

VISIONS OF AGRICULTURE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA*

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OVER THE PAST FIFTEEN years or so, North American social scientists have slowly rediscovered the countryside — the farms, fields, and villages where, until quite recently, the vast majority of people lived in local worlds of kith and kin. Approaches vary and disputes abound in this new literature, but the development and transformation of rural capitalism has been a subject of particular interest. This enthusiasm for rural history has not yet spread to British Columbia. Perhaps it is because this province has little countryside of its own. The highrises of downtown Vancouver, like the smokestacks of Kootenay smelters, are hemmed in by mountains and forest. Everywhere, cityscape presses against wilderness without the intermediate agrarian landscape so familiar in Europe and eastern North America. Perhaps it is the continuing legacy of the staple theorists for whom British Columbia, like Canada itself, was made by its staple industries: first the fur trade, then the gold rush, hard-rock mining, and lumbering. The production of these raw, relatively unprocessed commodities for the world market has engendered a very particular social geography. In the workcamps, mine shafts, and sawmill towns of early British Columbia, a largely male workforce of diverse, but racially segmented, origin confronted a fully developed international capitalism. Staple theorists and labour historians have shown no interest in family farms employing little wage labour and producing for small, local markets on the margins of the capitalist space economy.

Whatever the reason, rural life, agriculture, and the countryside in British Columbia have remained almost uncharted historical terri-

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tory.¹ The task of synthesis is further complicated by the variety of cultures and landscapes that make up this province. In such circumstances, a single essay can scarcely hope to provide a comprehensive overview of rural experience in British Columbia. Instead, I will try to set an agenda for future research by describing the broad social discourses through which British Columbians understood rural life and practised agriculture in the period between the completion of the transcontinental railroad and the Second World War.

The dates are somewhat arbitrary, marking the general period in which agricultural settlement peaked and the agricultural frontier closed in British Columbia, but my focus on visions or, more technically, what I will call discourses of agriculture, is not. As much as anything, historical debate about the transition to capitalism in rural America has swirled around the underlying pre-industrial *mentalité* that, it is commonly argued, regulated economic behaviour and forestalled the development of capitalist relations of production in the countryside.² By contrast, economic geographers and rural sociologists have been more concerned with the recent restructuring of agricultural production and the degree to which agriculture represents a special case somehow qualitatively different from other sectors of the economy.³ Both groups, however, have tended to see the essential questions

¹ British Columbia still lacks a general history of agriculture like those available for Quebec, Ontario, and the prairie provinces. Margaret A. Ormsby's two articles, "The History of Agriculture in British Columbia," *Scientific Agriculture* 20 (1939): 61-72, and her "Agricultural Development in British Columbia," *Agricultural History* 19 (1945): 11-20, remain the only overviews published in the last fifty years. In 1992, Cole Harris and I wrote an essay, "Farming and Rural Life in British Columbia, 1881-1941," that will appear in the upcoming *Canadian Countryside* volume, edited by Brian Osbourne and published by the Canadian Association of Geographers.

² For recent reviews, see Béatrice Craig, "Pour une approche comparative de l'étude des sociétés rurales nord-américaines," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 23 (1990): 249-70; R. W. Sandwell, "Rural Reconstruction: Towards a New Synthesis in Canadian History," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 27 (1994): 1-32. Key texts include Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press, 1985); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983); James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser. 35 (1978): 3-32, reprinted in Henretta, *Origins of American Capitalism* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1991); Alan Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville: Univ. Virginia Press, 1992); Michael Merrill, "Cash Is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review* 3 (1977): 42-71; Winifred Rothenberg, *From Market Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1992).

³ On this debate, see Margaret Fitzsimmons, "The New Industrial Agriculture: The Regional Integration of Speciality Crop Production," *Economic Geography* 62 (1986): 334-53; David Goodman, Bernardo Sorj, and John Wilkinson, *From Farming to Biotechnology: A Theory of Agro-Industrial Development* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Chul-Kyoo Kim and James Curry,

in terms of political economy: explaining the onset or delay of particular regimes of capitalist production and accumulation. As I hope to show, an examination of the discursive field in which agriculture was conceived and practised provides a more fruitful way to conceptualize the relationships at issue in the debate over the transition to and transformation of capitalism in the countryside. This approach dispels the apparent coherence of grand historical phases like pre-capitalist/capitalist and Fordist/post-Fordist; it disperses the singular historicity said to operate upon economic structures, political institutions, and cultural values; and it allows us to think about the diversity and heterogeneity of experience in British Columbia, because the existence of different discourses of agriculture, each producing different patterns of statements about British Columbia, enabled quite different agricultures to be practiced, scrutinized, and represented in the province simultaneously.

AGRICULTURAL DISCOURSES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1885-1941

Although rural life, agriculture, and the countryside presented many forms, we might reduce this vast array to three distinct regularities: arcadianism, agrarianism, and the Country Life Movement. I will call these regularities discourses, by which I mean systematic patterns of statements and practices about the field of agriculture. Discourses of agriculture in British Columbia were related to each other and to many other social discourses, institutions, and practices. The complex, local particularities of these inter-relations cannot be deduced theoretically; instead they demand empirical exploration and substantiation.⁴

"Fordism, Flexible Specialization and Agri-Industrial Restructuring: The Case of the US Broiler Industry," *Sociologia Ruralis* 33 (1993): 61-80; Susan A. Mann, *Agrarian Capitalism in Theory and Practice* (Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press, 1990); Terry Marsden, "Exploring a Rural Sociology for the Fordist Transition: Incorporating Social Relations into Economic Restructuring," *Sociologia Ruralis* 32 (1992): 209-30; Brian Page and Richard Walker, "From Settlement to Fordism: The Agro-Industrial Revolution in the American Midwest," *Economic Geography* 67 (1991): 281-315.

⁴ The work of Michel Foucault provides an important resource for my understanding of the workings of discourses, especially his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (1969. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). In his later work Foucault devoted more attention to the relationships between power and knowledge in disciplinary institutions and practices. See, in particular, M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (1975. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979) and the essays in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, G. Burchell et al., eds. (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1991).

Agricultural discourses, like the particular relations with nature that they instituted, were foreign to the indigenous peoples of what we now call British Columbia. Exotic invaders brought to the north Pacific coast by the British Empire and the capitalist world economy, these agricultural discourses were formed out of different structural and cultural changes in Europe and eastern North America, emphasized different aspects of rural life and agriculture, and, in British Columbia, were articulated by different social groups. Despite these important contrasts, however, all three strains of agricultural discourse celebrated rural life as the good life. Moreover, they were constituted and maintained through comparison, both implicit and explicit, with industry and urban life. As Raymond Williams makes clear, “country” and “city” are not so much material things themselves as powerful categories constituted through reciprocal relations.⁵ Agricultural discourses in British Columbia were connected to and derived much of their power from representations of the city that stretched far beyond the actual borders of the province.

This is not to say that the geography of British Columbia was somehow irrelevant. Far from it. The particular mix of mountains, vast distances, and the cultures of three continents formed the medium through which different statements about rural life were produced and acted out in British Columbia. Many transplanted ideas about agriculture and country life took root here; many more were swept away. The coherence and stability of these agricultural discourses, apparent at a distance, were subverted and dissipated by their encounter with the obstinacies of land and life in British Columbia. On the ground, analytical distinctions between arcadian, agrarian, and Country Life statements about agriculture were far from clear as individuals encountered and articulated fragments of each. The task, then, is not simply to map agricultural discourses onto the broad outlines of the province’s historical geography, but to appreciate the creative energy of their encounter, to see how its historical geography actually made these discourses that, in turn, were so important in shaping what we know as British Columbia.

Arcadianism

Arcadianism celebrated the moral virtues and personal benefits of country living, but its *fin-de-siècle* incarnation owed much of its tone

⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1973). William Cronon shows how these relations are realized materially in the traffic between city and country. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, 1991).

and principal emphases to the critique of modernity offered by romantics like John Ruskin and William Morris. Arcadianism enframed the countryside as an important site of emotional consumption and individual spiritual escape.⁶ Such sentiments had classical roots in the writings of Hesiod and Virgil, among others, but the emphasis on loss, anti-rationalism, and spiritual alienation from nature was unique to nineteenth-century arcadianism.⁷ The romantics decried the Enlightenment domination of nature and the spiritual and moral decay that it caused. Their arcadianism extolled the picturesque landscape and held it out as a historic relic to be preserved from the destruction wrought by progress and the relentless onslaught of industrial capitalism.⁸ In this sense, then, arcadianism was a reactionary, anti-progressive discourse: it was pervaded by nostalgia and the pressing need to save what was left of an authentic but quickly fading rural tradition. It constituted history and the country as those good qualities that had not yet been destroyed by the steamroller that was the future and the city.

Ultimately, however, the aesthetic sensibility and pastoral nostalgia of the romantics proved to be more influential than their wider critique of modernity. With its focus on the spiritual development of the individual, nineteenth-century romanticism provided few resources for organizing any broad social solidarities. Instead, the past and the countryside became objects of knowledge and places of retreat to be preserved for those few individuals, chiefly members of the middle and upper classes of England and eastern North America, able to appreciate their finer qualities. In Palladian country homes and Tudor revival retreats, the cultured could revel in the authentic experience provided by Arts and Crafts furnishings and the contemplation

⁶ My understanding of *fin-de-siècle* arcadianism has been enhanced by Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); David B. Danbom, "Romantic Agrarianism in 20th Century America," *Agricultural History* 65 (1991): 1-12; John Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880 to 1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964); Peter J. Schmidt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969).

⁷ On the relationship between classical pastoralism and nineteenth-century English romanticism, see Williams, *The Country and the City*.

