

At the beginning of the Covid pandemic with grocery store shelves emptying of food, Lisa and I talked a lot about food security and alternate food sources. We expanded our vegetable garden, ventured out more into surrounding forests near Georgian Bay, foraging for edible roots, mushrooms and berries. I remember seeing the land differently, noticing fruit trees in unexpected places, seemingly abandoned. Abandoned, or left behind? Abandoned, or dispossessed? Abandoned, or stolen? It's all stolen land.

My first visit to the Bayview Escarpment and Meaford Tank Range was in September 2020, six months after our first Ontario Covid lockdown. I pull the truck over, wondering what grows in the overgrown field between the rise of the escarpment on the left and a distant Georgian Bay on the right. I breathe in an air of aftermath and abandonment and step out off the dusty gravel road into the overgrown field, still tall with grass, spindly bushes and old berry canes that snag at my ankles. Twenty feet ahead I see the shapes of fruit trees, and fill with excitement at the sight of an apple tree, then another, then another, then another, many bearing early fall fruit. I had found what I was looking for. My first abandoned orchard.

That first day I brought home 2 heavy bags of various feral fruits, apples, some pears, many small, misshapen ... but all edible. Some were great for crisps and pies but all were good for jelly and cider. We ate apples all the way to Christmas.

I returned with my partner Lisa Myers and we ventured further into the fields, picking along the way, eventually we came to look out over the fields and the blue glimmer of Georgian Bay. Here we also came across a bench for resting before heading back to the truck.

Do you hear that Lisa? That's gunfire.

[Here, the audio changes from just one speaking voice to include our actual field recordings on site that day: sounds of distant gunfire, birds, dogs barking, ambient background noise]

In taking our bags back to the truck, we drove up to the dead end and walked about 10 minutes to the edge of what we found was the Meaford Tank Range, Department of National Defense, 'Keep Out', 'Danger,' barbed wire, all signs of military power and exclusion. So what is this place, the Meaford Tank Range?

Following Canada's entry into World War II in 1939, the military began searching for land they deemed suitable for large-scale military training with armoured vehicles. As described by the Grey Roots Museum and Archives, the area of Sydenham and St. Vincent Townships, was "quietly surveyed" before land purchase offers made to residents in July 1942. This area, northwest of Meaford, was home to over 167 farms and homesteads with extensive orchards of apple, pear and plum trees spread over thousands of acres of productive farmland adjoining the Georgian Bay coast. Approximately 167 settler families were forced to sell their farms and quickly leave. On July 21, 1942, the Crown expropriated 17,350 acres, making it Crown property in right of His Majesty the King. Compensation was approximately \$3300 each. Some families were forced out in August of 1942 while others had until September 30 to vacate. None had military assistance in relocating. Orchard fruit was largely left on the trees. Except for a limited re-entry in October 1942, families had to

abandon that years and subsequent fall harvests (Grey Roots, 6). According to Grey Roots, also left behind were the cemeteries of their loved ones, school, churches, and community buildings. About 80 years later, we see the remnants of the settler homesteads, these Scottish farms, in the trees - the trees are still there, the fruit is still there, the gunfire is still there.

The dispossession of settlers for the creation of the Meaford Tank Range was not the only, nor the first, time people were pushed out of this area by colonial government pursuing nation-building objectives. The tank range lies within an area encompassed by the Nottawasaga Purchase of 1818, also known as the Simcoe-Nottawasaga Treaty 18, and Treaty #18. The Nottawasaga Purchase of 1818 is part of what colonial powers term the Upper Canada Land Surrenders, so-called 'agreements' between Indigenous peoples (and "the Crown"). Exercised before Confederation and the formation of the Province of Ontario, these agreements were considered by the British colonial administration to be sales, or purchases of land, for cash payments, rather than treaties between nations that set out rights of Indigenous people. The Nottawasaga Purchase of 1818 was sought by colonial officials to secure land for British loyalists after the American War of Independence (see Morin, 2010).¹

So this is (and was) Anishinaabek territory.

