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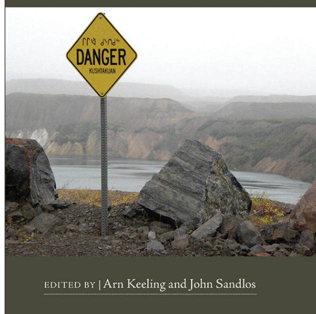

MINING AND COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN CANADA: HISTORY, POLITICS, AND MEMORY

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CHAPTER 5

"A Mix of the Good and the Bad": Community Memory and the Pine Point Mine

John Sandlos

Mining brings massive transformation to lives and landscapes. Almost inevitably, the people who worked in and lived near historic mines are compelled to tell stories about these changes. Whether it is recollections of hardships and good times within the mining camps, memories of large-scale environmental change, reminiscences of social life within a mining town, or remembrances of work on or under the ground, the process of telling stories can generate multiple and sometimes contested interpretations of local mining heritage within a particular landscape. Was the mine a good place to work? Was the town a good place to raise a family? Did pollution arise from the mine? What kind of landscape changes (open pits, roads, tailings ponds, etc.) did the mine produce, and how well were these physical reminders cleaned up? How did mining change pre-existing forms of natural resources use? The answers to these questions provide rich source material that can help us to understand the

complex social, cultural, and ecological memory and meanings associated with mining activity in small communities that are typically located in remote regions.

This has been particularly true for indigenous communities who must balance the inherently short-term benefits of mining development with long-term residency in particular localities and regions. And indeed, there is a large body of writing on the social, economic, and environmental inequities associated with large-scale mining development in subsistence-oriented indigenous communities throughout the globe.[1] Oral history research methods have sometimes been used as a means to capture these local voices and stories in places where mining has led to environmental injustices such as acute pollution and the exposure of indigenous communities to chemical and radiological toxins.[2] Such community-generated stories can provide a powerful corrective to boosterish histories (often commissioned by companies or published by mining heritage societies) that celebrate mining as a historical gateway for the extension of capital, settlement, and development in remote regions.[3]

Similar to the community-generated stories, the historical narrative of the Pine Point Mine, at first glance, seems to pit the environmental and economic impacts of development against the subsistence economies of First Nations communities. The Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company (later Cominco) operated the mine on the south shore of Great Slave Lake from 1964 to 1988 through a subsidiary company, Pine Point Mines, Ltd. As a massive lead-zinc mine, the Pine Point Mine was also central to the Canadian government's post–World War II colonial agenda in Northern Canada. Government records are replete with references to the mine as a gateway development that would stimulate additional mines throughout the North and quickly catapult northern Aboriginal people from the moribund fur trade economy to more modern forms of industrial wage labour.[4] So great was the political consensus in favour of northern development in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the federal government provided subsidies of nearly $100 million for a railroad, a highway extension, and hydroelectric development to support Pine Point, infrastructure that was meant to kick-start further mineral development and modernization throughout the Northwest Territories.[5]

Even at the early stages of the mine's operating life, however, several critics began to argue that the economic promise of Pine Point for adjacent First Nations communities, particularly for the Chipewyan and Métis community of Fort Resolution roughly sixty kilometres to the east, had gone largely unfulfilled. As early as 1968, the political economist Kenneth Rea invoked Harold Innis's staples theory to criticize Pine Point as another in a long line of export-oriented northern development projects that contributed little to local economic development.[6] Sociologist Paul Deprez's 1973 report for the Winnipeg-based Centre for Settlement Studies adopted much the same tone, highlighting how the federal government's failure to provide local skills training, a viable housing policy for northerners, and an extension of the Pine Point highway further east to Fort Resolution meant the mine workforce was mostly imported and the local economic benefits of the mine severely limited.[7] In 1977, Justice Thomas Berger's report on hearings into the proposed Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline quoted liberally from Fort Resolution testimony, suggesting that Pine Point demonstrated the negative impact of industrial mega-development on local hunting and trapping activities.[8] Almost simultaneously, the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee (CARC—an environmental NGO) released a report highlighting the negative social, economic, and environmental consequences of the mine, particularly for Aboriginal hunters and trappers in Fort Resolution.[9] The sudden closure of the mine in 1988, the subsequent collapse of the town of Pine Point, and the abandonment of the mine's forty-seven open pits in an unremediated state further cemented the idea that Fort Resolution and other nearby First Nations communities had derived little from the mine other than the mess that was left behind.

In recent years, a very different parallel story has begun to emerge about the legacy of Pine Point. In 2011 media artists Michael Simons and Paul Shoebridge released an interactive web documentary about the town of Pine Point through the National Film Board. Inspired by the efforts of former Pine Point resident Richard Cloutier to keep the abandoned and demolished ghost town alive through the web memorial titled "Pine Point Revisited," the remarkable web documentary traces the overwhelmingly positive memories of life in the town of Pine Point. In a broader sense, the Pine Point website and documentary provide a powerful example of what

Figure 1: Abandoned waste rock pile, Pine Point Mine, NWT, 2009. Photo by John Sandlos.

many historians and geographers have identified as a close identification with local place and landscape in remote mining towns, even after the cessation of mining activity.[10] The Simons and Shoebridge documentary declares (as looped video of a figure-skating performance of the Wizard of Oz at the Pine Point annual winter carnival plays in the background) that “most Pine Pointers think their home town was the best place on earth to have lived.”[11] With a close-knit community and seemingly endless recreation activities, the Pine Point experience evokes for many waves of nostalgia for the demolished community.