⁸ The idea of the picturesque as what is left of history after the onslaught of progress is perhaps best exemplified by John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (1851. London: George Allen, 1903). It finds its greatest contemporary resonance in the efforts of the heritage industry to preserve, display, and restage the "timeless" remains of an invented tradition. See Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985); Ian McKay, *The Quest for the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994).

of nature.⁹ The country also provided a resource for the practice of the arts of hunting and fishing, once the preserve of a martial aristocracy, whose eclipse by an overcivilized and sedentary middle class seemed to threaten the health and virility of the White race.¹⁰ The picturesque aesthetic even found expression in modern cities. Stanley Park, with its oceanside promenades and carefully cultivated disorder, provided a small taste of nature in downtown Vancouver, while the winding, tree-lined streets of Shaughnessy in Vancouver and the Uplands in Victoria offered an exclusive escape from the grid-pattern rationality of modern urban planning.¹¹ These disparate efforts to conserve an arcadian past actually created something materially new, though this was difficult to articulate in a discourse focused on the erosion of an essential rural tradition and the disappearance of an authentic country life experience.

Arcadianism conferred on agriculture a unique respectability among the professions, or at least to the idealized practice of a country gentry. This vision of rural life actively mirrored the styles and good taste of that "superior class who cultivate[d] the amenities of life," and in so doing helped distinguish themselves from the *nouveaux riches* and the working classes who were unable to appreciate arcadian amenities.¹² Agriculture in British Columbia was said to provide "delightful open-air life . . . rain and sun, sweet air, earth's wholesome scents, [and] the mysteries of all growing things."¹³ Such aesthetic concerns occupied the minds of those who took their wealth, and the class structure that produced it, for granted. Dwelling almost exclusively on the authenticity of country life and the possibilities for personal and spiritual growth provided by proximity to nature, arcadianism had little to say about the actual practice of agriculture.

⁹ On the Arts and Crafts Movement in the US, see T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

¹⁰ The connections between hunting, Victorian masculinity, and the cult of nature are explored in Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978); Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press, 1995), 105-32; John M. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism* (New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 1988).

¹¹ Robert A.J. McDonald, "'Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot?': Class Perceptions of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 1910-1913," *Canadian Historical Review* 65 (1984): 127-53; Charles N. Forward, "The Immortality of a Fashionable Residential District: The Uplands," in *Residential and Neighborhood Studies in Victoria*, C.N. Forward, ed. (Victoria: Univ. Victoria, Dept. Geography, Western Geographical Series, vol. 5, 1973), 1-39.

¹² J.S. Dennis, *The Agricultural and Industrial Resources of Vancouver Island, British Columbia* (Victoria: Colonist Printing and Publishing Co., Ltd., 1905), 12.

¹³ J.T. Bealby, *Fruit Ranching in British Columbia*, 2d ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911), 217.

Arcadian representations of agriculture in painting, poetry, and prose systematically occluded any evidence of human labour or class conflict.¹⁴ England's verdant fields and bounteous harvests seemed to result from the "spontaneous hand of Nature."¹⁵

Orcharding was the only line of agriculture described in much detail by arcadian texts. While the attention of nineteenth-century gentlemen farmers turned steadily away from the production of agricultural commodities and more towards the cultivation of flowering plants, the propagation of fruit trees held a continuing fascination for wealthy hobbyists.¹⁶ Pomology was really more like gardening than the farming practised by plodding peasants. Long lines of neatly trimmed and well-spaced trees, blooming every spring, seemed much like large flower gardens, and in British Columbia, this similarity was enhanced by the small size of orchard lots, often less than ten acres.¹⁷ What little work the orchardist could not do himself would be done by hired labour or by the experienced men paid to manage young orchards. According to Lord Grey, Canadian Governor General, this natural, contemplative lifestyle made "the fruit grower . . . one of nature's gentlemen" and "the most desirable of all citizens."¹⁸

An ever increasing number of horticultural and pomological societies, lecturers, and specialized horticultural books and magazines expounded and substantiated these arcadian statements about orcharding. They devoted particular attention to the interior valleys of British Columbia. These areas were free from the blights and rusts that haunted fruit growers in England and eastern North America.

¹⁴ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980); Stephen Daniels, "The Political Iconography of Woodland in Later Georgian England," in *The Iconography of Landscape*, D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 43-82; Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), 157-200.

¹⁵ The phrase belongs to John Locke, whose *Two Treatises on Government* justified the private ownership of property and the appropriation of aboriginal lands in the New World. The great irony here is that arcadian representations of British Columbia should extol the bounty of nature in its fertile fields while aboriginals were denied rights to land because they did not "appropriate land to himself by his labour" in a way that Locke and the British colonial government could recognize, i.e. "inclosed and cultivated land." Quoted in Peter Hulme, "The Spontaneous Hand of Nature: Savagery, Colonialism, and the Enlightenment," in *The Enlightenment and Its Shadows*, P. Hulme and L. Jordanova, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 18-34.

¹⁶ Tamara Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989).

¹⁷ In 1913, 60% of orchards in the Okanagan Valley averaged nine acres and under. *Agricultural Statistics, 1913* (Victoria: BC Dept. of Agriculture, bull. 59, 1914), 60.

¹⁸ *Vernon News*, 4 October 1906, quoted in Margaret A. Ormsby, *Coldstream: Nullus Secundus* (Vernon, BC: District of Coldstream, 1990), 20.

With sufficient irrigation, the Kootenays, the Okanagan, and the Similkameen seemed ideal for fruit production. They became the focus for an arcadian discourse that positioned “fruit growing in British Columbia . . . as an ideal life” and as “a beautiful art as well as a most profitable industry” requiring “refinement, culture and distinction.”¹⁹

Arcadianism in British Columbia did not simply float freely; it was produced in and through a variety of institutions, both public and private, that gave particular form to more general notions about agriculture and rural life. Land dealers, steamship and railroad companies, local boards of trade, and the provincial and dominion governments, among others, worked hard to promote British Columbia as the ideal place for an arcadian life. In this effort, they competed with those in South Africa, New Zealand, and other outposts of the British Empire that were also angling for the “right” sort of English immigrant. Perhaps this rising crescendo of boosterism is what drove Lord Grey to proclaim the Okanagan Valley as among the “one or two of the most favoured spots on earth.”²⁰ Building on this momentum, limited liability companies bought large swaths of the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys, constructed expensive irrigation works, and marketed small benchland lots to middle class Britons as suburban orchards.²¹ Others thought Vancouver Island the ideal setting for an arcadian existence. According to travel writer, novelist, and English ex-patriot Clive Phillips-Wooley, excellent hunting, fishing, and other “amusements . . . of English country life” distinguished the Cowichan Valley and made it “essentially the right country for men with pensions, with small incomes and country tastes.”²²

Arcadian propositions about rural life enjoyed some of their widest currency among the urban middle classes. A large audience turned out to hear William Sinclair speak at the St. John’s Literary Society in

¹⁹ Bealby, *Fruit Ranching in British Columbia*, 217; J.F.S. Redmayne, *Fruit-Farming in the “Dry Belt” of British Columbia* (London: Times Book Club, 1909), 10. Also see J.T. Bealby, *How to Make an Orchard in British Columbia* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911).

²⁰ Quoted in Ormsby, *Coldstream*, 20.

²¹ Paul M. Koroscil, “Boosterism and the Settlement Process in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia,” *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 5 (1986): 73-103; Colin M. Reeves, “The Establishment of the Kelowna Orchardring Area: A Study of Accommodation to Site and Situation” (MA thesis, Univ. Victoria, 1973); Kenneth W. Wilson, “Irrigating the Okanagan, 1860-1920” (MA thesis, Univ. British Columbia, 1989).

²² Quoted in BC Dept. of Agriculture, *British Columbia and Its Agricultural Capabilities: A Brief Descriptive Pamphlet* (Victoria, 1902), 25-26. Also see Eric Duncan, “Vancouver Island from a Farmer’s Standpoint,” *Chamber’s Journal* (June 1903): 366-68; Duncan Board of Trade, *The Cowichan District* (Duncan: Cowichan Leader, 1914); Vancouver Island Fruitlands, Ltd., *Farming in Vancouver Island* (London: J.J. Keliher & Co., [1911]).

Vancouver “On Land Cultivation.” But for most in the audience, Sinclair’s theories about land clearance were an idle curiosity, and their day-to-day experience with agriculture was limited to nostalgic memories of England, or the occasional Sunday drive through the small patches of countryside on the Saanich Peninsula around Victoria or in the lower Fraser Valley near Vancouver. If Sinclair’s call “Back to the Land” did indeed “make an attractive claim” on his middle class audience, it was abstract and imaginary, consisting mostly of soothing ideas of the pastoral.²³ It was a common article of faith in British Columbia that “[b]y intense farming a man can live on 5-10 acres properly cleared and in good farming condition.”²⁴ This optimism betrayed an ignorance of the economics of agriculture hidden from view by a discourse about country life that focused more on leisure than livelihood.

In British Columbia, unlike other parts of North America, arcadian discourse substantially affected the course of agricultural settlement. Particularly for status-conscious members of the English middle class, the promise of an arcadian country life, inaccessible at home, seemed within reach in British Columbia. A great many came, especially in the heady years before the First World War. Jean Barman estimates that nearly one out of every seven of the nearly 175,000 British immigrants to BC between 1891 and 1921 came from the upper and middle classes.²⁵ Taken by the arcadian celebration of country living, and possessing the start-up capital to buy land, these wealthy, often urban-born, English migrants were heavily represented in agriculture and in rural British Columbia.²⁶ They settled places like “Peachland,” “Summerland,” and “Glenmore” and made anglophile enclaves marked by boys’ schools, Anglican churches, and other institutions of middle class life in

²³ Sinclair’s lecture was described in (Vancouver) *Daily Province*, 13 January 1915. He later published it in pamphlet form as *Re-settlement and Cultivation of Land in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J. Pollack, 1915).

