Salmon River after merging into the Hahamatsees and relocated to the Comox Valley area around 1850 alongside the Sathloot and Xa'xe. The descendants of the Säsitla people who relocated to the K'ómoks reserve on the K'ómoks Estuary are the Hardy and Mitchell families. Several decades later, in 1941, the members of the then Comox Indian Band and the Hahamatsees voted to amalgamate into what is now K'ómoks. One of the conditions of this amalgamation was that there would be two chiefs, each representing their respective peoples and reserves, and this appears to have been the case for the next few years (i.e., Andy Frank and Moses Moon). Just three years later, in 1944, Indian Agent Todd specified in a letter dated July 17th, that the Indian Band (i.e., the Comox Indian Band) could have "a chief", and from that point on, K'ómoks has been represented by a single elected chief.

The Sathloot tribe of K'ómoks occupied the Campbell River and southern Quadra Island areas from ancient times, as they are the first people there, up to around 1850, when they also relocated to what is now - K'ómoks IR#1 on the K'ómoks Estuary. The Sathloot people had many marriage connections with the Pentlatch people of the Comox Valley, and these connections likely provided the cultural foundation for the K'ómoks relocation. In the early 20th century, several decades after the relocation of the Sathloot people to the K'ómoks Estuary, many of the Pentlatch hereditary rights were transferred to the Sathloot based on these family connections. The descendants of the Sathloot people who relocated to the K'ómoks Estuary are the Frank family.

The leeksan are one of the ayajuthem-speaking tribes and had a territory between Campbell River and Oyster River. They were the first of the K'ómoks tribes to relocate to the Comox Valley. They relocated specifically because of a Lekwiltok attack on their primary village at Campbell River. While originally enumerated as part of the then Comox Indian Band in 1876, by around 1910, the descendants of these leeksan people had moved to other First Nations communities, and their children became members of those respective communities.



Within K'ómoks, the Hahamatsees are primarily represented by the descendants of the Moon family. The chief of this group at the time of amalgamation, Moses Moon married Nak (Mary Moon) and lived at K'ómoks IR#1 on the K'ómoks Estuary. After the amalgamation of the then Comox Indian Band and the Hahamatsees, some of these people moved away from the K'ómoks reserve and became members of other First Nations, while other descendants of the Moon family (daughters of Harry Moon) are current K'ómoks members.

This history of relocations and amalgamations is undoubtedly complex, and contributes to some of the confusion surrounding K'ómoks identity, rights and territory. These amalgamations and the creation of K'ómoks has defined relationships between all the formerly distinct tribes and peoples comprising K'ómoks and the Crown for the last 150 years.



***FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION, THE SUMMARY OF THE K'ÓMOKS HISTORY PREPARED BY JESSE MORIN, PHD IS AVAILABLE ON THE K'ÓMOKS WEBSITE AT [WWW.KOMOKS.CA/CULTURE](http://WWW.KOMOKS.CA/CULTURE).***



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