

“A Much-Needed Class of Labour”: The Economy and Income of the Southern Interior Plateau Indians, 1897-1910*

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Anthropologists have long been interested in the study of the Indians of British Columbia. Historians, however, have not until recently shared that interest. Little research has been conducted on the history of the Indians and almost all of what has been done has been confined to the early contacts between the indigenous people and the Europeans, leaving open a wide field of study.

One area which has received some attention has been the position of the Indians in the British Columbia economy. The initial view has been that British Columbia's native people were virtually excluded from participation in the provincial work force after the decline of the fur trade. In reviewing the relations between the Indians of British Columbia and Europeans from 1774 to 1890, Robin Fisher concluded that “with the transition of the fur trade and the consolidation of settlement, the Indian had been reduced from an integral to a peripheral role in British Columbia's economy.”¹ Fisher dwelled particularly on the manner in which Indian reserves were established and the most productive lands were secured by European settlers. He stressed that the Indians placed a spiritual as well as economic value on the land and so their loss was even greater.²

Fisher's argument has been vigorously opposed by Rolf Knight, who contended that the Indians remained the major labour force for the growing resource industries of British Columbia until 1905.³ A quick examination of the settlement patterns of Europeans in British Columbia would tend to support this argument. While the non-Indian population

* I would like to thank Keith Ralston for his suggestions during the preparation of this article.

¹ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), 210.

² *Ibid.*, 104.

³ Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (Vancouver, New Star Books, 1978), 30.

grew rapidly in the decades around the turn of the century, it was concentrated on southern Vancouver Island and the southwestern mainland. This makes it likely, if not certain, that the expansion of the resource industries in many parts of the province must have relied on the Indian labour force.

In fact, both positions have some merit. Clearly the culture of the Indians was irreparably disrupted as more and more European settlers arrived in each region and Indians were gradually removed from the mainstream of the economy and society. Equally, however, they remained for many years an important part of the labour force in many sections of the province. At this juncture it becomes necessary to consider a factor neglected by both Fisher and Knight. The same diversity which attracted the interest of anthropologists to the Indian culture of British Columbia makes it impossible to properly examine the role of Indians in the provincial economy without taking into account regional differences. Varied job opportunities, regional economies and population composition all affected the entire work force. It is necessary to consider the Indians of each region as separate albeit interconnected entities.

The Southern Interior Plateau is an area which provides significant potential for study. It had numerous economic opportunities for white settlers in farming, mining, logging and other industries, but because of its relatively small European population it was necessary for many settlers to rely on its Interior Salish Indian population for wage labour. The major road and rail projects in this area also required labour, and many Indians were able to fit into the region's economy as independent farmers and ranchers.

The Interior Salish Indians were located throughout the Southern Interior Plateau. Their initial migrations into British Columbia appear to have occurred at different times and comprised independent bands.⁴ There were three major divisions of the group which were incorporated eventually into the Kamloops-Okanagan Indian Agency by the federal government. The Thompson group was originally situated on the Fraser River near Lytton and gradually spread south down the Fraser Canyon, north to Lillooet and the Fountain and northwest along the Thompson River to Spences Bridge. At a later date they continued to expand their territory, stretching to Ashcroft and throughout most of the Nicola and Similkameen valleys. The Shuswaps had first migrated to the lower or

⁴ James A. Teit, *Notes on the Early History of the Nicola Valley* (Nortorf, West Germany: Volkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft, 1979), 3.

western end of Shuswap Lake. Over time, they dispersed down the Thompson River, across the Plateau to the Fraser River and also up to the North Thompson. From the Fountain, they went north to Soda Creek. The last group were the Okanagans, who had originally settled on the Okanagan River near the Canada-U.S. boundary. Their expansion took them north to Okanagan Lake, west through the lower Similkameen and later up to Douglas Lake.⁵

Much of the land they inhabited consisted of broad river valleys. The terrain was rolling and hilly, and much of the actual surface of the land was on relatively steep slopes.⁶ The Indians were hunters and gatherers, subsisting on fish, wild game, roots and berries. Deer was the predominant food throughout the region, although fishing became very important to bands near the major salmon rivers. Many varieties of roots and berries were collected for inclusion in their diet.⁷ Indian groups did trade among themselves, but it was not until the arrival of the fur trade that trading became a major enterprise in their lives.

The Interior Salish Indians made contact with Europeans during the influx of Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company fur traders. Although their territory was not an area abundant with furs, the major transportation routes to the coast passed through it. During the various British Columbia gold rushes from the late 1850s to the 1870s and the subsequent arrival of settlers, the Interior Indians became better acquainted with the Europeans. The generally slower settlement of the area, however, permitted the natives to remain a dominant force in it for a much longer period of time than did the southern coastal Indians in theirs. The Interior Salish occupied a kind of middle ground between the slow and erratic expansion of white settlers into the northern territory of the Athapaskan Indians and the dramatic and overwhelming subordination of the Coast Salish on the lower mainland and southern Vancouver Island.

When the Department of Indian Affairs received authority over British Columbia's indigenous people in 1871, it divided the province into several

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁶ Thomas R. Weir, *Ranching in the Southern Interior Plateau of British Columbia*, Geographical Memoir no. 4 (Ottawa, Mines and Technical Surveys, 1964), 28.