²⁴ British Columbia Archives and Record Service (hereafter, BCARS), RG 324, box 1, vol. 4: 81, testimony of J.F. Bledsoe to the BC Royal Commission on Agriculture at Alberni, 15 April 1913. Also see box 2, vol. 1: 219-21, testimony of H. Hunt, Walhachin, 12 May 1913; Beverly Seaton, “Idylls of Agriculture; or, Nineteenth Century Success Stories of Farming and Gardening,” *Agricultural History* 55 (1981): 21-30.

²⁵ Jean Barman, “Ethnicity in the Pursuit of Status: British Middle- and Upper-Class Emigration to British Columbia in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 18 (1986): 36. Also see W. A. Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles* (London: P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1929); Patrick Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981).

²⁶ In 1921, 38% of all farm operators in British Columbia had been born in the United Kingdom. By 1941 this had dropped to 26%. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Eighth Census of Canada, 1941, British Columbia, Census of Agriculture* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1945), VIII: 1594.

England.²⁷ Arcadian discourse helped partition the space of British Columbia and create the self-consciously English atmosphere of the Cowichan and Okanagan Valleys. Tethered to these particular parts of British Columbia by a bundle of ideas forged in reaction to urban growth far away, English migrants tried, with limited success, to live the arcadian ideal in a distant corner of the British Empire.

Many soon discovered that country living was not as easy as it had seemed from afar. Servants were hard to get, and without them, the standards of middle class England were difficult to maintain. Daisy Phillips, who came to the Windermere Valley in 1912 with her retired army officer husband, Jack, had to cook, clean, and wash for the first time in her life. She and Jack struggled to set out an orchard at 3,200 feet where apples could not survive. When the war came, their capital gone, Daisy returned to England while Jack rejoined his old Lincolnshire regiment to fight and die in France. She remembered her days at Windermere as the most fulfilling of her life.²⁸ Settlers at Walhachin in the Thompson River Valley made a similarly ill-fated effort to live the country life, growing apples where irrigation was hardly feasible.²⁹ Some gentlemen farmers were able to survive because "farming . . . in their cases [was] an accessory rather than a main source of livelihood," but they were few and far between.³⁰

The leisurely country life represented in the arcadian literature was impossible to sustain in British Columbia, even in the Cowichan and Okanagan Valleys where the imprint of arcadian discourse was deepest. Most of the English immigrants who stayed on in rural British Columbia faced years of back-breaking work to develop viable farms. They were able to hire some labour — a few hired great quantities — but in general, agricultural labor was difficult to find, expensive to hire, and even harder to keep. Most of the actual work was performed by farm men and the unpaid members of their families.³¹ Despite their

²⁷ See, for example, Jean Barman, *Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School* (Vancouver: Univ. British Columbia Press, 1984).

²⁸ Daisy Phillips, *Letters from Windermere, 1912-1914*, R.C. Harris and E. Phillips, eds. (Vancouver: Univ. British Columbia Press, 1984).

²⁹ Nelson Riis, "The Walhachin Myth: A Study of Settlement Abandonment," *BC Studies* 17 (1973): 3-25. This is adapted from his more detailed "Settlement Abandonment: A Case Study of Walhachin — Myth and Reality" (MA thesis, Univ. British Columbia, 1970).

³⁰ A.G. Bradley, *Canada in the Twentieth Century* (Westminster: A. Constable, 1903), 328. Paul M. Koroscil discusses one of these lucky few in "A Gentleman Farmer in British Columbia's Garden of Eden," in *British Columbia: Geographical Essays in Honour of A. MacPherson*, P.M. Koroscil, ed. (Burnaby: Dept. of Geography, Simon Fraser Univ., 1991), 87-111.

³¹ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, Volume VII: Agriculture* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude), VII: 738, enumerated 3,066 full-time hired men and 33,190 tempo-

expectations before coming from England to run a Chilliwack dairy farm, Thomas and Daisy Edwards found that farm life in British Columbia meant work. Their personal diaries record an almost endless round of manual labour — a daily rhythm of men milking, feeding, and cleaning the cows and farm women cooking, cleaning, and caring for the men, set against more seasonal (but equally) gendered chores like ploughing, planting, picking, and canning.³² The particular tasks varied from region to region and farm to farm, but toil was the great constant of farm life. Such work was unrecognizable to a nostalgic, arcadian discourse that pictured agriculture without labour and harvests without harvesters. Herbert Church's celebratory accounts of farm life in British Columbia, written for readers back in England, are incommensurable with the plaintive letter of his Canadian-born daughter begging her father to sell his Chilcotin ranch and retire to Vancouver "so that you & Mother will have a fair amount to live on."³³

But this is not to say that Herbert Church and the arcadianism he articulated *misrepresented* British Columbia. Although the arcadian vision of British Columbia proved, ultimately, to be unsustainable, arcadian statements about the moral virtues of country life in British Columbia were, for a short period around the turn of the century, matters of fact. This truth was made possible by the impressive institutional resources of governments, universities, publishing houses, railroad and land development companies, as well as by the personal reputations of politicians, scientists, novelists, journalists, neighbours, friends, and family members that produced and stood behind the many different and diverse arcadian statements made about British Columbia. Together, they constituted what Michel Foucault would call "a regime of truth."³⁴ This diverse set of statements, practices, and institutions brought countless immigrants many thousands of miles across oceans and vast distances to settle particular parts of this

rary farm labourers (almost all male). The 34,778 family members that census officials listed as working on farms constituted the vast majority of the farm labour force, particularly since census figures systematically ignored women's labour. See Nancy Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth Century Economic Thought," *Signs* 16 (1991): 463-84.

³² BCARS, add. mss. 349, Edwards Family Collection.

³³ Herbert E. Church, *Making a Start in Canada: Letters from the Two Young Emigrants* (London: Seeley, 1889); Herbert E. Church, *Emigrant in the Canadian Northwest* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd, 1929); BCARS, Church Family Papers, add. mss. 1471, box 2, Elsie Church, Vancouver, to Herbert E. Church, Big Creek, BC, 3 November 1924.

³⁴ Michel Foucault used the phrase on several occasions, but developed the idea at some length in his "Truth and Power," in M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1979*, C. Gordon, ed., (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109-33, esp. 131-33.

province. It underwrote irrigation schemes and investment patterns as well as government policy, scientific research, picturesque architecture, flower gardens, boys' schools, and duck-hunting parties. These material effects were produced by arcadian discourse just as surely as it allowed the novelist and amateur historian Reverend R. G. MacBeth to declare: "Farm life tends to develop the power to think and helps to cultivate reverence for eternal realities."³⁵ Such remarks only made sense in the context of a much wider way of organizing the world, both materially and intellectually, brought into being and held in place by arcadian discourse about British Columbia.

Agrarianism

The pioneer settlement of much of rural North America was informed by agrarianism, a discourse celebrating agriculture as the source of all wealth and the wide distribution of land among yeoman farmers as the source of freedom and democracy. As the Sardis dairy farmer A. C. Wells put it, "the farm should be independent of all assistance. Small farms — 50 acres or less — are the best for the country."³⁶ The subject of agrarian discourse was a masculine one whose wealth and independence were achieved by the discursive subjugation of wife and children rendered virtually invisible by agrarian celebrations of the family farm. In general, agrarianism left a deeper mark on the United States than on Canada, where the paucity of arable land and the legacy of Wakefield's immigration and land policies made a liberal society of independent family farmers more difficult to envisage.³⁷ In British Columbia, the egalitarian strains of agrarianism also came up against the élitism of the arcadian vision of rural life.

Despite these obstacles, agrarianism was the predominant discourse of agriculture in British Columbia, as it was in the rest of North America. Many settlers, but especially those from eastern Canada and the United States, clung to its central tenets: the labour theory of value and the independent family farm as the bedrock of democratic

³⁵ Rev. R. G. MacBeth, *Land in British Columbia* (London: William Stevens Ltd., 1920), 20.

³⁶ BCARS, RG 324, box 2, vol. 1: 109, testimony of A.C. Wells, Chilliwack, 5 May 1913. Although there is no single source on agrarianism, the following are particularly suggestive: Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), esp. 23-59; James A. Montmarquet, *The Idea of Agrarianism: From Hunter-Gatherer to Agrarian Radical in Western Culture* (Moscow: Univ. Idaho Press, 1989), esp. 63-103; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950). My preliminary thoughts on agrarian discourse are outlined in Demeritt, "Climate, Cropping, and Society in Vermont, 1820-1850," *Vermont History* 59 (1991): 133-65.

