

The United States Consul in Victoria and the Political Destiny of the Colony of British Columbia, 1862-1870

CHARLES JOHN FEDORAK

Studies of Anglo-American relations in the nineteenth century have traditionally concentrated on the War of 1812, the American Civil War, and the various territorial disputes of the period. Attention is usually focused on manoeuvring and decision-making in Whitehall, Westminster, and Washington. Although often affected by these decisions, Canadians have been neglected by historians of Anglo-American diplomacy. Yet, the present map of North America owes much to choices made by British North Americans. One of the best examples was the colony of British Columbia* in the period up to its confederation with the Dominion of Canada in 1871. During the 1860s the political and economic future of the colony was in doubt, and British Columbians found themselves in a unique position: they had been given the opportunity, to a certain extent, to choose their destiny. The British cared little for British Columbia. Members of the government and press even intimated that, while Britain would oppose an American invasion of the colony, it would not interfere if British Columbians chose to join the United States of their own free will. Thus, pulled on the one side by sentimental ties to the empire and on the other by the lure of the prosperity of the United States, British Columbia became a test case for the political survival of British North America.

One man who took an avid interest in the opinions of British Columbians and the debate over their political future was the American consul in Victoria, Allen Francis. His correspondence with the Secretaries of State during the period 1862-70 indicates a keen regard for the state of the economy and the possible consequences of the political decisions taken by the colonists. A critical examination of these dispatches will demonstrate the extent of American influence in British Columbia and help to explain why the consul wished to interfere politically in this British colony.

* As the colony of Vancouver Island was incorporated into British Columbia in 1866, in the middle of the period covered by this paper, the term British Columbia will be used to denote the mainland and island inclusive.

Before analysis of the correspondence, a short biographical description of Francis is necessary to put the dispatches into context. Allen Francis was born in 1815 in Wettersfield, Connecticut. In 1830, he moved to Springfield, Illinois, and began working at his brother Simeon's newspaper, the *Illinois Journal*. During his stay at Springfield, he worked for the Whig and later the Republican party. By 1849, after eighteen years of setting type for the *Journal*, Francis had grown weary and applied for the apparently less arduous job at the Glasgow consulate. Twelve years later, he had still not received an appointment, but, claiming poor health, had quit his position at the newspaper. Unemployed, he found himself in desperate straits. Fortunately, while working for the Republican party in Springfield, he had met Abraham Lincoln. The future President became a close friend of Francis's family, as it was Simeon and his wife who arranged the reconciliation which led to Lincoln's marriage to Mary Todd. With the election of his personal friend to the Presidency, Francis had renewed hopes. Both he and his wife wrote to the President outlining their hopeless financial situation, in effect begging for a position.¹ Lincoln was unable to grant Francis the Glasgow consularship, but as consolation sent him in 1862 to a new post in Victoria on the British colony of Vancouver Island.

Francis's initial description of Victoria was extremely positive. He spoke of a growing economy with increased immigration and the potential for a prosperous future. But very early on, he began to describe problems which foreboded ill. The reckless advance of thousands of adventurers to newly discovered mines well ahead of provisions led to outrageously high prices, owing to high demand and costs of transportation across difficult terrain. The most attractive mining region was the Cariboo, 800 miles north of Victoria, only 150 miles of which was covered by a government-built wagon road. Another problem was "gold fever" which, with the prospect of making an instant fortune, drew away men who might otherwise have engaged in different economic activities. The result, Francis claimed, was that the mining of other minerals, fishing, farming, and forestry were ignored in the search for gold.²

Even when the mines were at their peak of production and Victoria was booming, Francis observed that there were not enough resources to go

¹ Francis to Lincoln, 20 October 1861, National Archives, Washington, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, Entry 331, P. I. 157; Mrs. Francis to Lincoln, 23 January 1861, *ibid*.