⁷ James A. Teit, *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia*, Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, ed. Franz Boas (New York, A.M.S. Press, 1975), 230 and *The Shuswap*, Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, ed. Franz Boas (New York: G. E. Stetchert, 1909), 513-14.

agencies. The majority of the Interior Salish were placed into two agencies, Kamloops and Okanagan. In 1897 the two agencies were joined into the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency. The agency contained the greater portion of the District of Yale and was approximately 24,000 square miles in area. It remained a single agency until 1911, when many of the province's agencies were re-divided.

Around the turn of the century the Department of Indian Affairs was extremely concerned about the role of the Indian in the country's economy. In their annual reports, the Indian Agents took great pains to explain the variety of work which Indians did and the opportunities which were available. The available evidence for Indian income comes almost exclusively from the annual reports of the Department of Indian Affairs. Starting in 1897, the DIA requested that its field agents calculate the income for the agency under their charge. These figures include an estimate of the value of the agricultural produce, fish and game used for food. The accuracy of these statistics is difficult to establish. There seems little doubt that the figures are approximate only. Those dating from 1901 were, however, compiled in response to a DIA circular asking for more precise information in view of the fact that some agents were recording incomes which could not possibly support the Indian population to which they were ascribed.⁸ They, therefore, are likely to be at least marginally more accurate than those dating from 1897. Certainly they provide the foundation for some interesting and suggestive argument concerning general trends in the Indian sector of the local economy.

The incomes of the various agencies not only provide an understanding of a particular agency but also allow a means by which different agencies can be compared at the same point in time. The short life span of the Kamloops-Okanagan agency does not, of course, permit it to be studied over a long period. The importance of the developments taking place at this time does, however, compensate for this. The rapid increase in British Columbia's white population, particularly in the southwestern corner of the province, was a serious problem for many Indian bands. Their dispersal through the province continually reduced the number of job opportunities for the Indians. Railroad and road construction projects, too, began and ended. The income values and yearly reports prepared by

⁸ Canada, Department of Indian Affairs (hereafter cited as DIA), Black Series, Western Canada, Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs to all Indian Agents, 28 May 1901, Correspondence, RG 10, vol. 1327.

the Indian Agents give insights into the way these processes affected the bands.

In addition to this material, there are available for the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency the worksheets of "Sources and Value of Income" compiled by the Indian Agent, A. Irwin, from 1899-1900 to 1905-06.⁹ This material is interesting for two reasons. Irwin, judging from his diary,¹⁰ was a careful and conscientious observer. What he reported, moreover, dealt with each band separately, so that it is possible to determine the relative prosperity of each of them.

The Kamloops-Okanagan district, it can be said with some certainty, was one of the most prosperous agencies in British Columbia in the first decade of the twentieth century. There were numerous work opportunities, particularly in agriculture. The Indian bands were often able to work either for themselves or for nearby white farmers or ranchers. They were also employed in packing, mining, sawmilling and road and railroad construction and supplemented their income as well as obtaining food by hunting and fishing. In his 1907-08 annual report, Irwin remarked that the Indians "may not remain as steadily at one occupation as some other class of labourers but as cowboys, farm labourers and domestics, they supply a much-needed class of labour, and satisfactorily, too."¹¹

All these forms of work added to a diverse economy for the region. However, it is important to realize that the agency covered a vast area and not all types of jobs were available in all locations. For example, there was lumbering near Shuswap Lake and mining along the Fraser River, and the building of the railroads was a feature of particular times and places.

Agriculture was the mainstay of the Indians' income. The annual value of farm products as reported by the agents rose from \$46,505.50 in 1897 to a high of \$164,219 in 1909. As the population of the urban areas of the province increased, the Indians, like the whites, had expanding markets for their produce and livestock. The annual reports of Indian Agents showed the bands involved in mixed farming, growing grain, growing fruit, producing hay and raising both cattle and horses. Irwin, in fact,

⁹ Canada, DIA, Black Series, Western Canada, Agricultural and Industrial Statistics, 1899-1919, RG 10, vol. 1327.

¹⁰ Canada, DIA, Black Series, Western Canada, Diary of Kamloops-Okanagan Indian Agent, 1898-1899, RG 10, vol. 1327.

¹¹ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1907," Canada, Sessional Papers (hereafter cited as "S.P."), 9th Parl., 4th sess., 1907-08, no. 14, part 1, 225.

believed that the stock of many of the Indians was equal to that of the settlers.¹²

In addition to independent farming, the Indians earned a considerable amount of their yearly income working as farm hands and cowboys on the neighbouring land of settlers. Wage labour was the major source of the Indian economy by 1897, ranging from about 35 to 45 percent of their total income over the next fourteen years. (The actual yearly income figures for the agency are shown in table 1.) Although they worked in many jobs, agriculture still provided the bulk of this employment. Naturally this work would be seasonal. The greatest need for workers would occur during such activities as harvesting and cattle drives. There would also have been more work in areas where extensive agricultural operations such as the Douglas Lake Cattle Company had been organized.