³⁷ H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines, & Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 39-47. Also see Richard Mackie, "The Colonization of Vancouver Island, 1849-1858," *BC Studies* 96 (1992-93): 3-40.

society. "Agriculture," the finance minister told the provincial legislature in 1912, "must necessarily occupy the foremost place in the Budget Speech . . . [that] has the farmers' interests greatly at heart."³⁸ The general idea that "we all live on the back of the farmer," that agriculture is "the backbone of all industries," or that farming and gardening "are the basic industries of every permanently prosperous country" was an oft-repeated axiom in British Columbia.³⁹

Agrarianism mixed a nostalgia for a rapidly disappearing society of family patriarchs with a progressive view of agriculture and a broad confidence in its transformative powers. Despite dogged insistence that agriculture was the backbone of the economy, fewer and fewer North Americans called themselves farmers. For agrarianism this fundamental economic restructuring became a problem of "keeping the boys on the farm." The Ontario Grange Committee on Education hoped to demonstrate "to our youthful population that it is not necessary to abandon and forsake farm labour to attain positions of prominence and trust." Farm and church leaders, the rural press, the Grange and the Patrons of Industry assailed the stereotype of dull and plodding farmers. They preached the sanctity and honour of agriculture and the family farm, emphasized the economic security provided by agriculture, and warned against the seductive call of city life.⁴⁰ In Quebec, calls to stay on the farm were closely bound up with the nationalist dreams of a Catholic élite.⁴¹ This reactionary strain of agrarian discourse echoed throughout the long-settled districts of eastern North America, where it legitimated deeply felt concerns about the eroding authority of farm family patriarchs. Even as the

³⁸ Ellison, *Budget Speech, 1912*, 11, quoted in Clint Evans, "From First Violin to Second Fiddle: A Shift in Government Attitudes towards Agriculture in British Columbia, 1911-1951" (unpublished ms., Dept. of History, Univ. of British Columbia, April 1990), 2.

³⁹ Tom MacInnes, *Oriental Occupation of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Sun Publishing Co., Ltd, 1927), 54; Sinclair, *Re-settlement and Cultivation of Land in British Columbia*, 4-5; Price Ellison, Minister of Finance, *Budget Speech, 1912* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1912), 11, quoted in Evans, "Government Attitudes towards Agriculture in British Columbia, 1911-1951," 15. Also see, MacBeth, *Land in British Columbia*, 20.

⁴⁰ *Patrons of the Dominion Grange* 4 (1885): 15-16, quoted in Russell Hann, *Farmers Confront Industrialism: Some Historical Perspectives on Ontario Agrarian Movements* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975), 3. Similar comments are made in "Evils of Emigration," (*Danville, Vt. North Star*, 13 June 1836; "Keep the Young People at Home," *Maine Farmer*, 13 February 1869; "Why the Boys Leave the Farm," *Prairie Farmer*, 1 March 1890. Also see Hal S. Barron, "Staying Down on the Farm: Social Processes of Settled Rural Life in the Nineteenth Century North," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*, S. Hahn and J. Prude, eds. (Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press, 1985), 327-43; Graeme Wynn, "Exciting a Spirit of Emulation among the Plodholders: Agricultural Reform in Pre-Confederation Nova Scotia," *Acadiensis* 20 (1990): 5-51.

⁴¹ J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism, and Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: The Upper St. Francis District* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1989).

possibilities for wage labour freed family members from dependence upon the male head of household, and economic changes skewed the rough equality of circumstance between rural men, agrarianism provided a language to realize a world in which farmers worked the land with their sons to support frugal wives and dutiful daughters in independent family-owned enterprises.⁴²

In British Columbia, as throughout the West, agrarian discourse took on a more optimistic tone, emphasizing the progress towards carving civilization out of savage wilderness. The language of the forest frontier of eastern North America seemed broadly applicable, however different the physical geography. Wilderness was wilderness — the opposite of the productive landscape of fences, fields, and small farms idealized by agrarianism. Mountains, forests, aridity — these were mere challenges to the hardy pioneer and his frugal wife. Agrarianism maintained that this wilderness would eventually yield and that social progress could be measured by the advance of agricultural settlement. Such agrarian progress marked another process: the displacement of Native space and the reorganization of landscapes finely tuned to provide for Native peoples.⁴³

Agrarian discourse in British Columbia was etched most deeply into the pattern of everyday life in the lower Fraser Valley. The area was heavily settled by people from southern Ontario and the United States who were imbued with its assumptions. Their fences marked the imposition of an abstract grid of exclusive, absolute property rights over land and the resources on it. They also partitioned specialized spaces of production and reproduction that made up an agrarian landscape: a field of oats, another of hay, a pasture, a barn, a farmhouse. The farmer of agrarian discourse moved through these different spaces to create a dense social network held together by roads, churches, schools, and the other institutions of rural life. But even in the Lower Fraser Valley, the most fertile and densely settled region of British Columbia, the emergence of civil society was agonizingly slow. The material and discursive wilderness that agrarian discourse opposed to itself had to be beaten back at every step with deeds and

⁴² On the importance of unpaid family labour in agriculture, see Marjorie Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Agriculture* (Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press, 1988); Harriet Friedmann, "World Market, State, and Family Farm: Social Bases of Household Production in the Era of Waged Labour," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1978): 545-86; Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991).

⁴³ I am indebted to Dan Clayton for emphasizing this side of agrarian discourse to me. It is also a point made by William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983).

surveyor's chains, axe, mattock, and frequently even dynamite. In 1902 alone, Harry Burr hired 189 days of male, mostly Chinese, labour to grub, ditch, and dyke his Ladner farm.⁴⁴ An older, Native landscape had to be effaced before an agrarian one could exist. Despite well over half a century of effort, by 1941 barely half of the total land area in the lower Fraser Valley had been cleared and made into improved farmland.⁴⁵

The agrarian faith in the ultimate conquest of wilderness spread semi-subsistence farms widely across the province. Agrarian discourse made it difficult to distinguish arable lands from those unsuitable for agriculture. J.T. Thorgnsson reported to the 1914 Royal Commission on Agriculture that he and his neighbours in the Kispiox Valley "are doing our best . . . We want to make our home here. Trouble is we have not capital." H.L. Frank, another settler of the northern Skeena country, complained, "It takes every dollar I make to keep things going."⁴⁶ Their determination was reinforced by an insistent agrarian rhetoric that "agriculture is the most important pursuit of man" and that "a man should only employ his own labour."⁴⁷ These North American ideas mixed easily with age-old peasant desires for land and independence brought by many immigrants from Europe and Asia. But land development costs for drainage, land clearing, and irrigation were enormous, and agricultural markets in which to earn capital to finance these improvements were distant and often highly competitive. "We can not compete," concluded Philip Jacobson, leader of the

⁴⁴ This calculation is necessarily somewhat imprecise. I have considered a nine hour day for labourers paid by the hour to be the equivalent of a day's work for labourers paid by the month. BCARS, Burr Family Papers, add. mss. 25, box 1, file 3, diary of Harry Burr, 1902. Chinese labourers were particularly favoured for ditching work, both because of the lower wages paid them and because migrants from the Guangdong province developed a reputation for great skill at land reclamation. BC Dept. of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, (1891): 773; Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1986).

⁴⁵ *Eighth Census of Canada, 1941*, VIII: 1646. This represented considerable progress from 1891 when less than a quarter of the land around Chilliwack was under the plow. BC Dept. Agriculture, *Report* (1891): 776.

⁴⁶ BCARS, RG 324, box 3, vol. 1: 131-33, testimony of J.T. Thorgnsson, Hazelton, 13 August 1913, box 3, vol. 1, p. ; box 3, vol. 1: 21-27, testimony of H.L. Frank, Terrace, 9 August 1913. Agrarian enthusiasm was such that government surveyors and regional boosters insisted that large portions of British Columbia were suitable for settlement by small farmers, and that even the Queen Charlotte Islands might be opened to successful agricultural settlement with an organized dyking programme like that in the Fraser Delta. See, for example, J.F. Carpenter, *Fruit-Growing Possibilities of Skeena River and Porcher Island Districts* (Victoria: BC Dept. of Agriculture, bull. 33, 1912); Province of British Columbia, *Full Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture* (Victoria: William H. Cullin, 1914), 65.

⁴⁷ MacInnes, *Oriental Occupation of British Columbia*, 54; BCARS, RG 324, box 2, vol. 1: 59, testimony of E.N. MacPherson, Aldergrove, 1 May 1913.

Norwegian Bella Coola settlement. His neighbours in Bella Coola, like H.L. Frank of Terrace, “had to work outside for [their] living.” In the Bulkley Valley, settlers were able to combine summer farming with railroad tie cutting in the winter, but elsewhere remunerative by-employment was more difficult to find.⁴⁸ The transformation from impoverished peasant to upstanding farmer, often accomplished on the thick soils of the prairies, was considerably more arduous in British Columbia. It led down the road to proletarianization as often as to independent proprietorship.

Before confidence in the agrarian conquest of British Columbian space gave way, many people had tried and failed to make the vision of small, independent farms a reality. In 1931, the census recorded 2,133 vacant and abandoned farms scattered across the province, or nearly one for every twelve occupied farms.⁴⁹ The wreckage of these dashed dreams is strewn across the province — derelict cabins amidst lodgepole pine in the Bulkley Valley, stunted fruit trees on high terraces no longer irrigated, and abandoned homesteads visited now by grazing cattle. Despite government support and years of hard work, the stubborn landscape of British Columbia became agricultural, where it did at all, only slowly.

Frustration was vented in a number of directions. Agrarianism lent a particular inflection to the racism deeply entrenched in British Columbia. In 1920, for instance, a public meeting in Kelowna resolved, “the ownership of land in BC by Japanese and Chinese . . . constitutes a peril to our ideal of a white British Columbia.”⁵⁰ Agrarian discourse idealized a society of small, White, family farmers. Early on, the difficulties in realizing this agrarian vision were blamed on the insidious presence of Asians and their “troublesome competition.”⁵¹ The Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration con-

⁴⁸ BCARS, RG 324, box 3, vol. 1: 63-77, testimony of Philip Jacobson, Prince Rupert, 11 August 1913; box 3, vol. 1: 21-27, testimony of H.L. Frank, Terrace, 9 August 1913; Jack Mould, *Stump Farms and Broadaxes* (Saanichton: Hancock House Publishing Ltd., 1976), 67-68, 135-36. For excellent studies of the experiences of Scandinavian immigrants, see John Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Balestrand, Norway to the Upper Midwest* (New York: Cambridge, 1985); Robert C. Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Midwest* (Madison: Univ. Wisconsin Press, 1988). On the importance of by-employments and occupational plurality to farm security, see Rusty Bitterman, “Farm Households and Wage Labour in the Northeastern Maritimes in the Early 19th Century,” *Labour/Le Travail* 31 (1993): 13-45.