How are these competing stories—the mine as colonial disruption versus the mine work and the mine town as a near-paradise—interpreted within the First Nations communities adjacent to the Pine Point Mine? A complicated answer can be found in the thirty-nine oral history interviews the Memorial University–based “Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada” project conducted mostly in Fort Resolution, but also

in the largely Slavey K'atl'odeeche First Nation (Hay River Reserve) and among members of the Hay River–based North Slave Métis Alliance.[12] The most striking and surprising feature of these interviews is that they feature parallel stories about Pine Point as a source of economic and environmental disruption, but also memories of Pine Point as a great place to live and work. Negative memories of local racism or environmental change are often juxtaposed *within the same interview*. This mix of positive and negative memories is all the more surprising because other oral history projects on historical large-scale northern mines have suggested unambiguously negative consequences for adjacent First Nations.[13] The process of selecting interviewees—local research assistants largely chose individuals who had spent time living in the town or working at the mine, as opposed to those with no association with the town or mine, who might have been more critical—may have biased comments toward those nostalgic for a past life in Pine Point. Nonetheless, as Emilie Cameron has recently argued, stories about Northern Canada are not always subject to the binary categories—north versus south, mining versus communities, colonial versus indigenous, industrial activity versions traditional economies—that scholars have often chosen to highlight.[14] In the more than two decades since Pine Point has closed, people in adjacent First Nations communities have retained memories that that speak both critically and nostalgically about the mine and the town, a reflection of their ability to accommodate *and* resist that massive changes that that the federal government's development agenda and private capital brought to their region in the 1960s.

SPEAKING OF PINE POINT: THE IMPACTS

A long tradition of testimony and storytelling about the impact of Pine Point exists in nearby Aboriginal communities, and has circulated for decades in public hearings about the mine or other development projects. Beginning with Justice Berger's landmark Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry in the 1970s, residents of Fort Resolution in particular have told an overwhelmingly negative story about the Pine Point Mine. The basic storyline resonates with the descriptions of adverse effects in the

previously mentioned academic literature: local First Nations were never consulted about the mine, they received few economic benefits (including jobs) from the mine, development at the mine severely impacted trapping activities, and the community was left with nothing but the huge mess of abandoned pits and the tailings pond.[15] Chief Robert Sayine, speaking through an interpreter at the Berger Inquiry in 1975, described Fort Resolution's experience with mining development:

> He [Sayine] says you should see our own Pine Point there, he says for about ten miles radius around Pine Point he says you'll never see no green trees around there for about ten miles radius around Pine Point. He says everything is just—all the dead trees, that's all you could see around there.
>
> He says look at that water around there because it never freezes during the winter, and you could smell it even when you are in a car passing through there, you can smell that water.
>
> Yes, he says right at the meeting wherever they're going to have a stockpile for these pipes for the pipeline, he says, you told us there was going to be about 400 people is going to be employed there, and he says that's the same kind of promise we got from Pine Point in 1960 when we sat in the meeting with them. There was going to be lots of jobs for natives there, but what we get today, he says there's nothing for natives over at Pine Point.[16]

Local First Nations' criticism only hardened after the mine closed in 1988, as people realized that Cominco's abandonment and restoration plan did not extend beyond covering the tailings pond with gravel, removing the houses and buildings at Pine Point townsite, and treating remaining water discharge to mitigate zinc discharge. The pits, the roads, and some infrastructure (the power facility) were left as long-term reminders of mining's impacts on the landscape. Speaking for the Fort Resolution Hunters and Trappers Association, Cecil Lafferty testified to local objections to the limited reclamation plan at a Northwest Territories Water Board hearing on renewal of the mine's water licence in 1990:

> Presently the operation may be terminated, except for the retreatment program and minor clean-up, however, we have lost that whole area for future utilization, economically. With the long term lease on the area it would be unworthy to even consider the area in our land selection. This was once a pristine traditional harvesting area for the people of Fort Resolution. The Pine Point Mines Limited have yet to implement an adequate restoration program that will be satisfactory to the people concerned. The operation over a period of twenty years, had numerous open pits that were left as is to fill up with groundwater. The waste dumps were not covered over with soil that could at least enhance growth, and what little land that was not dug up flooded over by the pit dewatering programs, which in turn killed all the trees and surrounding vegetation in the area.
>
> During its short lived operation, Pine Point Mines Limited had also put in hundreds of miles of haul roads that are all about four times as wide as our normal highways. Ironically, these roads impeded proper drainage of the land and therefore flooded . . . The tailings pond with its high level of metal, particularly zinc in a soluble form, is being flushed out annually into the environment . . . We strongly believe that our waters are polluted and that the fish are absorbing the metals.[17]