The Interior Indians had other forms of employment in addition to

TABLE 1
Kamloops-Okanagan Agency
Department of Indian Affairs Sources and Values of Income

<i>Year</i>	<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Wages</i>	<i>Fishing^a</i>	<i>Hunting^a</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
1897	46,505.50	62,200.00	14,475.00	9,505.00	35.00	132,720.50
1898	58,334.00	75,400.00	18,050.00	11,750.00	195.94	163,729.94
1899	89,921.00	79,150.00	17,300.00	14,050.00	14,400.00	214,821.00
1900	74,021.50	89,950.00	17,300.00	14,050.00	17,800.00	213,121.50
1901	97,456.80	97,700.00	23,150.00	25,950.00	28,600.00	272,856.80
1902	96,234.00	126,200.00	33,900.00	33,900.00	32,500.00	322,734.00
1903	100,194.00	130,500.00	37,100.00	24,600.00	38,000.00	330,394.00
1904	107,288.50	130,500.00	37,100.00	34,600.00	38,000.00	347,488.50
1905	96,810.00	172,900.00	25,500.00	26,600.00	39,800.00	361,610.00
1906	142,031.00	176,600.00	36,150.00	26,200.00	35,600.00	416,581.00
1907	145,282.65	145,000.00	34,600.00	21,400.00	29,183.33	375,465.98
1908	145,998.00	152,000.00	30,850.00	20,500.00	18,233.33	367,581.33
1909	164,219.20	188,900.00	26,400.00	17,850.00	12,750.00	410,119.20
1910	158,171.00	185,600.00	32,150.00	19,700.00	14,300.00	409,921.00

^a Estimated value included fish and game used for food.

¹² Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1904," Canada, S.P., 10th Parl., 1st sess., 1905, no. 11, part 3, 250.

agriculture. The Adam's Lake band was involved in cutting wood and rafting it down the Thompson River to Kamloops.¹³ When sawmills opened on Shuswap Lake, Indians also found work there.¹⁴ Some Indians were part of railroad and road construction crews, and others were freighters and packers for the railroads. When construction was completed, Indians took up positions as section hands.¹⁵

Indian women were also part of the wage labour force. They undoubtedly worked as farm labourers during the harvest season and were often employed by white settlers as domestic servants. This was not necessarily full-time work. In 1913 a witness appearing before the B.C. Royal Commission on Indian Affairs testified that women of the Ashcroft Reserve were hired only periodically to perform heavy domestic chores. Women of the Nicola Mameet band did laundry for settlers and earned \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day.¹⁶

It would appear that Indian wage labourers received as much as white workers. Mill and farm hands from the Kamloops band received \$1.50 per day and the men of the Nicola Mameet band made a similar wage. Labourers from the Bonaparte Reserve, according to its Indian Agent, one of the poorest bands in the agency, earned \$1.00 per day plus food for their work on outside farms.¹⁷ The Enderby band in the Okanagan received pay of \$2.00 to \$2.05 per day as farm help.¹⁸ Testimony to the Commission also indicated that the Indian farm labourers earned as much as their white counterparts. These wage levels seem quite in keeping with those reported for the Vancouver Immigration Agency district in 1891, when wages were \$1.25 to \$2.50 per day for farm labourers and \$1.25 to \$2.25 per day for mill hands, both without board.¹⁹

Despite their reliance on agriculture and wage labour, the Interior Indians continued to hunt and fish, each activity comprising from 5 to

¹³ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1900," Canada, S.P., 9th Parl., 1st sess. 1901, no. 11, part 2, 263.

¹⁴ *Inland Sentinel*, 9 November 1882, 3.

¹⁵ *Inland Sentinel*, 24 July 1899, 4.

¹⁶ British Columbia, Evidence presented to the B.C. Royal Commission on Indian Affairs, Kamloops Agency, 1913, 111 and 124. This and the following information related to hourly wages paid to Indians was taken from the 1913 B.C. Royal Commission on Indian Affairs. Such data was sparse and all which was presented by the Kamloops and Okanagan Agency Indians is recorded here.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70, 79 and 91.

¹⁸ British Columbia, Commission on Indian Affairs, Okanagan Agency, 1913, 2.

¹⁹ M. C. Urquhart and K. A. H. Buckley, ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), 94.

10 percent of their income. Both activities gradually declined in importance during the fourteen-year period from 1897 to 1910. Mining was another focus of Indian labour. Bands along the Fraser and Thompson Rivers continued to practise rocker mining for gold during low water.²⁰ The development of mines in the Similkameen district employed Indians as miners and packers after the turn of the century.²¹

The diversity of labour and the access to good agricultural land made the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency among the most prosperous in the province. Its total income rose from \$132,720.50 in 1897 to \$330,394.00 in 1903 to \$409,921.00 in 1910, a significant increase when one notes that the population grew only from 3,733 to 3,862 in the same period. The agency attained a per capita income of over \$100 in 1906, 1909 and 1910. (Table 2 gives a list of the total population, the adult male popula-

TABLE 2
Kamloops-Okanagan Agency
Summary of Income and Population

Year	Population		Total	Income	
	Total	Males 12-65		Per Capita	Per Family
1897	3,733	1,056	\$132,720.50	\$ 35.55	\$125.68
1898	3,778	1,026	163,729.94	43.34	159.58
1899	3,760	1,020	214,821.00	57.13	215.47
1900	3,749	981	213,121.00	56.85	217.25
1901	3,820	1,038	272,856.80	71.43	262.86
1902	3,834	1,049	322,734.00	84.18	307.66
1903	3,875	1,047	330,394.00	85.26	315.56
1904	3,882	1,053	374,448.50	89.51	330.00
1905	3,865	1,058	361,610.00	93.56	341.79
1906	3,855	1,055	416,581.00	108.06	394.86
1907	3,877	1,058	375,465.98	96.84	354.88
1908	3,852	1,049	367,581.33	95.43	350.41
1909	3,829	1,040	410,119.20	107.11	394.34
1910	3,862	1,037	409,921.00	106.14	395.30

²⁰ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1899," Canada, S.P., 8th Parl., 5th sess., 1900, no. 11, part 2, 230.