⁴⁹ *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931*, VII: 756-57.

⁵⁰ *Kelowna Courier*, 22 January 1920, quoted in Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1978), 123-24.

⁵¹ BC, *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 14.

cluded in 1902 that “agricultural and market gardening would have been much farther advanced if there were not any Chinese to keep out those [Whites] who would otherwise go into the business.”⁵² The 1914 Royal Commission on Agriculture responded to the testimony of many White farmers by recommending provincial bans on ownership of land by Asians.⁵³ Agricultural co-operative organizations, particularly in the Lower Fraser Valley, explicitly banned their members from “selling, renting, leasing, . . . all or any of the Grower’s lands . . . [to] persons of East Indian or Asiatic birth or origin other than the white race.”⁵⁴ Such racism, only implicit in the agrarian visions of eastern Canadians and northern Americans, came to the fore in British Columbia, where, as in the American South, race was a fact of everyday life.⁵⁵

The chronic economic difficulties of North American farmers fuelled a smouldering resentment that flared up periodically, particularly during the economic crises of the 1890s and the early 1920s. Informed by the agrarian tenet that only farmers and other members of the producing classes actually produced wealth, many rural people blamed their economic problems on the depredations of bankers, middlemen, railroads, land speculators, and other “robbers.” They complained about credit woes, railroad and water company rates, commission merchants’ profits, and the spread between low prices received at the farm gate and the much higher ones paid to retailers by consumers.⁵⁶

Many farmers in British Columbia called for a complete “Readjustment of [the] balance between industrial & agricultural development,”

⁵² Quoted in W.G. Donley, “The Oriental Agriculturalist in British Columbia” (BA essay, Univ. British Columbia, 1928), 24. Donley shared this racist assessment. While he granted that Asian farmers had helped lower the price of dairy, fruit, and vegetable products to urban consumers, “these advantages are far more than outweighed by the unfair competition the small farmers and rural labourers are subjected to.”[39]

⁵³ BC, *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 14–15; BCARS, RG 324, box 1, vol. 4: 155, testimony of W.M. White, gardener, Duncan, 21 April 1913.

⁵⁴ Delta Co-Operative Growers’ Association Agreement, quoted in Donley, “Oriental Agriculturalist in British Columbia,” 13; MacInnes, *Oriental Occupation of British Columbia*, 31–34; Special Collections, Univ. British Columbia, Yamaga Yasutaro papers, box 1, file 1, Y. Yamaga, “My Footsteps in British Columbia” (1958 ms.).

⁵⁵ For the historical controversy about the significance of racism in British Columbia, see W. Peter Ward, “Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870–1939,” *BC Studies* 45 (1980): 17–35; Rennie Warburton, “Race and Class in British Columbia: A Comment,” *BC Studies* 49 (1981): 79–85; W. Peter Ward, “Class and Race in British Columbia: A Reply,” *BC Studies* 50 (1981): 52. For a different perspective on the workings of racial discourse in British Columbia, see Dan Clayton, “Geographies of the Lower Skeena,” *BC Studies* 94 (1992): 29–58. Also see Hahn, *Roots of Southern Populism*.

⁵⁶ For unrest in BC see BCARS, RG 324, box 1, vol. 4: 129, testimony of Donald Campbell, Courtenay, 17 April 1913; box 2, vol. 1: 237, testimony of W. Kimball, Merritt, 13 May 1913; box 1, vol. 4: 159, testimony of E.W. Weil, Duncan, 21 April 1913; box 1 vol. 4: 71 testimony of H. Bridge, Nanaimo, 11 April 1913.

but they could not agree on a political programme to achieve this end.⁵⁷ The Populist party in the American West and South and the Non-Partisan League on the prairies had been able to direct rural unrest towards organized political action.⁵⁸ In British Columbia, however, the countryside was both more diverse and more diffuse than on the prairies. Many farmers singled out the hated National Policy, but fruit growers depended on tariff protection to secure the prairie market from American competition, while dairy farmers bemoaned the butter imports of greedy commission merchants and demanded tariff protection as well. These divisions made the organization of a farmers' movement more difficult in British Columbia than elsewhere in North America. The half-hearted efforts of the United Farmers of British Columbia to organize a third party failed, although the provincial Liberals eventually enacted many of the programmes advocated by the UFBC.⁵⁹

Farmers placed their hopes in economic co-operation and organization. In co-operative marketing they believed they had the means to preserve the heralded independence of the small producer from the market power of middlemen and merchant capital. Dairy farmers enthusiastically established co-operative creameries to produce butter and market their milk, but many of these early efforts failed because of undercapitalization.⁶⁰ Fruit growers organized co-operative grading and packing houses to improve the quality and reputation of their products in international markets. Like dairy farmers, they also tried to establish co-operative marketing mechanisms to reverse the weak market position faced by diffuse fruit growers who had to take whatever price was offered by a small number of large canning firms and commission merchant houses. Economic concerns were important, but they were framed by the sharp distinction in agrarian thought between the production of value by agricultural labour and its

⁵⁷ BCARS, RG 324, box 2, vol. 1: 81-89, testimony of Charles Hilltout, Abbotsford, 2 May 1913.

⁵⁸ The historiography of prairie populism is daunting. The most recent analysis is David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910-1945* (Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press, 1990). Paul F. Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (1948. reprint. New York: Octagon Books, 1971), remains a good survey of the connections between these movements in the US and Canada.

⁵⁹ Louis A. Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada: The Origins and Development of Agrarian Protest, 1872-1924* (1924. Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press, 1975), 307; Margaret A. Ormsby, "The United Farmers of British Columbia: An Abortive Third Party Movement," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 17 (1953): 53-73.

⁶⁰ This was the conclusion of the BC *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 32-33. Eric Duncan, *Fifty-Seven Years in the Comox Valley* (Courtenay: Comox-Argus Co., Ltd., 1934), describes the initial difficulties of confidence and capitalization faced by the Comox Co-operative Creamery, which ultimately proved to be one of the province's most successful.

subsequent redistribution through the market. The enthusiasm for co-operative marketing was driven as much by the perception of injustice created by agrarian beliefs about the countryside as the source of all wealth as it was by objective conditions of unequal exchange between farmers and merchants.⁶¹

Ultimately, however, these co-operative efforts faced the problem of the free-rider and could not succeed without government action. Vigilante violence, public sanction, and slogans like “a cent a pound or on the ground” were not enough to secure the participation of all producers and ensure that the price gains won by the concerted efforts of the many were not appropriated by a few producers breaking rank.⁶² Farmers clamoured for government regulations to enforce participation in these co-operative marketing programmes. Although the courts declared such government-mandated marketing schemes to be *ultra vires*, by the 1930s farmers in British Columbia and throughout North America generally believed that government-mandated restrictions on production and the operation of the “free” market were the only way to preserve the independence of the small family farmer so celebrated in agrarian thought. The widespread acceptance of government price supports for agriculture is testimony to the continued power of agrarianism and those arguments, first put forward in the 1930s, linking government action to the preservation of the family farm.

The Country Life Movement

The Country Life Movement, a loosely affiliated group of urban progressives, church leaders, and social reformers, articulated concerns about the degeneration of the countryside. Whereas arcadianism spoke of rural bliss and agrarianism of an independent yeomanry, Country Life discourse saw rural depopulation, social stagnation, and economic decline, particularly in the oldest parts of eastern North

⁶¹ The development of co-operative marketing in British Columbia is discussed in Margaret A. Ormsby, “Fruit Marketing in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia,” *Agricultural History* 9 (1935): 80-97; Morag Maclachlan, “The Success of the Fraser Valley Milk Producers’ Association,” *BC Studies* 24 (1974-75): 52-64; Ian MacPherson, “Creating Order Amid Degrees of Marginality: Divisions in the Struggle for Orderly Marketing in British Columbia, 1900-1940,” *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 7 (1990): 309-34. On the agrarian distinction between the production and the redistribution of value, see Tony A. Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists: Constitutional Conflict in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville: Univ. Virginia Press, 1994).

⁶² Okanagan fruit growers blocked carloads of prairie-bound fruit on several occasions. Ormsby, *Coldstream*, 69-72. W. Harris, editor of the *Vernon News*, ignored these extra-legal actions when he contrasted the idyllic peace of Okanagan farmers with the vigilantism in the New York milk strike and attempts by some Fraser Valley Milk Producers’ Association members to intimidate independent milk producers. Harris, “Dairying in the Okanagan Valley,” *Vernon News*, 22 June 1933, 13.

America.⁶³ The movement had its origins in the United States and its strongest institutional base in American agricultural colleges and experiment stations, but to many like-minded Canadians the rural problems enframed by the Country Life Movement “are applicable to Canadian as well as American life.”⁶⁴ It advocated scientific surveys to assess the problems and reforms, often directed by government but always planned by trained experts, to alleviate them. While Country Lifers shared some of the romanticism of the arcadians and the economic concerns of the agrarians, in general, reformers like John MacDougall thought the “repair of country life can only come on modern lines.” The best way to preserve the essential qualities of rural life was to make it more organized, more efficient, and more modern so that it could advance as urban life had done.⁶⁵

The Country Life Movement scrutinized rural life because the countryside and its population were “indispensable to the life of our nation.” Like other Country Life commentators in Canada, Rinaldo Armstrong believed that the centrality of the family, the proximity to nature, the intimate scale of local society, and the habits of hard work and self-reliance engendered by agriculture were the “foundation of a great many of the moral and spiritual qualities that are to be found in the other sections of society.”⁶⁶ Rapid urban growth and rural out-migration, particularly of young women, threatened to erode the moral fabric of society.⁶⁷ The Catholic Church as well as many liberal protestant denominations organized and published rural surveys to measure the problems caused by “urban drift” and rural decline.⁶⁸

⁶³ One of the few studies of such an area is Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984).

