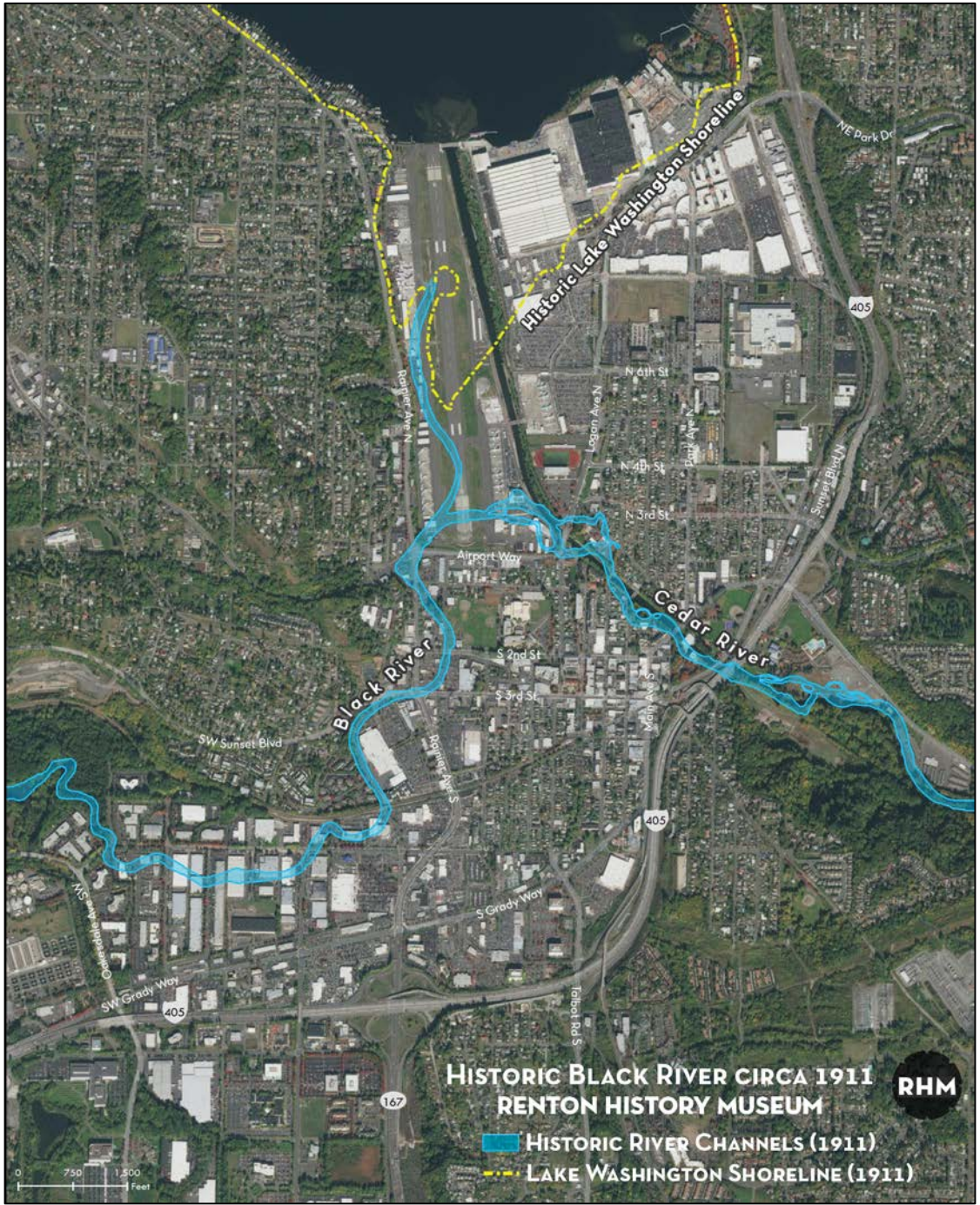
Lesson 2
A. Map #1

Native Americans have called the Pacific Northwest home for thousands of years. The Native Americans from the Pacific Northwest area are called the “Coast Salish” people. They made the Salish Sea and surrounding basin their home.