In 1993, Bernadette Unka, the chief of Fort Resolution's Chipewyan band government, the Deninu K'ue First Nation, summed up the environmental and economic dislocation associated with the mine for a national audience at the hearings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

> Pine Points [*sic*] Mines nor Canada have never compensated the Dene people that used those areas in their hunting, fishing and trapping. They have never been compensated for their loss or for the land devastation. When I say land devastation, if you are to fly over Pine Point Mines you would look down and you would think you were flying over the moon with the craters and open pits that are left open. The people have never been compensated for the hardships and the heartaches induced by mineral

> development. While the company creamed the crop at $53 million during their peak years, we got very little jobs and what we did get were very low-paying jobs.[18]

Although comments such as those above were produced for public consumption, the large volume of public testimony about the negative impacts of the mine on First Nations represents a significant source of oral history recollections about the mine. Taken together, they suggest that feelings about the Pine Point Mine ran raw during the operational phase and in the years after closure, with broken promises of jobs and economic development consistently juxtaposed with the negative impacts on Aboriginal harvesting and fishing, and on the land more generally.

In 2010, many people we interviewed recounted many similar stories describing the extensive impact of the mine.[19] Even before the mine opened, respondents noted, several traplines were destroyed in the area as line cutting and seismic exploration proceeded in the 1950s and early 1960s. As Angus Beaulieu described it, "People were trapping in that area, and they bulldozed people's traplines, and many people lost their traps and everything. Every 900 feet they had a bulldozer go in there in the winter . . . A lot of people lost their traps. People in those days, they didn't say too much."[20] Kevin Fabien remembered, "All the animals disappeared; they went farther away because of all the construction going on and all the equipment running." Other interviewees explained that pollution and habitat change also meant that game animals disappeared in the area. As George Balsillie put it, "The mine killed everything around there."[21]

As with the testimony from earlier sources, several interviewees suggested that these lost opportunities associated with trapping were not replaced with chances to earn a living at the mine. Angus Beaulieu claimed that only an average of eight people from Fort Resolution were hired at Pine Point at any given time in the 1960s and 1970s, a number he claims did not increase dramatically until thirty-eight additional Fort Resolution residents were hired on just prior to Justice Berger arriving to conduct hearings and then subsequently laid off shortly afterwards.[22] For those local Aboriginal people who did get jobs, several interviewees suggested they were often confined to menial low-skilled jobs, particularly cutting

Figure 2: Abandoned mine pit, Pine Point Mine, NWT , 2009. Photo by John Sandlos.

seismic exploration lines in the forest or the repetitive work of shovelling ore in the dusty environment of the loading shed. As Sam Bugghins from K'atl'odeeche First Nation stated in regard to Aboriginal people from Hay River, "mostly they cut lines" when they worked at the mine.[23]

In broad terms, some interviewees resented the lack of consultation and compensation in advance of the mine development, which is now standard practice and takes the form of impact and benefit agreements between mining companies and First Nations. Greg Villeneuve recalls that "they didn't even inform Res [Fort Resolution] about anything that time. Like now, other mines they pay out these, you know, like Res used to get IBA money for everybody, to give it out. And back then, I guess I'm not sure how it worked, but Res never did get a cent out of Cominco. And that's I think where, you know, we lost out on lots in Fort Res. We could'a had lots. It could'a been a rich little town."[24] Lloyd Cardinal claimed that the lack of consultation was possibly the most significant source of local

resentment about the mine in Fort Resolution: “The biggest negative impact that Pine Point brought was that they didn’t get our consent.”[25] Whether it was a lack of employment and training opportunities or the absence of consultation and other financial benefits, the notion persists that in economic and political terms the mine bypassed nearby Native communities.

Many interviewees noted—in contrast to the ephemeral economic benefits—the more lasting environmental impacts of the mine. Indeed, the abandonment of the open pits and waste rock piles with little attempt at remediation is still a major source of discontent in adjacent Native communities. Leonard Beaulieu’s concerns about the landscape changes and safety issues associated with the pits are representative of many interviewees: “Look at the way they left Pine Point. Goddamn place is full of holes, about forty big goddamn holes full of water . . . Yeah, you know, they left the mess like that.”[26] In a similar comment, Henry McKay criticized Cominco directly for the lack of remediation at the mine site:

> The way I look at it, those people that make the mill and mine and make all that money and are gone, they don’t care. ’Cuz they made their money, and they’re gone, and they just leave everything to us. Big holes, you know? We can’t look after that. They should make us a promise that they’ll do something about it at the end, you know? Like fill out that hole they’re makin’. And, you know, why do they leave that big stockpile there? Put it back! It’d be safer for animals. It’s only right. They shouldn’t be leaving it like that.[27]

In addition to the pits, people continue to have widespread concerns about the health and environmental impacts of water pollution. Roy Fabian, chief of K’atl’odeeche First Nation, claimed that when he was younger his father told him not to drink the water in the area of the mine.[28] K’atl’odeeche resident Harold Moore claimed that the government lied to miners about contaminants in the drinking water supply, and many died after moving to Pine Point.[29]

Leonard Beaulieu summed up local concerns linking the spread of water-borne contaminants from the mine to deformities in fish and the increase of cancer among the local Native population in the 1970s:

Figure 3: Water Treatment Pond, Pine Point Mine, NWT , 2009. Photo by John Sandlos.