²¹ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1900," S.P., 1901, 268.

tion, the total value of income, the per capita income and the estimated family income for the agency.) To obtain a rough estimate of average family income, the total income of the agency was divided by the number of males between 21 and 65 years of age.

There is, of course, no reason to assume that the income was distributed equally within the agency. If anything, it is likely that income levels varied widely both among bands and among band members of each band. Good agricultural land was not distributed throughout the district. Water, too, was a problem. In arid regions like the Okanagan and Nicola valleys, irrigation was vital to agriculture, and many bands could not afford the expense. While the Department of Indian Affairs often provided some capital, it was usually not sufficient to irrigate the entire arable portion of the reserve. The testimony of the Interior Indians at the Commission on Indian Affairs often dealt with the question of irrigation. Many Indians and the Indian Agent, John Smith, frequently argued that the reason that Indians were not farming all their arable land was the lack of irrigation. Either the expense was too great or the access to the water supply had been restricted by Euro-Canadian settlers. On the other hand the Okanagan band was the largest wheat producer in the agency²² and other bands were known for their high quality stock. Also bands situated near industries such as mining or logging stood a much greater chance of employment.

Fortunately, Irwin's worksheets provide an opportunity to examine the distribution of income in the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency in a quite detailed way. The documents cover the period 1899-1900 to 1905-06 and provide excellent evidence for the type of work performed by each band for its income. (Table 3 lists the 25 Indian bands acknowledged by the Department of Indian Affairs to make up the agency in 1905-06.) It should be noted that there is a discrepancy between the global figures for population and those for income in what is provided in worksheets and what is given in the annual report for 1906. It is possible that the Agent revised his figures prior to submitting them. In any case the actual difference between the per capita incomes derived from this information is slight.

Examination of these data makes it clear that the Indians of the Okanagan, Nicola and Similkameen Districts were far more successful than the bands which were located along the Fraser and Thompson Rivers. Of

²² Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1902," Canada, S.P., 9th Parl., 3rd sess., 1903, no. 11, part 2, 245.

TABLE 3

Bands of the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency, 1906
Summary of Income and Population

<i>Band</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Total Income</i>	<i>Per Capita Income</i>
Spuzzum	F	158	\$15,334	\$97.05
Boston Bar	F	146	10,082	69.05
Boothroyd	F	154	12,892	83.71
Kanaka Bar	F	55	5,437	98.85
Siska	F	30	4,682	156.07
Lytton	F	460	33,914	73.73
Nikaomon	T	49	4,446	90.73
Cook's Ferry	T	185	17,185	92.89
Ashcroft	T	45	5,486	121.91
Bonaparte	T	160	10,764	67.28
Deadman's Creek	T	122	11,668	95.64
Kamloops	T	242	21,380	88.35
North Thompson	T	130	10,400	80.00
Neskanilith	T	152	19,580	128.81
Adam's Lake	T	194	18,636	96.06
Little Lake Shuswap	T	88	8,642	98.20
Spallumchen	O	150	21,520	143.47
Okanagan	O	232	51,000	219.83
Osoyoos	O	65	10,349	159.22
Similkameen (Lower)	S	132	19,960	151.21
Penticton	O	158	21,230	134.37
Similkameen (Upper)	S	47	9,795	208.40
Spahomin	N	190	20,007	105.30
Coldwater	N	110	12,472	113.38
Lower Nicola	N	365	43,520	119.23
Oregon Jack Creek	T	19	2,940	154.74
TOTAL		3,838	\$423,321	\$110.29

Districts

Fraser	F	Nicola	N	Okanagan	O
Similkameen	S	Thompson	T		

the twelve bands which had a per capita income over the average of \$110.29, eight were from these three districts. The Okanagan, Nicola and Similkameen Districts had a total of nine bands, which contained approximately 38 percent of the population in the agency, but they earned just under 50 percent of the annual income. The larger amount of arable land and the success of ranching and farming would account for this greater prosperity. Indians were able to earn income both as independent agriculturalists and as farm labourers.

Indians centred around Shuswap Lake were also relatively well off. The three bands there had access to employment and income from the forest industry which existed in the area as well as from agriculture. Further, the Shuswap Lake bands, like the Okanagan, Nicola and Similkameen bands, earned additional income by packing and freighting. This extra money would not have been available to Indian bands who were situated along a railroad route.

The most disadvantaged Indians in the agency lived along the Fraser Canyon. They were primarily wage labourers who supplemented their income with placer mining and fishing. Their arable land was not extensive enough to allow them to become commercial farmers or ranchers. Neither were many settlers drawn to the Canyon, and so wage labour would not be easily available. The Lytton band and the Boston Bar band represented the lower economic status of the Canyon Indians, having per capita incomes of \$73.73 and \$69.05 respectively.