[Sound changes to introduce Lisa Myers speaking and her guitar response to the Meaford Tank Range, with our field recordings of gunfire, birds, and dogs in the background]

This is Lisa Myers and I'd like to describe what I hear in the soundscape I call "Abandoned Orchards near the Meaford Tank Range." In the background of me talking you will hear my guitar response to that experience.

This space has a tone, like room tone, but it's an abandoned orchard tone and its tone is what's swaying in the wind, what's soaring overhead, with crickets and insects, intermittently I hear a constant rhythm of a knocking fast beat, low middle tones of knocking, I hear a soft surge tone, a constant soft middle tone wave in the distance, as distant as the sky, as a plane in the sky, I hear high pitch yipping voices and howls, that start and stop and crickets intersect in those similar frequencies.

While picking apples at a conservation area near a tank range, I looked down to see how many apples I had in my bag and then I heard coyotes yipping at a distance to my left and then straight ahead and slightly to my right I could hear something that sounded like a woodpecker, but it had a different tone, I could tell it was at a distance with more low-end

¹ For further reading, see: Grey Roots Museum and Archives, *Home on the Range: The Meaford Tank Range Story*; Morin, Jean-Pierre (2010). "Concepts of Extinguishment in the Upper Canada Land Surrender Treaties, 1764–1862," *Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International*; Shular, Michele, 2009. Turning Genealogists onto GIS, *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries*, 5 (1): 55-71.

frequencies and continued longer than any bird I'd heard before. I stood still, frozen. Freezing came from fear, came from wanting to know before making another move, came from a sense of risk, that we were taking a risk by being there and picking apples. I was comparing my sense of threat between coyotes and machine guns – both were making me scared, but I also felt that the coyote's call was almost in protest of the gun fire. I was siding with the coyotes. My wandering thoughts brought me to think about war, I was thinking about being shot, I was thinking about the surge of protests that started in the summer, I was thinking about lockdown and how gathering food and finding sustenance could be happening while machine gun fire was happening at a distance. My fear decreased as I realized that it was a shooting range, that people were training and likely doing machine gun drills at targets. I was not their target. In that moment, I continued picking apples and I thought about how Anishinaabe people and Haudenosaunee people fought in this region hundreds of years ago.

Picking apples makes me think about my mother's family / they moved south from Shawanaga to the town of Oakville to pick fruit as wage labour. From my mother's account, the relocation was difficult and so were the living conditions. This town is where she eventually met my Dad whose family settled there in the early 1900s.

I also thought about colonization as a process of seizing land, but also how states of emergency like World Wars could take land and also never return it, well it wasn't the state of emergency, it would be the state who was in a state of emergency, like these farms that were seized to make this tank range at the beginning of WW II.

I wondered if my community knew about this place which is not so far from our island? I started to want to find more trees and pick more fruit, each apple could be my own way to claim a place there, to appreciate the sustenance of that place. I am thinking about this as an Anishinaabe person, on my traditional territory around the Great Lakes. I am doing this with my partner who is a woman. I am listening to this considering we are both women and both gathering food to the sound of gunfire. I am thinking about the food and the trees who also witness these frequencies and vibrations as they grow.

I listen to this soundscape as a self-taught guitar player who understands that sound takes up different frequencies and that different frequencies travel different distances. I understand sound as a guitar player who has recorded music with sound engineers. I understand sound because I play through an amplifier and it has middle, bass, and treble settings, I appreciate distortion and feedback made with my guitar. I listen to this with the experience of listening to different kinds of music over many years. My ear is attuned to the beauty of sound in the bush, soundscapes not intended for the human ear, I am also attuned to listening to rock music, old country, pow-wow songs, jazz and some experimental noise stuff.

I wanted to emote fear but also courage and convey a strong sounding back at the tank range.