Until 1973, all the waste was pumped down the hill into the lake. Poison. All that shit that's sitting in the pond right now. You know, holding back in that dyke? And then, they had two big pits; the X-15 pit right behind the highway, and the W-17 right next to . . . I know all those pits. I used to haul out of there. The waste from the water, from the thing you know, there's always water pumping and pumping. They'd pump that across the highway. Every time you drove by there. In them days you'd get sixty below, up until 1975 you'd get sixty below. And if it freezes . . . stink. Oh shit. It used to run way up into the bush and it'd run through to Paulette Creek, back into my lake. And then people are wondering why there was cancer. Now today they don't know who to blame. They're blaming it on the tar sands. It's not the tar sands . . . Every elder that gets sick: cancer. Cancer. It's the goddamn water! There's no water treatment plant that's going to stop that

> cancer from, you know? That's why us here we don't drink the darn water. I buy water from the store. That has really impacted the lives of the people in the North West Territories; their health. That Cominco Pine Point Mine.[30]

Scientific studies in the 1970s suggested that heavy metals, particularly copper, cadmium, lead, and zinc, were leaking from the tailings pond during spring runoff, but spikes above safe levels were localized in nature. An Environment Canada report from the mid-1990s questioned the methodology of these earlier studies, and claimed that water and fish in the area were generally safe for human consumption.[31] Nonetheless, in our interviews and informal conversations in Fort Resolution and K'atl'odeeche First Nation, people persistently identified water quality and human health issues as one of their biggest concerns associated with the mine and one of the most pressing research needs within the community.

People who spoke with us also highlighted some of the negative social consequences associated with the mine. Some who moved to Pine Point reported difficulty adjusting to the new town, particularly when they experienced incidents of racism. Although only seven years old when she moved to Pine Point, Priscilla Lafferty recalls being "scared" due to the large numbers of outsiders, and remembers that "just because we were Native we were called down and what not."[32] Denise McKay remembered similar fears grounded in the fact that she did not speak much English.[33] Other interviewees reported memories of racial violence and division. Melvin Mandeville recalled, "We used to . . . especially the Newfoundlanders, the Newfies, whatever, we'd fight against them lots, and they'd be callin' us wagon burners and we'd be callin' them Newfielanders or whatever. We fought like that, as kids. The older adults too, they'd be drinkin' and fighting." Mandeville also suggested there was racism in the schools, describing Native children being singled out to read in front of the class when the teacher knew they were not good readers, and being told he could not wear moccasins to school because the teacher did not like the smell.[34] Gord Beaulieu remembered that the police could be rough on Native people living in Pine Point. Obviously, the town of Pine Point was not always the "best place on earth" for some of its residents.[35]

Interviewees suggested that the other major negative social impact was increased exposure to alcohol after a highway extension connected Fort Resolution with Pine Point and the rest of the world in 1972. Ronald McKay told us that Fort Resolution became known as "Little Vietnam" after the highway was extended to the town: "There was shootings, and fighting. Actually, it turned the whole community upside down with the boozing. It was kind of like the end of the road development thing, where boom! Everything just boomed and no rules. People just partied. There was a lot of money, you know."[36] Although interviewees suggested that the situation improved over time, some indicated that the long-term impact of the road was to undermine the close-knit nature of their previously isolated community. Angus Beaulieu recalled, "And it seemed like people were much closer before than after . . . Before it was like one big family, people got along much better. It seemed like about from the time they got that road in, people kind of . . . you know, I don't know how to explain it, but it was not the way it was before Pine Point."[37] Ron McKay similarly claimed that Fort Resolution was "really, really strong" before the road came in, but increased mobility made people more individualistic and less willing to help neighbours.[38] Leander Beaulieu noted that "people used to be more together" before the road and associated changes such as the introduction of electricity and television, but "now they're more in their own little world . . . more distant."[39] In broad terms, Tommy Unka stated that the introduction of the mine, the road, and associated southern influences "kind of dragged me away from my traditional lifestyle."[40] For Fort Resolution residents, the mine was a watershed event in their history, a development project that ultimately fostered closer links with the outside world and a move away from the bush life.