The differences were also apparent in the individual bands themselves. Chiefs and senior leaders were able to set themselves up on the best land in the reserves. Many young men who did not have possession of any land or only poor land were indirectly forced to leave the reserve and work as farm labourers for white settlers.²³ Band members short of cash also left the reserve to work as day labourers. One gains the distinct impression from the testimony at the Commission on Indian Affairs that wage labour most often involved younger members of the group and those of lower social status. Agriculture was considered to be a superior occupation. It seems probable, given its relative scarcity, that the returns from farming good agricultural land provided a high income for only a small number of individuals, and that too would increase its status.

Wage labour was nonetheless one of two major income producers in the agency. Wages and agriculture contributed 70 to 85 percent of the agency's economy over the fourteen-year period. While the total income

²³ British Columbia, Commission on Indian Affairs, Kamloops Agency, 1913, 48.

increased dramatically over this time, there were only minor fluctuations in the percentage distribution of the major sources of income. Figure 1 indicates the remarkable stability of each area. Only a gradual decline in the relative importance of hunting and "other industries" is evident. As described in the Irwin worksheets, other sources of income were gold mining, selling wood, packing and freighting. Still more may not have been listed.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the greater degree of wealth generated by the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency was primarily from agriculture, coming both from independent ownership of the land and from wage labour. Not all agencies, however, were as well off, while others were even more prosperous. Using the "Sources and Value of Income" tables, it is possible to compare various agencies during the early years of this century. Although the nature of the statistics depends on the methods employed by the agent — not to mention his diligence — many useful generalizations are possible. The three other districts that will be examined and compared below are the Cowichan Agency, the Williams Lake Agency and the Kootenay Agency.

The Cowichan Agency covered the southern portion of Vancouver Island and the nearby Gulf Islands. Fishing was the major source of income for the native people, but agriculture and wage labour also provided substantial shares. The jobs which the Indians performed were extremely diverse. They built boats and canoes, cut firewood and worked in canneries, sawmills, mines, smelters and a cement works. They picked hops in Washington State and manufactured dogfish oil at Nanoose Bay. In Victoria, the Indians peddled fish and fruit door to door.²⁴ The Nanaimo Indians worked as stevedores, trimming coal in ships for \$3.00 to \$5.00 per day.²⁵ The Cowichan valley was extensively farmed by the Indians, growing grain, fruit and other produce. The natives were trackmen on the railroads and also worked in lumber camps. The Lyackssun band even had their own tugboat for towing logs.²⁶

Since southern Vancouver Island was the earliest major settlement for Euro-Canadians, the Indians had a ready market for their produce and many opportunities for wages. The large European population as well as

²⁴ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1897," Canada, S.P., 8th Parl., 3rd sess., 1898, no. 11, part 2, 92.

²⁵ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1903," Canada, S.P., 9th Parl., 1st sess., 1904, no. 11, part 2, 259.

²⁶ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1906," Canada, S.P., 10th Parl., 3rd sess., 1906-07, no. 14, part 1, 205.

the large number of Asian immigrants, however, meant that competition for those markets and for wage labour was stiff. The Indian Agent, W. A. Robertson, remarked in his 1900 report that in Victoria the Songhee Indians had "a little more work this year than formerly owing to the scarcity of white labour."²⁷ In 1904 the situation had changed, and he reported that "the severe competition in the labour market due to competition with Orientals has in a great measure forced the Indian to work his land for a living instead of working away from home."²⁸

The major problem which the Cowichan Indians were encountering at this time was not the loss of wage labour. It continued to grow and became equal to fishing in its share of income. These Indians' difficulties were in the fishing industry. Between 1899 and 1902, fishing provided almost 50 percent of the yearly earnings, but by 1907 this share had dropped to one-third. The presence of job competition from Europeans, Asians and other Canadians had a serious impact on the income of the Indians. Throughout the period of study both the total income and the per capita income of the natives declined. Even more seriously, their population dropped by 12.6 percent, from 2,011 in 1897 to 1,758 in 1910. Clearly the extensive settlement of southern Vancouver Island had a deleterious effect on its Indian inhabitants.

Extending from Lillooet up through the Chilcotin and the Cariboo country, the Williams Lake Agency had much in common with the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency. Both contained extensive grasslands which were excellent for grazing cattle. The growth of ranching and farming allowed the Indians to earn income as cowboys and farm labourers as well as work their own land. Yet wage labour was never the predominant source of income that it was in the Kamloops-Okanagan area. The harsher climate of the north prevented the wide-ranging cultivation that occurred in the south of the Plateau.

The Williams Lake Indians were nevertheless able to practise occupations similar to those of their southern brethren, though not on such a grand scale. The Indians carried out placer mining for gold along the river banks. They also had opportunities for freighting and packing. Some Indians from the Lillooet region would travel to the coast in the fishing season and work in the canneries.²⁹ Hunting and fishing remained an important part of the agency's income. Some individuals were able to

²⁷ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1899," S.P., 1900, 222.

²⁸ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1904," S.P., 1905, 224.

²⁹ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1900," S.P., 1901, 285.

turn their hunting experience into a good living as guides for big game hunters, earning "hundreds of dollars."³⁰ Another lucrative enterprise was performed by the women in the Lillooet area. They wove cedar baskets and sold them to tourists for \$2.00 to \$8.00 each.³¹

Despite this activity, however, the Indians of the agency were not particularly wealthy. The slow rate of settlement and the poorer climate hindered both wage labour and agriculture. Fishing, the other major industry engaged in by British Columbia's Indians, was unavailable to them. While, then, they were not by any means destitute, they suffered the disabilities of people in a district without proper access to the large coastal cities and with no substantial markets near at hand. Agriculture usually produced the largest portion of the agency's income, and in combination with wages comprised approximately two-thirds of the yearly earnings. The other three categories — hunting, fishing and other industries — would add about equal shares to the last third. The per capita income of the natives varied between about fifty and sixty dollars per annum.

