

BRITISH COLUMBIA COLONIAL HISTORY CONFERENCE

Fulford Harbour, Salt Spring Island, BC

January 9-10, 1998

Historians and other scholars of early British Columbia marked the 150th anniversary of the colonial foundations of the west coast province with a conference at Fulford Harbour, Salt Spring Island, on the weekend of 9-10 January 1999. On 13 January 1849 the British Government issued a charter of grant to the Hudson's Bay Company to establish a colony on Vancouver Island. The island colony was joined in 1858 by a second Pacific colony named British Columbia by Queen Victoria herself; but in 1866, after a brief period of rivalry and debt, the colonies were merged. They joined the Canadian confederation in 1871 as the single province of British Columbia after a somewhat telescoped twenty-two year colonial existence.

The conference embraced four aspects of colonial history: imperial ideologies, First Nations responses to colonization, colonial immigration and society, and Native landscape change. Historical geographer Dan Clayton of the University of St Andrews and historian Jeremy Mouat of Athabasca University spoke on the imperial and political background to the charter of grant and considered the work of explorers and theorists from Captain Vancouver to Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Four speakers examined the impact of the assertion of colonial title on Native economies and societies: Cole Harris of UBC and historian Chris Arnett examined the theory and practice of Governor James Douglas's Native land policy, while historical geographer Ken Favrholt and historian of education Jean Barman, both of UBC, examined the alienation of Native land in the interior of British Columbia and Native women's employment strategies on the streets of colonial Victoria. Another five speakers considered aspects of colonial society: historian Roderick Barman of UBC presented his original research on the lives of Mexican packers in the mainland gold rushes, SSHRC postdoc fellow Adele Perry unpacked the discursive suitcases of proponents of colonial immigration, and three speakers examined colonial immigration and settlement on Vancouver Island by Hudson's Bay Company employees. They were Ruth Underhill of Victoria, Bruce Watson of Vancouver, and SSHRC postdoc fellow Richard Mackie. Three Victoria biographers- John Adams, Brad Morrison, and Maureen Duffus- spoke respectively on the colonial careers of Governor James Douglas, surveyor J.D. Pemberton, and merchant James Yates. A central session considered the formation and fate of colonial institutions: Patrick Dunae of Malaspina University-College spoke on children and schooling on colonial Vancouver Island, Ruth Sandwell of Simon Fraser University explored the distance between the "official discourse of rural" and the more prosaic reality of settlers' lives on Salt Spring Island, and Chad Reimer of Fraser Valley University-College examined the effect of island-mainland rivalries on the

writing and "periodization" of British Columbia history. Human geographer Briony Penn and ethnobotanist Nancy Turner, both of the University of Victoria, closed the conference with talks on the introduction of British plants like Scotch broom and the eradication of Native food plants like Camas by colonization and urban growth.

Held at the Fulford Community Hall, a rustic barn-like hall built in the 1920s and used extensively for dances, concerts, wedding receptions, bingo, etc, the conference offered a rare and convivial blending of the professional and the "amateur," the urban and the rural, and the island and mainland aspects of British Columbia history. The 100 participants boarded with friends on Salt Spring Island or stayed at the Fulford Inn or at Bed and Breakfasts on the south end of the island. There were no concurrent sessions, and the nineteen speakers were rewarded with an attentive, varied, and knowledgeable audience of academic and popular historians, archivists, geographers, ethnohistorians, museum curators, lawyers, land claims researchers, educational historians, genealogists, and many others.

The conference was also the venue for the launch for a fine new collection of essays edited by R.W. Sandwell, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999). Most of the authors of the essays attended or spoke at the conference, and the rural setting of the Burgoyne Valley proved an ideal setting both for the launch and the conference in general.

By Richard Mackie