SPEAKING OF PINE POINT: A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

Stories about the past can unfold in ways that defy our attempts to uncover singular meanings about social and environmental change. Certainly in the case of our interviews about Pine Point, people told us about experiences that challenge previous assessments of the mine as a wholly

negative experience for nearby Native communities. As with non–Native Pine Pointers, there was overwhelming consensus among interviewees that the town of Pine Point offered an exceptional quality of life, that work at the mine often offered tangible monetary reward, and that rather than wholly displacing trapping, work at the mine offered Native people income that supplemented wildlife harvesting practices when fur prices were low. Powerful stories of Pine Point's environmental, political, and social impacts were thus very often tempered with accounts of the positive aspects of the mine. This was particularly true among younger interviewees, people who may be remembering the halcyon days of childhood, but for whom life in the community of Pine Point remained a positive and momentous part of their life histories.

If there was any theme that came through loud and clear in the interviews, even among critics of the mine's environmental and economic legacies, it was the fond memories for the town of Pine Point. Lorraine Mckay, the first child ever to be born at Pine Point, claimed simply that she "loved it there, because I was raised there and knew everybody."[41] Linda McKay asserted that "if that place would have opened up I'd be the first one to move back there . . . Oh, do I ever miss that place man. Sometimes I'd sit there, my mom and I would just sit there and talk; talk about Pine Point."[42] Garvin Lizotte remembers Pine Point as "a picture perfect town," where "every yard had flowers and grass, picket fence. It was a beautiful town." As Lizotte's comments hint, part of the affinity people feel for Pine Point stems from the fact that it resembled a modern suburb, with all the facilities, amenities, and activities one would expect in a southern small town. Citing what he felt were excellent schools and many opportunities for sports and recreation, Lizotte remembered that "it was the best of the best of everything."[43] As Dene and Métis began to visit or move to Pine Point, the quality of life in the more traditional Fort Resolution seemed diminished compared to the ultra-new and modern mining town. Eddy McKay recalled his growing perception of a stark contrast between the two towns:

> I guess it was totally different from Fort Res, as you know. It had a lot of things, you know. Stores, all kinds of stores, and everything was paved, and running water. You know, everything

> was right up to the times. You had the best of pretty much everything for a small community . . ..Oh yeah, there was a lot of sports there. That is where this arena came from. They moved it over here after it closed. The ball field went to Hay River. They had a soccer field right next door to the school. And then the high school had another big field, so there was a lot of green space, I guess, recreational space.[44]

As did McKay, many interviewees cited sports and recreation as the focal point of the town's social life, with memories of baseball tournaments, the Arctic Winter Games, and the Pine Days festival flowing into many of our conversations. Larry Dragon, a Métis from Hay River, described the town as "close knit" because "if you wanted something, like to get into recreation, they had the arena, which Cominco build 99 percent of it . . . You had a curling rink . . . towards the end you had a swimming pool. They had everything there. They had a golf course; the best golf course in the Territories back then."[45] Such testimony suggests that the efforts of federal and territorial governments to create a model northern mining town—a family-oriented community with a high quality of life that contrasted with rough mining camps or divisive company towns—was at least partly successful.

Certainly many interviewees confirmed Dragon's comments about the close social cohesion within the town. Many stated that everybody got along at Pine Point, and even some of those who cited incidents of racism suggested that for the most part outsiders embraced local Native people as friends. Ron McKay, who described racial tension between Aboriginal people and outsiders, also described how "the non-Native people were actually really nice to—like, my dad had some of the greatest friends there that were non-Native. They took care of him and everything, so they were good people."[46] Lorraine Mckay suggested that "growing up they used to get along, everybody from Res or Hay River who'd go to Pine Point, they were always welcome."[47] Several people noted that they had a particular affinity for Newfoundlanders, due to shared interests in hunting and fishing. And for some local people, one of the exciting aspects of moving to Pine Point was the opportunity to meet people from all over the world. As Garvin Lizotte explained, "We had at that mine guys from

Iran, my dad had good friends from Portugal, Argentina, you know, all over. I could just keep on naming them. It was just awesome to live there. Good culture, eh. Just because of the mine, people come in for all different trades. I enjoyed it. Like I lived beside a real Italian family; the mom and dad were both from Italy."[48] Melvin Mandeville likewise recalled that he "found it interesting, because coming from a community where it's all Chipewyan and Native and not too many white people, or Hispanics and coloured and stuff. So it was good in that sense, to meet different people and knowing that the world isn't just here. There's a big world, eh."[49] If the comments of many interviewees suggest that racism was part of the social landscape at Pine Point, other testimony suggests that residents were often able to create a cultural middle ground within the community.

Many people also invoked the idea of successfully accommodating change more broadly when discussing their embrace of southern cultural and economic norms. Ronald Beaulieu described the expanded entertainment and shopping opportunities in Pine Point, suggesting that the culture brought up from the south, "it's different than us, so to us it's exciting. Maybe to them it's a regular thing, but we see it different." Although Beaulieu repeated a common sentiment when he suggested that the new money that accompanied the mining jobs "screwed a lot of people up" with increased alcohol consumption, he and many others also cited the introduction of good-paying jobs as one of the best aspects of the new mining economy.[50] Gord Beaulieu recalls that

> We were working six days on, two days off. And the money was good. It was probably better money at that time than anywhere I've worked since, with the value of money back then. In 1979, '80, you could go to the store, and if you buy a hundred dollars' worth of groceries . . . we couldn't carry it out of the store; it was too much. Nowadays if you buy a hundred dollars' worth of groceries, and you can just walk out carrying it in one hand. So, you know, for the value of the money, and even vehicles were cheap back then. So I made good money. I had fun in Pine Point.[51]

Tommy Beaulieu recalled that many more Fort Resolution people were able to buy vehicles because of mine wages, suggesting in turn that increased mobility opened up the opportunity to buy cheap groceries in

Pine Point.[52] Indeed, many interviewees felt that access to cheaper food was one of the most significant positive impacts of the mine and the eventual road extension to Fort Resolution.