Lesson 2
A. Map #2

Coast Salish people speak similar languages called Lushootseed and have many similarities in their cultures, but are distinct groups. The specific group that made up the original residents of Renton are called the Duwamish.

Lesson 2
A. Map #3



The Duwamish lived along the rivers and lakes of the region. In Renton, they used to live along the Cedar and the Black Rivers, but Duwamish people lived all the way up to the Seattle area, too. Duwamish actually means “people of the inside” because Duwamish people would row up the rivers inside the land (and away from the coast).

The Black River once connected Lake Washington and the Cedar River with the Duwamish River and drained into the Puget Sound. The Black River had a thriving salmon population that the Duwamish relied heavily upon for food. In 1912 Rentonites created a channel to drain the Cedar River into Lake Washington to stop the flooding in downtown Renton. In 1916 the Montlake cut (by the University of Washington) was completed. When the channel opened, the level of Lake Washington dropped 16 feet and fell below the level of the Black River. The Black River dried up within a couple months, destroying the salmon population.

Lesson 2
B. Canoes

Duwamish caneo on the bank of the Cedar River, 1893

Source: Duwamish Indian Canoe, Clarence Leroy Andrews Photographs, PH001_1418, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon

Duwamish people were, and still are, incredibly skilled at making canoes. Canoes can be used for fishing or hunting on rivers and lakes or in the ocean. They can also be used to move people around; some canoes hold up to 30 people.

When they pick a tree to use for the canoe, Duwamish people look to see if it is the right size, if it is straight, if it is smooth or has lots of branches, and what its guarding spirit is like. Then they chop it down or might control fire around the bottom and burn it down.

Lesson 2
C. Food

Clams

Stinging Nettles

Thimbleberry

Source: http://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/animals-and-plants/clams.aspx

Like other Coast Salish people, Duwamish people ate nutritious resources from the forests, rivers, and ocean. The forests provided nettles, blueberries, wild blackberries, acorns, and other plants. Animals such as deer, elk, rabbits, and a variety of birds also made up part of the Native diet. They caught, prepared, smoked and dried fish, shellfish, and other animals.

Today the Duwamish people still harvest and eat many of the traditional plants and animals listed above along with other foods from local grocery stores and restaurants.