⁶⁴ *The Nor'West Farmer*, 20 December 1911, 411, quoted in David C. Jones, “‘There Is Some Power About the Land’: The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17 (1982): 96-108. Jones argued that “virtually everyone interested assumed that the matter of country life transcended boundaries.” [105]

⁶⁵ John MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada: Its Trend and Tasks* (1913, reprint. Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press, 1973), 101. For general surveys of the Country Life Movement, see Liberty H. Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1919); William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974); David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1979); Jones, “The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology”; James H. Madison, “Reformers and the Rural Church, 1900-1950,” *Journal of American History* 73 (1988): 645-68.

⁶⁶ Rinaldo W. Armstrong, *The Salt of the Earth: A Study of Rural Life and Social Progress* (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers Ltd., 1930), 18-19.

⁶⁷ MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada*, 19-53; Thomas Adams, *Rural Planning and Development* (Ottawa: Commission of Conservation, Canada, 1917), 20.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Warren H. Wilson, *The Church of the Open Country: A Study of the Church for the Working Farmer* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States

Country Lifers linked health and sanitation to the problems of rural degeneration, an equation that intersected a much broader social Darwinist discourse on race. Rural families, according to a BC Department of Agriculture publication, “rear up a race of strong, wise and pure people who while working for the advancement of their native land will raise national life to the highest level of honour and health.”⁶⁹ Since “the country is the seedbed of the whole population . . . the quality of this seedbed” was of paramount importance. W.C. Good, master of the Dominion Grange, raised the spectre of race suicide and imminent “social and national disaster” if conditions continue “to cause the withdrawal of the best blood from the rural districts.” The Reverend R.G. MacBeth also worried about “the pure and virile blood [being] poured by the country into the crowded cities,” but the Country Life gaze also focused on “the social menace of the degenerate family in the country.” Without some reform, rural degeneracy put the nation’s gene pool at risk.⁷⁰

In British Columbia, problems of health and race in the countryside seemed particularly acute because of the Asian presence. In marked contrast to the ideal of the nuclear family, rural Chinese lived in large, almost exclusively male, households widely depicted as sources of disease and vice.⁷¹ Their presence threatened to pollute the seedbed of the White nation. Perhaps even more frightening were the Japanese, who, not forced to pay the same head-tax that kept out most Chinese women, were a demographically balanced population with a high rate of natural increase. Japanese-owned berry farms in the Maple Ridge area produced much of the province’s small fruit.⁷² Social scientists attributed their success to the deployment, virtually,

and Canada, 1911); MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada*; Archbishops and Bishops of Canada, *Joint Pastoral Letter on the Rural Problem in Relation to the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Quebec, 1937); National Catholic Rural Life Conference, *Manifesto on Rural Life* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1939). Also see Hal S. Barron, “Rural Social Surveys,” *Agricultural History* 58 (1984): 113-117; Madison, “Reformers and the Rural Church.”

⁶⁹ Alice Ravenhill, *The Place and Purpose of Family Life* (Victoria: Dept. of Agriculture, bull. 35, 1911), 5.

⁷⁰ W.C. Good, *Farmer Citizen: My Fifty Years in the Canadian Farmers’ Movement* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1958), 94; MacBeth, *Land in British Columbia*, 20; E.R. Groves, *Rural Problems of Today* (New York: Association Press, 1918), excerpted in *The Agrarian Myth in Canada*, ed. R. Wood (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), 34. Also see MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada*, 19-53; “Birth Control and Race-Suicide,” *Literary Digest* 54 (3 February 1917): 244-45; Edward A. Ross, “Folk Depletion as a Cause of Rural Decline,” *Publications of the American Sociological Society* 11 (1916): 21-30; Armstrong, *Salt of the Earth*, 194.

⁷¹ Chan, *Chinese in California Agriculture*; Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 7-14.

⁷² On Japanese farmers, see John M. Read, “The Pre-War Japanese Canadians of Maple Ridge: Landownership and the *Ken tie*” (MA thesis, Univ. British Columbia, 1975); see Yamaga papers, box 6, file 15, Y. Yamaga, “The History of Japanese Farming in British Columbia, 1906-1941.”

of slave labour within the family, to an unnaturally low standard of living, and to a genetic “ability to work effectively in a squat position.” The provincial and federal governments monitored the problem by collecting statistics on Asian landholdings and participation in agriculture, measures that helped maintain race as a potent social category in rural British Columbia.⁷³

To reverse rural degeneration, Country Life reforms focused principally on four areas of rural life: the home, the schools, the community, and the practice of agriculture. The rural home was scrutinized because in it women cared for their families and inculcated the values of the next generation. Scientific surveys inspected the rural household and the activities of farm women. They discovered conditions of labour, sanitation, and health that shocked an urban, middle class cult of domesticity based on the centrality of home to feminine identity. Although responsibility for agricultural labour shifted increasingly to men through the nineteenth century, women’s farm chores remained substantial, while new urban standards of propriety and the burden of feeding the extra hired hands needed on the larger farms of late nineteenth-century North America increased their domestic duties. In October 1927, for example, Daisy Evelyn Edwards cooked on twenty separate days for hired men on her husband’s Chilliwack dairy farm. In total, she prepared 205 meals, which she valued at \$89.70.⁷⁴ Country Lifers were particularly concerned that farm women worked without many of the labour-saving devices and amenities common in urban, middle class kitchens. In 1931, census enumerators were told to collect information about farm kitchen facilities; they found that less than a quarter of all farm kitchens enumerated in British Columbia had running water. Most rural women and children fetched well water in all seasons.⁷⁵

⁷³ Donley, “Oriental Agriculturalist in British Columbia,” 18; British Columbia, *Report on Oriental Activities within the Province* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1927); Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Oriental, 10 Years of Age and Over, Gainfully Employed by Race, Occupation, and Sex in the Province of British Columbia, Census 1931* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, bull. 41, Seventh Census of Canada, 1934).

⁷⁴ BCARS, add. mss. 349, Edwards Family Collection, Diary of Daisy Evelyn Edwards. A 1922 survey by the United Farm Women of Manitoba found that 46% of respondents washed for their hired men, while 25% mended for them. Mary Kinnear, “Do you want your daughter to marry a farmer?: Women’s Work on the Farm 1922,” *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 6 (1988): 143. Contemporary novels of prairie life also concluded that hired men increased the burdens of farm women. R.J.C. Stead, *Grain* (1926. reprint. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), 48–49; Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1917), 155.

⁷⁵ *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931*, VII: 758; MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada*, 126–30; Alice Ravenhill, *Some Labour-saving Devices in the Home* (Victoria: Dept. of Agriculture, bull. 41,

In the home, as in the masculine world of staple production, the watchwords of Country Life discourse were efficiency and science. Alice Ravenhill, a former lecturer of hygiene at King's College for Women in London and prominent speaker at Women's Institutes throughout the province, complained that "the rule of reason" had not been applied to domestic science. She believed "[e]fficiency . . . must be the modern home-maker's ideal." Under the auspices of the provincial Department of Agriculture, she wrote seven bulletins outlining "the resources of modern knowledge" for farm women.⁷⁶ The province established Women's Institutes within the Department of Agriculture to inculcate, as Deputy Minister of Agriculture William E. Scott put it, "the highest ideals of home life, by teaching morality, sanitation, cleanliness, sobriety, and honesty of purpose, by bringing up our children in the way in which they should walk, by fostering patriotism and love of country." In 1917, there were fifty nine local Women's Institutes with an active membership of more than 3,000. Their motto, "For Home and Country," neatly played on the concerns linking home, countryside, and nation in Country Life discourse.⁷⁷

Government health inspectors collected mortality statistics and other medical information about rural British Columbians. At the request of the Women's Institutes, public health nurses were hired to disseminate the latest medical information and monitor the care of the sick. By 1930, 132 public health nurses worked in various parts of the province.⁷⁸ Country Life reformers were particularly shocked by maternity practices that included midwives rather than doctors and little post-partum rest for women whose labour was desperately

1912); Bailey, *Country Life Movement in the United States*, 85-96; BC, *Royal Commission on Agriculture* (1914), 19-20. See also Neil Sutherland, "I can't recall when I didn't help': The Working Lives of Pioneering Children in Twentieth-Century British Columbia," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 26 (1991): 263-88.

⁷⁶ Ravenhill, *Some Labour-saving Devices in the Home*, 5-6. Her other six bulletins were *The Place and Purpose of Family Life*, *The Preparation of Food*, *The Preservation of Food*, *Food and Diet*, *The Art of Right Living*, *The Care of Children*. Also see her *Memoirs of an Educational Pioneer* (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1958).

⁷⁷ Advisory Board of Women's Institutes, *Women's Institutes Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Dept. of Agriculture, bull. 43, 1912), 8; BC Dept. Agriculture, *Annual Report* (1918): 10. Also see Carol J. Dennison, "The Women's Institutes in British Columbia, 1909-1946: Housewives 'For Home and Country'" (MA thesis, Univ. Victoria, 1983); Alexandra Zacharias, "British Columbia Women's Institute in the Early Years: Time to Remember," in *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in BC*, B. Latham and C. Kess, eds. (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), 55-78.