It is tempting to conclude that the introduction of modern wage labour and outside sources of food undermined local patterns of subsistence hunting and commercial trapping in the South Slave region. Many comments from interviewees suggest, however, that Native people in the area took a flexible approach to various economic opportunities, often moving between trapping and mine labour to take advantage of shifting prices and market conditions. Darin Mckay remembered his father's movement between two types of labour:

> I think he did trapping on the side, yeah. He always trapped, all his life he's been a trapper. Like before he moved to the mine here, that's what he did . . . I guess when trapping wasn't the greatest, that was when fur was cheap. And that maybe, five, ten years after we moved there, or maybe five years after we moved to Pine Point, the fur price went up. Just when the mines were shutting down too they were laying off people. And my dad was a trapper, so we moved out of Pine Point because they were shutting down, you know, there was not money I guess in lead and things, startin' to get old. Then we moved to Res and he started trapping again, hunting and old times. Right 'til today he still traps and hunts. And he does trap in that area, Pine Point, right now.[53]

Leonard Beaulieu, who worked off and on at the mine and on the road crew from 1965 to 1974, claimed that trapping "was not worth it" when the mine opened in 1964, but by the mid-1970s lots of people quit their jobs because fur prices were very high. He recalled, "At that time, lynx averaged $400 apiece. Damn right, sport. In two months I made $21,000. Never make that working on a CAT."[54] Some interviewees indicated that settling in Pine Point and taking advantage of the associated wage labour opportunities drew them out of trapping for good. For others, however, movement between trapping and mining labour provided a means to cushion the blow from the international price swings that could cripple local economies associated with both these forms of primary resource production.

For still other interviewees, the transition from life in a modern town back to the more subsistence-oriented Fort Resolution proved difficult after the closure of the mine. Denise McKay said that she did not want to move back because there were no jobs (though she did find a job in the community hall), and her kids were sad to lose their friends at Pine Point.[55] Eddy McKay remembered a period of adjustment to life at the older town:

> I didn't like it at first, cuz, you know, there was no running water, and we had honey buckets I guess, and cramped housing; having to go to the school and shower over there. So it was totally different. And then, I don't know, I got (pauses), what would you say? I guess I accepted it more. And opened myself to the life in Fort Res, and then it wasn't too bad after a little while.[56]

Catherine Boucher similarly recalled that "for them [returning Pine Pointers] it was a big change for the families I guess because, even for me, when I came back it was different. Oh there was no pool table. You know, the things I liked to do when I was in Pine Point." Aside from missing the good life at Pine Point, Boucher suggested that one major source of difficulty for people moving back to Fort Resolution was the fact that there was no housing.[57] As well, according to Melvin Mandeville, the difficulty of adjusting to his return to Fort Resolution was compounded by the fact that many people labelled the Pine Pointers as outsiders.[58] In any case, memories of adjusting to the comparatively poor facilities at Fort Resolution point to a mixed legacy. As many attest, quality of life in Pine Point was quite high for some Native workers lucky enough to find work and housing in the town. But the juxtaposition of a modern town with another that (at the time) lacked basic municipal services also suggests the lack of lasting economic benefits that flowed to Fort Resolution during the life of the Pine Point Mine.

Such a mixed record is reflected in the ambivalent attitude of many Native people to the mine. While we did encounter some unequivocal Pine Point boosters and some who directed only harsh criticism at the mine among the many people we spoke with, most suggested in some way that the mine represented a mixed legacy for Native people in the surrounding communities. As mentioned previously, a remarkable number

Figure 4: Abandoned street, Pine Point, NWT, 2009. Photo by John Sandlos.

of people mixed stories of racism with stories of how the people in Pine Point were friendly, and pointed out how well they got along with many outsiders. Darin Mckay, for example, juxtaposed difficult memories of racism with broader recollections of the very positive social life in the town:

> Yeah, [the town was] a little bit rough. They kinda didn't like Natives, some of them. But lots of them were nice to us, you know, white people. "Come in and have cookies," or something. We had neighbours—yeah there was a few, the ones that didn't like us, I guess, had some kind of beef. But I didn't know; I was a kid, eh? I remember that. It was a good town, to tell you the truth. It was a nice place there; they had lots of good stores, a ball park. They had everything—lots of stuff going on for kids once in a while. They had parades, you know, carnivals. It was pretty good.[59]