Lesson 2
D. Longhouses #1

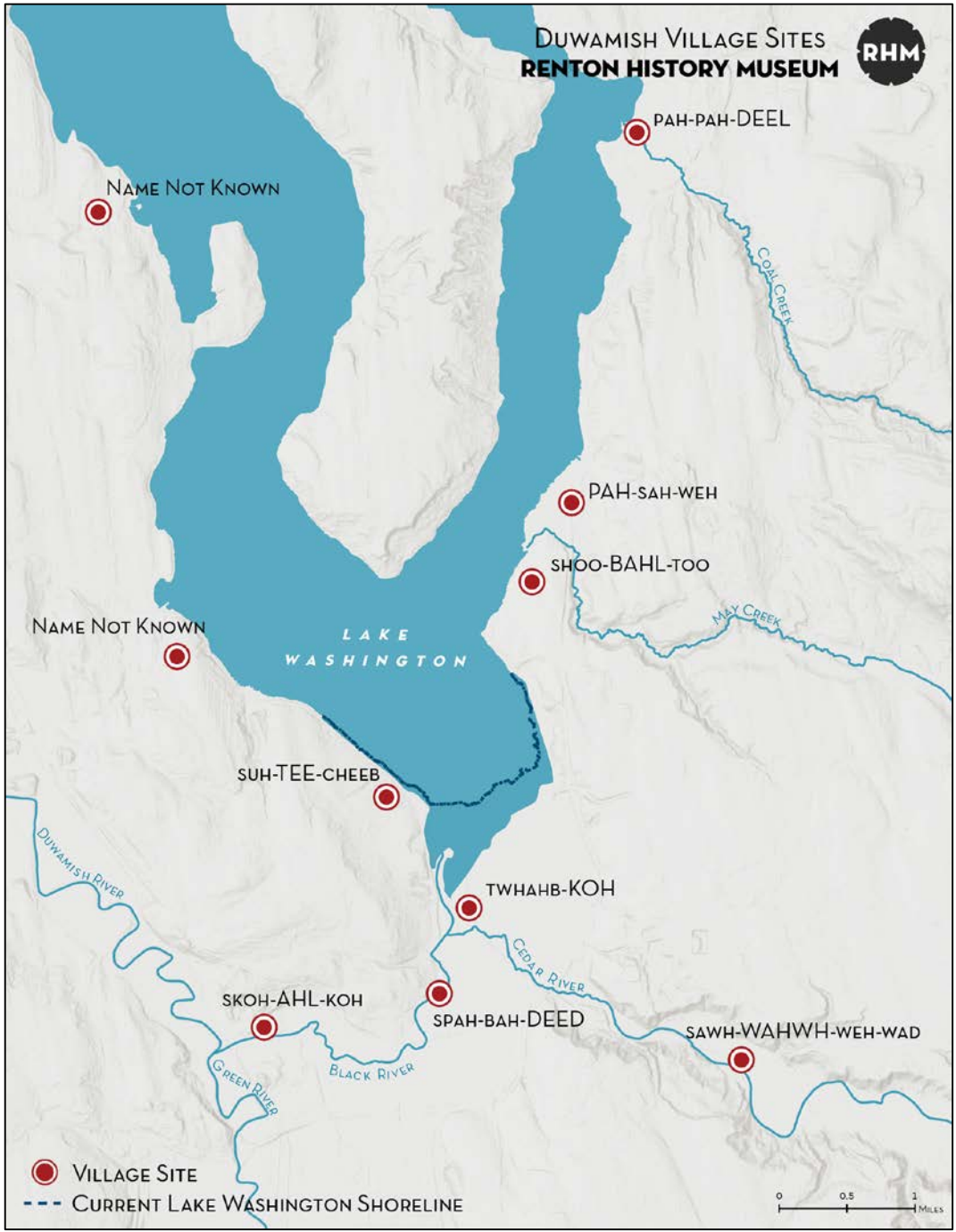
Cowichan dwelling (British Columbia, Canada).
Source: https://www.sfu.ca/brc/virtual_village/coast_salish.html

Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center
Source: https://kingcountyparks.org/2017/06/06/trail-spotlight-green-river-trail-north-extension/#jp-carousel-11900

Duwamish homes, or longhouses, were also made out of cedar. Generally, several families would live inside the longhouse together. Take a careful look at the house posts shown in the photograph. Washington Coast Salish peoples did not carve totem poles, but they did carve house posts like the ones you see in the photograph.

Lesson 2
D. Longhouses #2

Excavation at Spah-Bah-DEED in 1978-1979
(now the Fred Meyer Shopping Center)
Image courtesy of the Renton History Museum



When white people moved to the Seattle area for the first time in the 1850s, the Duwamish tribe inhabited at least 17 villages near Elliott Bay, Duwamish River, Cedar River, Black River (which no longer exists), Lake Washington, and Lake Sammamish.

There are some historic maps that show were large Duwamish settlements used to be but even more existed at one point in time. Through archaeologists' collaborative efforts with tribes, traditional knowledge is increasingly becoming more public.

Archeologists found the remains of a very large longhouse in Renton in the late 1970s. The longhouse was so large as many as five families could have been living in it. There was evidence inside the longhouse of many different types of activities and trade.