⁷⁸ Ravenhill, *Educational Pioneer*, 17.

needed on the farm.⁷⁹ English-born Daisy Evelyn Edwards found nothing unusual about the short car trip with her husband from their Chilliwack farm to the local hospital where a masked male doctor used sterilized instruments to deliver her child, just as he had been trained to do at a certified medical college. For many other women, however, the new standards of obstetrical science were considerably more disruptive and disturbing. Bulkley Valley pioneer Nan Bourgon remembered that her neighbour, Mrs. Clarke, was hospitalized for weeks in Hazelton so that doctors could supervise her labour under sanitary conditions.⁸⁰

Traditional ways held out, particularly in the more remote districts of British Columbia. When Lily Barger went into labour in Aldermere, miles from the nearest doctor, her husband approached a surprised Nan Bourgon to assist at the birth. When she politely begged ignorance, he replied, "You are a woman, aren't you?" Nan did what she could but was greatly relieved, after attending the newborn and mother for ten days, when Mrs. Dally, the only trained nurse in the area, was able to leave the two other births she had been supervising to check on the mother and newborn child.⁸¹ Although the Country Life Movement could not stamp out midwifery completely, health reforms and state surveillance, in this case in the form of visits by certified nurses, reached the most intimate spheres of life in remote corners of British Columbia.

To stem the tide of young men and women leaving the countryside, the Country Life Movement promoted agricultural education, nature study, and rural school reform. A university where agricultural science would be taught to young men was established.⁸² Many believed that children were a more crucial object for agricultural education. Children, it was feared, were not learning to "regard farm life as a desirable

⁷⁹ Isaac W. Brewer, *Rural Hygiene* (New York: Macmillan, 1911); Elizabeth Moore, *Maternity and Infant Care in a Rural County in Kansas* (Washington: Children's Bureau of the Dept. of Labor, bull. 26, 1917); Danbom, *Resisted Revolution*, 8-9; Judy Barrett Litoff, *American Midwives, 1860 to the Present* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1978).

⁸⁰ BCARS, add. mss. 349, diary of Daisy Evelyn Edwards, 12 February 1924; Nan Bourgon, *Rubber Boots for Dancing and Other Memories of Pioneer Life in the Bulkley Valley* (Smithers: Tona and Janet Hetherington, 1979), 68, 78-79. On obstetrical practice in British Columbia, see Veronica Strong-Boag and Kathryn McPherson, "The Confinement of Women: Child-birth and Hospitalization in Vancouver, 1919-1939," in *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, G. Creese and V. Strong-Boag, eds. (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), 143-71.

⁸¹ Bourgon, *Rubber Boots for Dancing*, 78-79.

⁸² Before provincial authorities were able to settle on a final location for the University of British Columbia, they had to test the soil at Point Grey to determine if it were suitable for agriculture. Cole Harris, "Locating the University of British Columbia," *BC Studies* 32 (1976-77): 106-25.

vocation.”⁸³ According to John W. Gibson, director of Elementary Education in British Columbia, nature study would instil in them “a scientific spirit . . . which must lead to increased efficiency in the individual as well as agricultural prosperity in the state.” After 1913, the Dominion government contributed to this broad effort with funds allocated through the Agricultural Instruction Act.⁸⁴

Educational reforms substantially extended the effective range of state surveillance over the countryside. In schools and through young farmers’ clubs, boys were taught farming, natural history, and the importance of healthy outdoor activity, while girls learned about flowers, the beauties of nature, and “a useful course in domestic science” through the schools and the Girl Guides’ clubs administered in part by local Women’s Institutes.⁸⁵ Rural school inspectors monitored this thorough-going regime of compulsory education, consolidated schools, standardized teacher training, and textbooks. They filed reports on individual teachers, the curriculum they taught, the efficiency of their pedagogy, and the appearance and functioning of each rural school. In these reports, whole new classes of objects — students, rural and domestic science, teachers, normal schools, laboratories, school gardens and grounds — were re-ordered and made visible to government officials in Victoria.⁸⁶ The actual practice of rural science instruction may have proven less systematic and standardized than school inspectors making their rounds through the province might have envisaged, but the more tightly organized system of education wielded considerable power over rural space, across even the considerable barriers of language and race. It could compel

⁸³ MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada*, 137. As Jackson Stake, the farmer in R.J.C. Stead’s novel *Grain*, explained, “I’ve noticed that the boys an’ girls that goes to school until they’re fourteen or fifteen gets themselves educated off the farm.”[60]

⁸⁴ J.W. Gibson, “The Rural Problem,” *Courtenay Herald*, 24 December 1914, clipping file, “Agriculture, BC,” BCARS; David C. Jones, “We Cannot Allow It to Be Run by Those Who Do Not Understand Education: Agricultural Schooling in the Twenties,” *BC Studies* 39 (1978): 30-60.

⁸⁵ BC, *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 35. Also see J.C. Ready, *Boys’ and Girls’ Field-Crop Competitions* (Victoria: BC Dept. of Agriculture, bull. 57, 1914). Their motto was “Better boys and girls — better crops.” On the teaching of domestic science, see Barbara Riley, “Six Saucepans to One: Domestic Science vs. the Home in British Columbia, 1900-1930,” in *British Columbia Reconsidered*, 119-42.

⁸⁶ BCARS, GR 172, ser.2, rolls 1-3, Teachers’ Reports on Instruction in Rural Science, BC Dept. Education; A.R. Lord, *Alex Lord’s British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-36*, J. Calam, ed. (Vancouver: Univ. British Columbia Press, 1991). For background on education reform, see J. Donald Wilson and Paul J. Stortz, “‘May the Lord have Mercy on You’: The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s,” *BC Studies* 79 (1988): 24-58; John Calam, “Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the BC Provincial Normal Schools,” *BC Studies* 61 (1984): 30-63.

Japanese fathers to release their children from the strawberry harvest to attend schools that would teach them the wonders of nature and the joys of agriculture.⁸⁷

Country Life discourse also identified the monotony and restricted scope of social interaction in rural communities as important social problems. To provide regular social occasions for dispersed rural people, both Women's Institutes and their male equivalent, the Farmers' Institutes, sponsored travelling libraries and regular speaking engagements that also served to disseminate current information about domestic science and agriculture. The Country Life Movement also promoted the expansion of transportation and communication to alleviate rural decline. Of course, communication also meant contact and potential contamination by decadent urban cultures, so as Country Lifers preached rural uplift, they worried about the destructive potential of new technologies that linked the city and the country more closely. The census charted the slow diffusion of radios, telephones, and automobiles into the countryside. As an ever more uniform information field was established, the cultural distinctions between urban and rural underwriting Country Life discourse became more difficult to imagine.⁸⁸

The Country Life Movement addressed the economic problems of rural life and agriculture in four ways. First, it tried to instil a business-like approach to farming that, it was widely assumed, would make for success in agriculture as it had in other sectors of the economy. J. Coke of the Dominion Department of Agriculture insisted that "the psychic returns [of farming] are overemphasized," and by the 1930s many of the arcadian sentimentalists who had tried their hand at country life in British Columbia were probably inclined to agree.⁸⁹ Over and over, progressive reformers and government officials

⁸⁷ Y. Yamaga, "My Footsteps in British Columbia," 11-12.

⁸⁸ BC, *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 19-20; Adams, *Rural Planning and Development*, 126-27; MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada*, 131-34. On rural transportation, see Cole Harris, "Moving Amid Mountains," *BC Studies* 58 (1983): 3-39; Ronald H. Meyer, "The Evolution of Roads in the Lower Fraser Valley" in *Lower Fraser Valley: Evolution of a Cultural Landscape*, A.H. Siemens, ed. (Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd., BC Geographical Series, no. 9, 1973), 69-88. See also Hal S. Barron, "And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: Public Road Administration and the Decline of Localism in the Rural North, 1870-1930," *Journal of Social History* 26 (1992): 81-103. On rural communications, see Don F. Hadwinger and Daly Cochran, "Rural Telephones in the United States," *Agricultural History* 58 (1984): 221-38; Reynold M. Wik, "The Radio in Rural America During the 1920s," *Agricultural History* 55 (1981): 339-50. Beyond the odd comment, such as that in Sutherland, "Working Lives of Pioneering Children in Twentieth-Century British Columbia," 275, there has been little sustained analysis of the cultural meanings of rural radio in Canada.

⁸⁹ J. Coke, "Farming, A Mode of Life?" *The Economic Annalist* 2 (1932): 81-82.

repeated, "Farming is a business enterprise and, like other business, must be measured by its profits." Of course it was impossible to measure profits, to say nothing of maximizing them, without accurate accounting methods, and here, as in so many aspects of agricultural practice, scientists at the University of British Columbia found the farmers wanting. W.A. Middleton was shocked to find that barely half of the fruit growers he interviewed kept records detailed enough to analyse input costs, yield, and product value by apple variety.⁹⁰ The schools taught accounting methods to farm children, but John W. Gibson, director of Elementary Education in British Columbia, also realized that instrumental thinking could be somewhat contradictory. On the one hand he hoped to instil a love of nature, while on the other he hoped to instruct the youth in the most efficient ways to exploit nature for profit.⁹¹

The Country Life Movement also emphasized efficiency and planning as solutions to the economic problems of rural life. The concern for efficiency legitimated scientific studies of wasted motion in farm kitchens and hay barns as well as government agencies to ensure the efficient use of natural resources. In the name of conservation, farmers were severely chastised for carelessness in land-clearing and were required to apply for fire permits before they burned stumps and brush.⁹² District agricultural and horticultural inspectors travelled around British Columbia. If necessary, they had the power to fine farmers who failed to abide by the Noxious Pests and Weeds Act, the potato seed certification programme, various dairy hygiene regulations, or other laws designed to institute more efficient modern

⁹⁰ The quotation is from federal Deputy Minister of Agriculture, J.H. Grisdale, "Farming as a Business Requires Economic Analysis," *The Economic Annalist* 1 (Feb. 1931): 1; W.A. Middleton, *Cost of Producing Apples in the Okanagan and Average Yields and Prices for Leading Varieties* (Victoria: BC Dept. of Agriculture, circular 38, 1921), 3-4. A short list of similar remarks would include Doris E. Lee, "Some Factors Making for the Success or Failure of Agriculture in BC" (MA thesis, Univ. British Columbia, 1925), 8-9; MacDougall, *Rural Life in Canada*, 113; Duncan Marshall, *Farming in Canada* (Brantford, Ont.: Cockshutt Plow Co., Ltd., [1946]), 219.

