

Whistleblowing

Boats on the Water, Fire in the Sky

October 20, 2017



A participatory boat excursion about the explosion in Halifax harbour
Creative City Summit 2017

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Mi'kmaq people have lived in Kjiptuk (Halifax) and Punamu'kwati'jk (Dartmouth) for thousands of years, traveling between the Minas Basin and Bay of Fundy and the harbour at Kepe'k (the Narrows) via the network of rivers and lakes throughout the region. This is unceded, unsundered territory. We are all Treaty People.

We are not a garrison town.

At approximately 8:45am on December 6, 1917, the SS Imo and the SS Mont-Blanc collided in the Narrows of the Halifax harbour. The resulting sparks ignited munitions on the Mont-Blanc that were intended for the battlefields of WW1. Twenty minutes later, at 9:04:35, the ship exploded into over 100,000 fragments.



Janet Maybee, Catherine Martin and Whistleblowing participants, October 2016

The blast itself, then the tsunami and fires that raged through the working class neighborhood of Richmond, killed almost 2000 people and injured 9000 more. Thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed. The Halifax Explosion was the largest human-made explosion until nuclear weapons were used to annihilate Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and caused more Haligonians to die in their hometown than on the battlefields of WW1.

This is a waterborne excursion in today's debris field. What caused the two vessels to be on this collision course? Can you imagine this sequence of events from different vantage points on the water? As fire engulfed the Mont-Blanc, it drifted for 20 minutes, ending up at Pier 6 where it exploded. Where is Pier 6 now?

Today we explore the Explosion as place, including indigenous, African Nova Scotia and settler community perspectives, urban morphology, landscape design and commemorative sites; the Explosion as heritage, culture and communication, including the role of public art, museums, and urban mobility; and living the legacy of the Explosion, with the commitment to address present-day identity issues, systemic trauma, cultural engineering, and the complexities of reconstruction and community development. NiS+TS presents *Whistleblowing* as a participatory exercise in creativity and communication.

Cartographer Gordon Campbell has created *Pilot Francis Mackey and The Halifax Explosion*, an online storymap about Halifax Harbour Pilot Francis Mackey, and the events and aftermath of the Explosion. You can see this award-winning project online at www.pilotmackey.ca, "Storymap".



View of the location of Africville, from the Bedford Basin

Presenters and Collaborators

NiS+TS members Robert Bean, Brian Lilley, Barbara Lounder and Mary Elizabeth Luka

Evan Cameron and Matt Harrison, media artists

Gordon Fraser Campbell, cartographer, GFC Maps

Irvine Carvery, Africville descendant

Brian Downey, actor

Crystal John, Executive Director, Mulgrave Park Caring and Learning Centre

Janet Maybee, historian and author of *Aftershock: The Halifax Explosion and the Persecution of Pilot Francis Mackey*

Catherine Martin, storyteller and filmmaker, Millbrook First Nation

"If urban destruction in the nineteenth century was largely a result of industrial accidents and that of the twentieth century from war, the twenty-first century will likely be a period of meteorological and seismological disasters...as always, the social effects of these 'natural' disasters are felt most by the poor, both globally and within developed countries." p.198, Conclusion, Jacob Remes, *Disaster Citizenship: Survivors, Solidarity, and Power in the Progressive Era*, University of Illinois Press, 2016.

NiS+TS

Founded in 2012, Narratives in Space + Time Society (NiS+TS) uses mobile media, storytelling and walking to creatively and critically explore urban spaces that are often overlooked and disregarded. The psychogeographic practice of the *dérive*, an attentive form of drifting or walking through urban space, is central to NiS+TS's interdisciplinary and experiential approaches. NiS+TS began the public art project *Walking the Debris Field: Public Geographies of the Halifax Explosion* in 2014. The members of NiS+TS are Robert Bean, Brian Lilley, Barbara Lounder, and Mary Elizabeth Luka.



View of the location of Pier 6 (now part of the Irving Halifax Shipyard), from the Narrows

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