Lesson 2
E. Potlatches

Watercolor by James Swan showing the Klallam people of Port Townsend, c.a. 1859.
Source: commons.wikimedia.org

Muckleshoot Indian Tribe Potlatch
Photo courtesy of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe

Duwamish people had, and still have, big gatherings, or celebrations, that they called potlatches. Potlatches were held for many different reasons, including reasons that may be familiar to you: building a new longhouse, raising a mortuary pole, the birth of a baby, the coming of age of a child, a marriage, taking a leading position in the village, or taking a new and more honorable name.

Unlike our celebrations, where the person being honored is given gifts, the host will also give the guests gifts such as food, clothing, or other valuables -- like the objects you looked at. If you are invited to a potlatch and get a beautiful gift, you are expected to invite that person to your potlatch later and give them a gift that was just as good, or better.

During the potlatch, different events take place, like singing and dancing, sometimes wearing masks or other impressive clothing. At many potlatches, spiritual ceremonies take place for different occasions.

Lesson 2
F. Treaties and Reservations #1

Chief Sealth, Photo by E. M. Sammis

When white people came to the Pacific Northwest in the 1850s, they met countless Duwamish people living in the way we've just described. Chief Sealth was one of the leaders of the Duwamish people. The city of Seattle was actually named after Chief Sealth.

Lesson 2
F. Treaties and Reservations #2

Created by the Renton History Museum

Chief Sealth and 81 other leaders from local tribal nations signed a treaty with the U.S. government in 1855. They agreed to give up most of their land, as long as the government gave them the right to fish and hunt on the smaller piece of land that they were allowed to keep (a reservation) and the government continued to view them as sovereign nations. But the United States government did not always keep its promises and as more white people came to the area, the Duwamish and the white people began to fight. Between 1855 and 1904, 94 Duwamish longhouses were burned down.

Lesson 2
G. Boarding Schools

Boys with buckets, Tulalip Indian School, ca. 1912
Source: MOHAI, http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/loc/id/44/rec/14

Notes from UW Special Collections:
Every student at the boarding school spent at least half of his or her day working in some part of the operation. Boys rotated about every six weeks between jobs as carpenter, engineer, farmer or dairyman; girls were assigned to sewing, darning, laundry and kitchen work.

Starting in the 1860s and until the 1920s, the United States government began taking all Native American children from their families and sending them to Indian boarding schools far from their homes.

Duwamish children were sent to several schools such as the Tulalip Indian School near Everett, or further away, the Chemawa near Salem, Oregon. When they were there, students had to follow strict rules. They were not allowed to do anything from their Duwamish culture – like wear Duwamish clothes or speak the Duwamish language and were punished when they did. Some died from diseases.

Today, Duwamish children can attend public, private, or Tribal schools and live at home with their families.

Lesson 2
H. Life Today #1

Source: Photo provided by the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe

There are more than 25,000 Coast Salish peoples in the United States and Canada today. Today, tribes hold potlatches and have canoe races. Duwamish people still do traditional crafts such as weaving and carving.

Some Duwamish people live on reservations. There are 29 Native American reservations in Washington State and 326 in the entire country. The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe Reservation is the closest to Renton and many Duwamish live there.

Lesson 2
H. Life Today #2

Young Cheyenne, tribal youth, in full cedar cape and headband waiting to perform.
Source: All photos provided by the Duwamish Tribe

Blake Shelafoe, Tribal Youth, making a drum at the Duwamish Longhouse.

Tribal youth, Jacob Johnson, alongside his elder grandma and tribal leader, Cecile Hansen, along with Kaden Finkbonner from Lummi to assert Duwamish presence at Alki during canoe journey.

Some Duwamish people don’t live on reservations. They might live anywhere from cities to small towns to rural areas. There are many Duwamish living in the Seattle area that are not associated with the Muckleshoot. They might associate with the Duwamish Tribe instead.

The Duwamish people are still “the people of the inside.” They live in Western Washington communities, attend schools and universities, and work in local fisheries, hospitals, and offices. The Duwamish people encourage everyone to learn more about their culture by visiting with them at local events held at the Muckleshoot Reservation and the Duwamish Longhouse.