The last of the four agencies was something of an anomaly. The Kootenay Indians were a small group scattered throughout the southeastern corner of the province. Their population had never been very large. Duff estimated it to be only 1,000 people in 1835,³² and by 1899 it had dropped to 541. They had recovered slightly by 1907, growing to 618. Its small size notwithstanding, it managed to become one of the wealthiest in the province. Like other agencies it performed many different tasks to supplement its earnings, but agriculture was clearly the major activity. It accounted for about 60 to 80 percent of the total yearly income.

The Kootenay Indians had a wide variety of markets for their produce, selling to lumber camps, railroad crews, and, as the Indian Agent noted in his 1899 report, towns such as Windermere and Fort Steele.³³ They also found employment at the mines, sawmills and lumber camps and worked as packers and guides for the railroad and mines.

Wage labour provided only a minor portion of the annual income, but its significance appears to have been increasing, starting at 9.4 percent or

³⁰ Ibid., 290.

³¹ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1903," S.P., 1904, 311-12.

³² Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia*, 1 vol. (Victoria: Provincial Museum of British Columbia, 1964), vol. 1: *The Impact of the White Man*, 39.

³³ Canada, DIA, "Annual Report . . . 1897," S.P., 1898, 83.

\$1,050 in 1900 and reaching 24.3 percent or \$14,400 by 1910. Conversely, income from agriculture remained relatively stable during the same period, with a low of \$31,183 in 1904 and a high of \$36,776 in 1909. The percentage of total income represented by it was 79.0 in 1899, a figure which dropped to 58.3 by 1910, a decline which would seem to indicate that the Indians were losing their share of the agricultural market.

Certainly it seems likely that the increase in the white population characteristic of these years meant that white farmers had entered the agricultural marketplace and had supplanted the Indian bands. The arrival of settlers also provided more wage work for the natives, which would account for much of the increase in earnings from labouring. It is also possible that the limited amount of agricultural land available to the Indians prevented them from expanding their operations. In the end, however, it must be said that the data do not permit definite conclusions.

A comparison of all four agencies yields some interesting inferences. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the per capita incomes of each agency over the study period. The Cowichan Agency was the only agency which suffered a serious decline in its per capita income over the fourteen-year study period. In the 1901 census, Indians composed 18.7 percent of the population of the Yale District, which included the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency, and 45.7 percent of the Cariboo and Lillooet Sub-Districts, which covered the Williams Lake Agency. By contrast, the Cowichan were only 4.3 percent of the Vancouver and Victoria Districts, which covered their territory, and they were even fewer in number than Asian immigrants.³⁴ There can be little doubt that competition from white settlers and Asian and white labourers seriously damaged the economic status of the Cowichan natives.

More difficult to explain is the fact that the Kootenay Agency continued to increase its income level although the natives comprised only 2.9 percent of the total population. This may have had something to do with the character of the white population which came to the region. Hardrock and coal mining were the principal industries of the Kootenays, and many workers came simply to make a quick stake and move on. The transience of many British Columbia workers has been noted by several

³⁴ Canada, 1901 Census of Canada, S.P., 9th Parl., 3rd sess., 1903, vol. A, 26 and 284. It should be noted that the Vancouver Census District did not include Vancouver City, which was in the Burrard Census District, and also that the Alberni and Comox Sub-Districts were subtracted from the Vancouver totals in an attempt to confine the District to the Cowichan Indians.