⁹¹ Gibson thought there was something strange about a boy who "manages to fatten up his pet in order that in its death both he and it may make a record for the country or for the province and receive in connection therewith a prize and a halo of glory." Quoted in Jones, "Agricultural Schooling in the Twenties," 45-46.

⁹² Fire restrictions were bitterly resented by farmers across British Columbia. BCARS, RG 324, box 1, vol. 4: 127-29, testimony of Donald Campbell, Courtenay, 17 April 1912; box 1, vol. 4: 133, testimony of J.S. Shepard, Courtenay, 17 April 1912; BC Forest Branch, *Annual Report* (1912): 11. Only rural MLAs from Interior ridings opposed the Forest Act of 1912 that created the provincial Forest Branch and the fire-licensing programme. Thomas R. Roach, "Stewards of the People's Wealth: The Founding of British Columbia's Forest Branch," *Journal of Forest History* 28 (1984): 22.

agriculture. To prevent the settlement of land unsuited to agriculture, the provincial government required trained land surveyors to certify agricultural potential prior to pre-emption. The fullest use of land was ensured by the requirement that all merchantable timber be cut before a lot was open to pre-emption. The Canadian Commission of Conservation recommended state planning so as to concentrate new settlers and improve access to schools, churches, and other benefits of civil society.⁹³

Thirdly, Country Lifers endorsed the co-operative impulse of agrarianism, although co-operation occupied a rather different position in Country Life discourse. Whereas agrarianism understood co-operative marketing as a remedy for the dangerous market power enjoyed by incorporated food processors, large wholesale merchants, and other "middlemen," the Country Life Movement advocated co-operative marketing because hierarchical organization, backed by planning and staffed by experts, was the only way to achieve the efficiency and economies of scale necessary for modern life.⁹⁴ Single-desk selling of apples through a large, central marketing house instituted a degree of order in the fruit market and a further division of labour in agriculture that Country Lifers considered efficient. If the courts struck down early co-operative marketing efforts in the 1930s, the programme commanded wide support in British Columbia, partly because government sponsorship of economic co-operation meant different things to different people.

Finally, Country Lifers promoted agricultural science to increase farmers' productivity and income by rooting out superstitious "moon farming" and unscientific agriculture. The larger American agricultural colleges, especially Cornell and the University of Wisconsin, produced most of the important agricultural knowledge, but in Canada, federal and provincial governments also operated experimental stations on this American model.⁹⁵ They tested seed varieties, dissected insect pests, recommended animal feeding ratios, and studied crop rotations to discover the most efficient methods for conditions in British Columbia. Ministries of agriculture published specialized bulletins that diffused up-to-date agricultural knowledge.⁹⁶ Farmers were

⁹³ H.V. Whitford and Roland D. Craig, *Forest Resources of British Columbia* (Ottawa: Commission of Conservation, 1918), 324; Adams, *Rural Planning and Development*.

⁹⁴ The classic statement of this position is Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

⁹⁵ Liberty Hyde Bailey, "Moon Farming," *Independent* 67 (1909): 907-09; Vernon C. Fowke, *Canadian Agricultural Policy* (Toronto: Univ. Toronto Press, 1946), 220-38.

⁹⁶ See BCARS, add. mss. 419, M.M. Gilchrist, "A History of the British Columbia Department of Agriculture."

receptive to new knowledge when it solved a glaring technical problem, like the Babcock tester which measured the butterfat in milk and provided a way to account for the production of individual cows. But in general, experienced farmers like Kelowna fruit grower L. E. Taylor were cautious and openly contemptuous of “young men from college with saving theory and no practice.”⁹⁷ Notwithstanding rural conservatism, they adopted enough of the scientific advances in fertilizer, tillage method, and apple genetics to raise yields and farm productivity far beyond previous levels. In this respect, the Country Life Movement with its emphasis on science and efficiency in rural life succeeded, but in the flood of food production, real agricultural prices fell steadily after 1914. By the Depression, farmers were just beginning to cope with the fallout from chronic over-production that plagues North American agriculture to this day.⁹⁸

DISCOURSES OF AGRICULTURE AND THE CAPITALIST TRANSITION DEBATES

In this essay I have tried to account for the ways in which arcadian, agrarian, and Country Life discourses worked in British Columbia. I also made several theoretical claims about the importance of thinking in terms of agricultural discourses.

My first claim was that an examination of the broad discursive field in which agriculture was conceived and practised provides a more fruitful approach to the debates about the transition to and transformation of capitalism in rural America. This debate has focused on the slow eclipse of an underlying pre-capitalist *mentalité* said to have forestalled the development of capitalist relations of production. Writing about different places, individual historians have chosen to begin their stories about the transition to capitalism at different times, but narrative coherence forces them to describe changing economic structures, political institutions, and cultural customs according to a single temporal rhythm. Ending their stories with a thoroughly capitalist countryside, these historians are ill prepared to explain why,

⁹⁷ BCARS, RG 324, box 2, vol. 1: 145, testimony of L.E. Taylor, Kelowna, 2 June 1913. Farmers were particularly hostile to social scientists and rural sociology. “Farmers nowadays are not frightened by the idea of science in wheat-raising, potato-raising, cotton production [or] hog production. But many of these same farmers just naturally scout the idea of a science of human relationships.” C.J. Galpin, “Discriminations against Rural People,” *Rural America* 7 (April 1929): 5-6, quoted in Danbom, *Resisted Revolution*, 122.

⁹⁸ Sally H. Clarke, *Regulation and the Revolution in United States Farm Productivity* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994).

even today, relations of production in agriculture remain stubbornly traditional: family members, organized and disciplined by power relations internal to the patriarchal family, still provide the principal labour force on the majority of farms in the United States.⁹⁹ An examination of agricultural discourses frees us from the singular historicity of the transition debates and allows us to think about how the diversity and heterogeneity of rural North America was possible.

This discursive approach also provides resources for an analysis of the production of knowledge. Focused on cultural values and *mentalité* as either obstacle or aid to capitalist transition, historians tend to reduce those ideas said to advance this transformation to the level of mystifying ideology, whereby they stand “in virtual opposition to something else that is supposed to count as truth.”¹⁰⁰ In British Columbia, the historiography of the forest products industry is also haunted by an instrumentalist approach to ideology and forest policy.¹⁰¹ By thinking in terms of discourses of agriculture, it is possible to switch the focus away from this opposition between falsity and truth and to ask instead about the conditions that made it possible to produce and sustain particular truths about British Columbia. From this perspective, arcadian discussions of fruit farming are not misrepresentations of the province, as some have suggested, but rather are the effects of particular discourses whose conditions of existence we are then better placed to question.¹⁰²

My third claim is that the particular spaces provided by British Columbia were integral to the working out of agricultural discourses in and about this place. To be sure, the broad outlines of arcadian, agrarian, and Country Life discourse were shaped by and connected to different conditions in Europe and eastern North America. But discourses take place in specific locales, and their setting has great

⁹⁹ The anomaly presented by the persistence of non-wage forms of production in agriculture has sparked a series of interesting debates in rural sociology. For a critical review, see Mann, *Agrarian Capitalism in Theory and Practice*.

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, “Truth and Power,” 118.

¹⁰¹ This is especially true of work on the forest industry in British Columbia. See, for example, M. Peter G. Aylen, “Sustained-yield Forest Policy in BC to 1956” (MA thesis, Univ. Victoria, 1984); Patricia Marchak, *Green Gold: The Forest Industry in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Univ. British Columbia Press, 1983); Keith Reid and Don Weaver, “Aspects of the Political Economy of the BC Forest Industry” in *Essays in BC Political Economy*, P. Knox and P. Resnick, eds. (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974), 13-24; Jamie Swift, *Cut and Run: The Assault on Canada's Forests* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 1983).

¹⁰² The suggestion that arcadian promotion of British Columbia misrepresented the possibilities of agriculture in the province is made by Cole Harris in his introduction to Phillips, *Letters from Windermere*. Similar thoughts occupied contemporaries. BC, *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, 15; John B. Thornhill, *British Columbia in the Making, 1913* (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1913), vii.

bearing both on their workings and on the story that I have told about them in what we call British Columbia. Only here could arcadian discourse produce an image of rural bliss comprising Okanagan orchard settlements and views of the Rocky Mountains.¹⁰³ This relationship was reciprocal because arcadian discourse could not exist without the particular images that it produced of British Columbia and other places like it.

In the same way, the story that I have told here about British Columbia stands in a complicated relationship with the facts and discourses that actually made the place I am describing. The documents that I have read and write about are not transparent reflections of some external reality. Census data about farm kitchens or the number of radios and telephones in rural British Columbia were only made possible by *Country Life* discourse which brought these objects into view. In turn, story-telling makes visible the specificity of discourses that produce facts about British Columbia. It provides a means to challenge what we take to be true about our world.

¹⁰³ Here I think of the many views that adorn the boxes of BC apples exported to Britain.