Others mixed harsh criticism of the social, environmental, and economic impact of the mine while acknowledging the positive side of life and work at Pine Point. From K'atl'odeeche First Nation, Daniel Sonnefrere (speaking through an interpreter), asserted:

> Some places look bad, some places look good, because it's helped some people to work and there are still people working today. They learned a lot from there. But for us it was bad, because too much drinking . . . It was a good job, good work, you get good pay, you get to keep it. It's too much drinking [and] we had a problem with that.[60]

Tommy Unka maintained a similar perspective on Fort Resolution's experience of the mine:

> Well, like I said, it kinda brought the south to us, you know. So there's that impact, you know. But it was also a lot of good stuff like at Christmas time we had a little more stuff because of Cominco mines, because the stores were there and shit like that, you know. So there's the goods, you know, my family, my Dad had a little more rum and stuff like that. There's a lot of parties, you know, and I was young, so you know, I enjoyed these little perks. But also of course there was always a down side to a good thing. And some of the down side was some of the social problems that happened as the highway came in.[61]

Gord Beaulieu summed up his perception of the mine by stating simply, "There's a lot of good that came with it, but there's a lot of bad too. A lot of negative. I was young back then, and I had a lot of fun. I had fun at Pine Point."[62] A mix of the good and the bad: this idea came through time and time again in the interviews and challenged our initial assumption that Aboriginal communities simply regarded Pine Point as a blot on their collective historical experience.

Such an ambivalent view of Pine Point's history has deeply influenced local opinions on the recent plans of a smaller resource company, Tamerlane Ventures, to reopen the mine (but not the town) and remove the remaining economical deposits of lead and zinc. At environmental

assessment hearings in Fort Resolution in 2008 about the project, people raised concerns about the negative impacts of Pine Point, particularly ongoing environmental concerns and the fact that the community derived little economic benefit from the mine.[63] Our interviewees raised many of the same issues, with many opposed to or ambivalent about the idea of reopening the mine. Catherine Boucher proclaimed an oft-repeated concern for the environmental impacts of new mining activity: "For me, I don't think it'd be good for our land. They've been taking things off our lands for so long; we don't get nothing back."[64] Angus Beaulieu echoed the latter part of Boucher's comments when he interpreted the lack of consultation prior to exploration work as a sign that history was repeating itself: "We're hitting the table so it's never going to happen to us again, and it happened again. These people come in and start drilling without even coming to Fort Res here."[65] Lloyd Cardinal was similarly critical that Tamerlane's bulk sampling and test mining program had proceeded without an impact and benefit agreement, and many in Fort Resolution and at K'atl'odeeche were firm that development should only proceed if the communities received employment, assurances that the site would be remediated, and an IBA.[66] Others juxtaposed environmental concerns with the pressing need for more employment and economic activity in the South Slave region.

Some, however, wholeheartedly welcomed the return of mining at Pine Point. When asked what he thought about the mine opening up again, Garvin Lizotte replied, "Well I'm just waiting. I'm a truck driver, eh. So I'm ready to go to work day one."[67] Gord Beaulieu felt that the community was more prepared than in the 1960s for a second Pine Point project: "So it's not like, if they open up a mine and everybody has all this money, it's not like this whole town is going to go back like it did again, like it did back in the '60s and '70s. We're already used to it, so that part won't change that much. But it will help the economy."[68] Lorraine Mckay claimed that if they did reopen the mine, she would move back and put up a house in the place where she was born.[69] Whether one is a supporter or critic of Tamerlane's Pine Point project, memories of the profound impact of the original mine continue to shape local responses to industrial development in the South Slave region.

CONCLUSION

People's life stories almost always proceed as a series of ups and downs. So why, then, is it important to suggest that Native people's experience with industrial mining in the South Slave region was mixed? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the rich and complex oral history of Pine Point expands beyond the common (though understandable) emphasis in northern oral history projects on preserving traditional stories and accounts of the pre-industrial fur trade and trapping life. Indeed, the Pine Point oral histories offer a rare glimpse, not at long-ago stories passed from generation to generation or the hunting and trapping life that dominated in South Slave communities prior to World War II, but at the various ways that Aboriginal people in the region resisted, accommodated, and in some cases embraced post-war industrial development. Interviewees provided trenchant and perceptive critiques of historical approaches to northern development, but their comments also problematize previous studies suggesting that northern Aboriginal people received no benefit from the mine and associated developments. Personal histories of individuals suggest that the mine did not simply bypass Aboriginal people; nor were they purely the victims of an externally imposed development project. If the oral interviews confirm that, in general, Aboriginal communities in the surrounding area realized very few social and economic benefits while having to live with a lasting legacy of environmental damage in their proverbial backyard, they also suggest that many individuals responded creatively to the social and economic opportunities associated with the mine and the modern community that came with it. Some took advantage of available wage labour opportunities while never completely abandoning hunting and trapping as a potential economic safety net. Others translated their experience working in the mine into employment in other development projects, whether mines, mineral exploration, or work on the road crew. Still others embraced the social life and economic opportunities associated with a modern town.