FIGURE 1
*Kamloops-Okanagan Agency
 Percentage Comparison of Sources of Income*

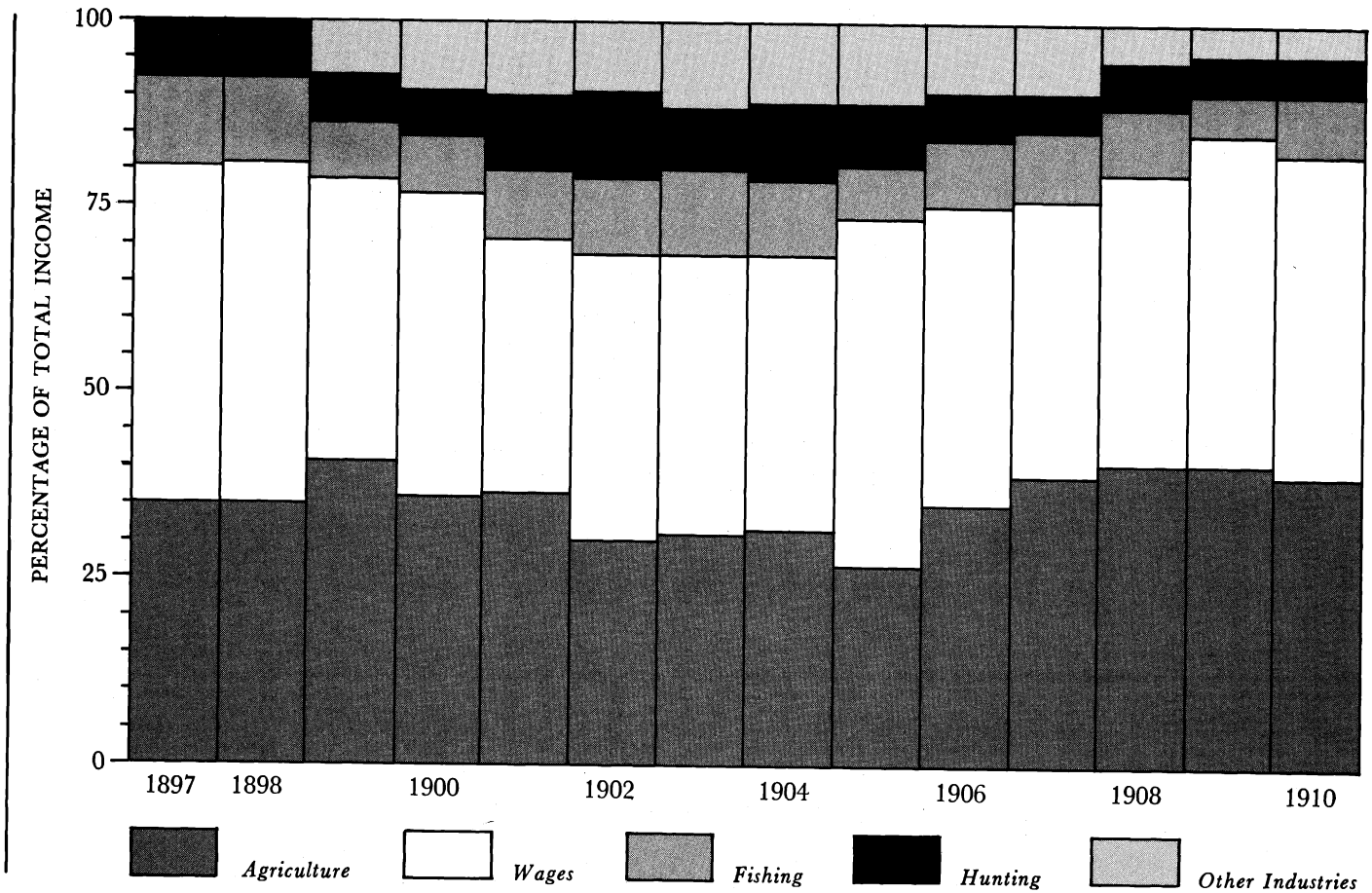
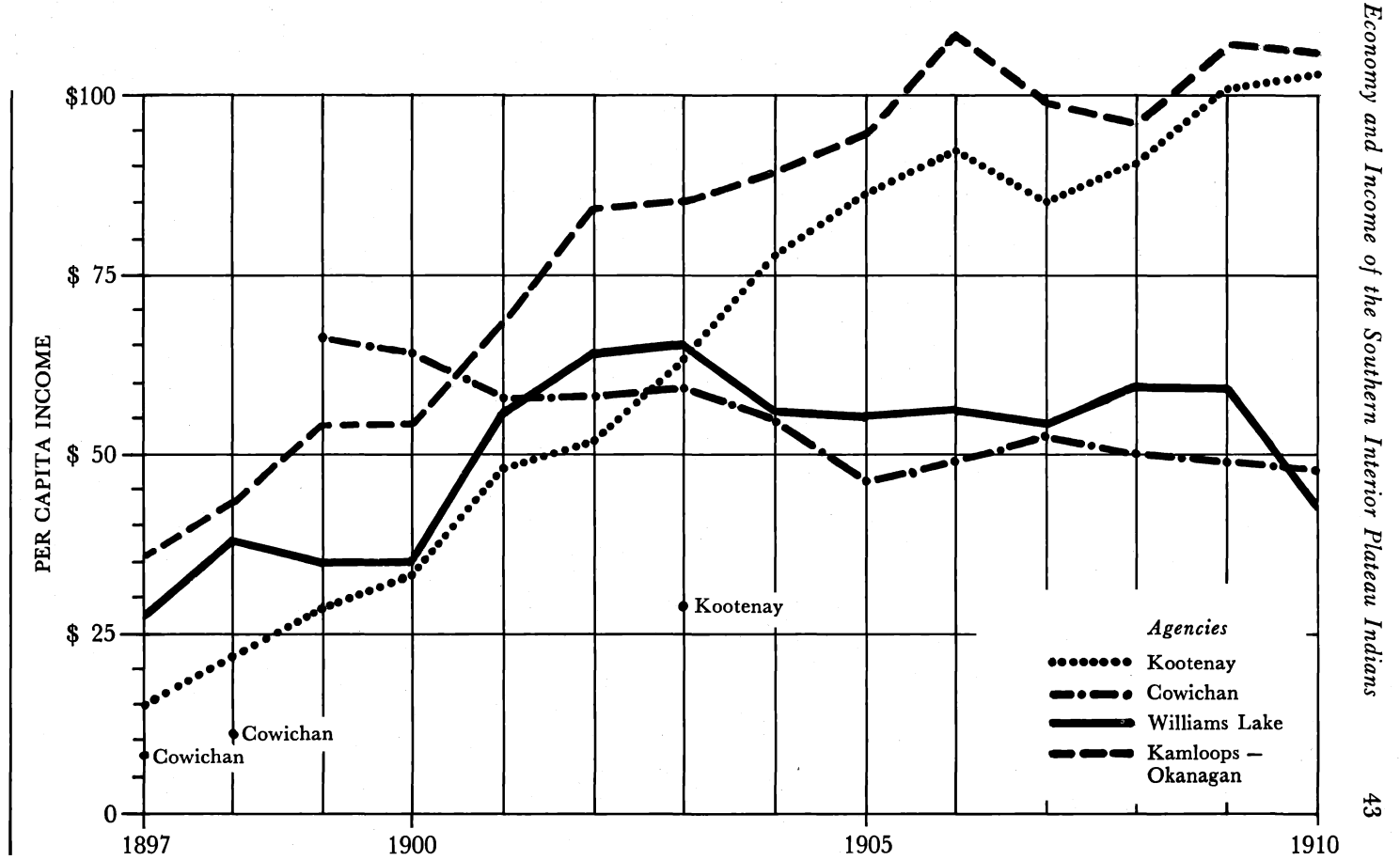