Acknowledging these stories should not be misinterpreted as an apologia for a development project that largely failed to fulfill the promise of sustained economic development in the South Slave region. Nor is it an attempt to flatten the variety of human responses to Pine Point into

abstract social science concepts such as community resilience and adaptation. Instead, these oral histories should remind us that simple dualistic stories of traditional communities versus modern mines do not necessarily accord with the complex individual experiences of people who shaped, and were shaped by, the massive social, environmental, and economic changes that came with developments like the Pine Point Mine.

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13 Yellowknives Dene First Nation, *Weledeh Yellowknives Dene: A History* (Dettah, NWT: Yellowknives Dene First Nation Council, 1997); Délı̨nę Uranium Team, *If Only We Had Known*. The negative memories associated with these two prominent abandoned mines in the Northwest Territories, the Port Radium radium/uranium/silver mining complex and Giant Mine at Yellowknife, can be explained in part by the simple fact that they produced much more acute pollution than Pine Point. Keeling and Boulter's chapter in this volume suggests that the combination of political critique with a strong mining identity is not unique to communities near Pine Point.

14 Emilie Cameron, "Copper Stories: Imaginative Geographies and Material Orderings of the Central Canadian Arctic," in *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and Whiteness in Canada*, eds. Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, and Audrey Kobayashi (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 169–90.

15 Sandlos and Keeling, "Claiming the New North."

16 A transcription of Robert Sayine's comments to the Berger Inquiry in Fort Resolution, October 1975, was found in a file marked DKFN, Cominco File, in the archive of the Deninu K'ue First Nation band office.

17 Cecil Lafferty's testimony was found in the transcript titled Northwest Territories Water Board Public Hearing on Pine Point Mines Limited's Application for Renewal of License N1L3-0035, June 12, 1990. A copy was found in the Deninu K'ue First Nation band office.

18 Presentation by Chief Bernadette Unka of the Deninu K'ue First Nation to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 17 June 1993, Native Law Centre Fonds, RCAP Vol. 167, Box 26, University of Saskatchewan Archives.

19 Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, with interviewers suggesting questions or themes for discussion, but also allowing the interviewee to take the lead in the conversation as well. Because of this, the interviews are not really for quantitative analysis in the manner of standardized surveys or focus groups, though some obvious trends are noted in the paper.

20 Angus Beaulieu, interview by John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

21 George Balsillie, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

22 Angus Beaulieu, interview by John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010). These numbers are difficult to corroborate with existing employment data from the 1970s because the numbers do not distinguish between Aboriginal people hired at Fort Resolution and those hired from outside the region in any given year. Macpherson has noted in her report that the number of Aboriginal workers hired from northern Alberta may have been substantial, and the mixing of the two groups in employment data was a major bone of contention in Fort Resolution. See Macpherson, "The Pine Point Mine," 89.

23 Sam Bugghins, interview by Arn Keeling and Rosalie Martel, digital recording (K'atl'odeeche First Nation, NWT, May 20, 2010). Twelve other interviewees mentioned that Native workers were confined to lower-skilled work, or that they had worked as line cutters. Some testimony in the interviews suggests there were more employment opportunities at the mine for Fort Resolution residents in the 1980s, but Aboriginal employment records for the 1980s were not found in the archives.

24 Greg Villeneuve, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

25 Lloyd Cardinal, interview by Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 18, 2010).

26 Leonard Beaulieu, interview by John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

27 Henry McKay, interview by Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

28 Roy Fabian, interview by Arn Keeling and Rosalie Martel, digital recording (K'atl'odeeche First Nation, NWT, May 20, 2010).

29 Harold Moore, interview by Arn Keeling and Rosalie Martel, digital recording (K'atl'odeeche First Nation, NWT, May 20, 2010).

30 Leonard Beaulieu, interview by John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

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34 Melvin Mandeville, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

35 Gord Beaulieu, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

36 Ron McKay, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

37 Angus Beaulieu, interview by John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

38 Ron McKay, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

39 Leander Beaulieu, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

40 Tom Unka, interview by Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

41 Lorraine Mckay, interview by John Sandlos and Frances Mandeville, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

42 Linda McKay, interview by Arn Keeling, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

43 Garvin Lizotte, interview by John Sandlos and Frances Mandeville, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

44 Eddy McKay, interview by John Sandlos and Frances Mandeville, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

45 Larry Dragon, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Hay River, NWT, May 21, 2010).

46 Ron McKay, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

47 Lorraine Mckay, interview by John Sandlos and Frances Mandeville, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

48 Garvin Lizotte, interview by John Sandlos and Frances Mandeville, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

49 Melvin Mandeville, interview by John Sandlos, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

50 Ron Beaulieu, interview by Arn Keeling and Catherine Boucher, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

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53 Darin Mckay, interview by John Sandlos and Frances Mandeville, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 19, 2010).

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57 Catherine Boucher, interview by Frances Mandeville, digital recording (Fort Resolution, NWT, May 20, 2010).

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