FIGURE 2

Comparison of Per Capita Incomes for the Four Agencies



writers.³⁵ Unlike southern Vancouver Island, the Kootenays drew few permanent settlers, and so there was much less competition for agricultural land and markets. This argument is supported by the ratio of men to women in both areas. Men outnumbered women 1.6 to 1 in the Vancouver and Victoria Districts in 1901 and 2.1 in the Kootenays. Obviously southern Vancouver Island was a more settled community. What should also be noted is that agriculture was slowly losing its predominant position, being replaced by wage labour in the Kootenays. This was a clear signal that white settlers were beginning to pre-empt Indians from the agricultural markets.

The presence or absence of efficient transportation systems may also have been a factor in determining Indian occupations and income levels. The railroad main line ran directly through the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency, and branch lines connected it with other parts of the area. The use of this system enabled farmers and merchants to send their produce to market quickly and reliably. The Indians benefited both as independent farmers and as day labourers. The Cariboo District, however, had no access to the railroads, and so the immigrants were not inspired to settle and Indians had fewer opportunities to work.

Even where they occurred, of course, the benefits of good transportation might be transitory. Indian farmers and farm labour, too, would fall victim to industrialism and commercial expansion as many other people did. The growth of large agricultural operations, initially providing wage labour for the Indians, would soon force small operators, both Indian and white, out of business by making them uncompetitive. Indians were particularly susceptible to this problem because they could not expand their holdings by buying out settlers or pre-empting new lands. Eventually the need for agricultural labour also began to decline as large farms and ranches started to mechanize many of their operations.

Another factor which should be considered in the subsequent decline of the Indian economy is the growth of the Indian population. Expanding numbers were confined to a limited land base. There were, to be sure, only minimal population increases during the period examined by this study. From 1897 to 1910, the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency grew by just over 3 percent — an increase of 129 people. Even the Kootenay Agency

³⁵ A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 101, and W. Peter Ward, "Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia," in *British Columbia: Historical Readings*, ed. W. Peter Ward and Robert A. J. McDonald (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1981), 589.

grew by only about 12 percent between 1900 and 1907, and their number dropped to 473 individuals by 1910, a decrease of 9 percent. But while these developments would not have put much extra pressure on the land by 1910, population growth became a major factor in later years.

The question of when the economy of the Kamloops-Okanagan Agencies began to decline merits particular comment. The years of greatest prosperity for the Kamloops-Okanagan Indians may have occurred prior to the turn of the century, and decline may have been in progress during the years of the study. It is difficult to know for certain because of the multitude of factors involved. Although competition from the non-Indian population was stiffening and an increasing native population was confined to a finite amount of land, there were also new advantages. Transportation systems to southwestern markets were improving, and the markets themselves were growing rapidly. Further, the DIA income figures show that the total income was still rising. There does not appear to be any clear point during this period when the fortunes of the agency as a whole were in decline.

Nevertheless, it is clear that wage labour was providing the predominant income for the Indians of many areas. When this happened, their economic position was altered. They ceased to be relatively self-sufficient and became labourers who were wholly dependent on the availability of work. Their vulnerability was especially evident when the white population in a given region of the province became sufficiently dense to end the demand for Indian labour. At that point prejudice against the Indians or, if one wishes to be generous, favouritism towards white labourers eliminated Indians from the labour force.

It was necessary for the Indians of each agency and even each band to acquire diverse strategies to cope with the new problems they faced in learning to integrate into the Euro-Canadian economy. The success or failure of the endeavours was closely linked to the region where each Indian group resided. It can be seen from the DIA statistical material that the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency was better able to function in the provincial economy because of better agricultural land, less competition from other workers and the relative nearness of the markets of southwestern British Columbia. Even there, however, there remain great differences between individual bands. For example, the per capita income of the Bonaparte band was less than a third of the Okanagan band. These distinctions need to be considered in any examination of the economic status of Indian bands.

Despite these differences among agencies and bands, the Indians were in almost all instances only able to enter the economy as small operators or labourers, and their job opportunities decreased with the increased white population and the onset of mechanization. Handicapped by restrictive government regulations, particularly in relation to land holding, by lack of capital, and by discrimination on the part of white employers, they found it increasingly difficult to respond to these challenges. The fact that they had nonetheless been able to function at least for a period within the framework of an economy based on wage labour suggests, however, that their capacity to adapt to new social and economic realities was not as limited as is frequently supposed.