² Francis to Seward, 30 September 1862, Despatches from the United States Consul in Victoria, 1862-1906, National Archives and Record Service General Services Administration, Microfilm, 1957. All subsequent references to American correspondence are derived from this source unless otherwise noted.

around. He asserted that in 1862 more than 15,000 men, which he claimed was the largest number of any single season, sought their fortune in the British Columbia gold mines. Only 2,000 were successful. According to Francis, limited gold supplies and the high cost of provisions ruined many prospectors, and thousands returned to Victoria penniless. Francis had to provide out of his own pocket for many of the destitute Americans. He asserted that, had there not been other forms of work available on the sites and wagon roads, many might have starved.³ Those who did get work, however, were paid handsomely, as wages of eight to ten dollars per day were common.⁴

Over the next several years, Francis described a gradual but steady decline in the prosperity of both Vancouver Island and the mainland. In 1863, only 3,500 worked the gold mines, but most were successful, owing to cheaper provisions and greater productivity in the mines. Gold production was down, but only slightly over the previous year. There was no further diversification in the economy, Francis claimed, as other industries continued to be ignored. By 1864, Victoria was still moderately prosperous with a population of 5,000 to 6,000 permanent residents and approximately 100 buildings.⁵ Victoria had to rely on imports for its food supplies, however, as little attention was yet paid to agriculture. Even though the government offered incentives to settle on crown land, few would go any distance from Victoria. He argued correctly that people were too easily led away by gold discoveries, but incorrectly that Vancouver Island was not suited for agriculture.⁶

By the end of 1864, Victoria began to feel the effects of a serious depression. According to Francis, there was a great decline in business with the closure of several commercial houses: all building was suspended and a great exodus from the colonies began. Immigration had ceased, the population was decreasing, and the price of real estate had fallen by half. The yield of gold in British Columbia, \$1 million less in 1864 than in 1863, also had been very disappointing. Francis concluded that the future prospects for the colony were dim.⁷

³ Francis to Seward, 1 October 1862.

⁴ Douglas to Newcastle, 14 July 1863, Public Record Office, Colonial Office Correspondence, British Columbia CO 60/15. Henceforth cited CO 60. Crown copyright material in the Public Record Office is reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

⁵ Francis to Seward, 18 January 1864.

⁶ Francis to Seward, 29 December 1864.

⁷ Francis to Seward, 29 December 1864.

Such reports fill his dispatches from 1865 until the end of his term in 1870. Business declined owing to smaller gold yields and lack of immigration. Francis stated, in the spring of 1865, that miners were moving to new discoveries in Idaho. According to his estimates, by January 1866 the population of Victoria had declined to 4,000, real estate was down 50 percent again, and merchants continued to go bankrupt, until one half of all businesses had closed.⁸ At the end of 1866, he reported that almost every leading business firm in the colony had closed and no city on the Pacific coast was in such a deplorable state as Victoria. As for the mainland, he predicted, "it will not be long until the whole colony falls back into the possession of the Hudsons's [*sic*] Bay traders and native tribes."⁹ As the years went by, Francis continued to report a further decline in business and a decrease in population. In 1869, Victoria was down to a white population of 2,000. The succeeding twelve months produced "a more rapid and marked decline, a greater depletion in population, and less confidence than any preceding year."¹⁰

Francis had arrived in Victoria in 1862 during the climax of the British Columbia gold rush. This influenced his perception of the situation on the mainland and in Victoria and facilitated a more gloomy description of the economic downturn over the next several years. In 1862, Victoria was bloated by the influx of thousands of foreign adventurers and speculators. The increased demand caused the prices of everything from provisions to real estate to rise substantially. These high prices and the profits from the production of gold encouraged investment in Victoria; buildings were constructed and many new businesses were established. The city experienced a rapid economic boom. Nevertheless, as it was dependent on the continued success of the gold mines, the new level of prosperity could not last. In fact, Victoria's growth was based on the anticipation of continued large yields from the mines, not from actual production. The city was built on the dreams of adventurers, many of whom were destined to return empty-handed. Thus, Victoria's prosperity in 1862 was set on an extremely weak foundation.

While British Columbia suffered economic decline after 1862 and a decrease in population until 1868, Francis's description certainly distorted the facts. As the gold industry faltered, greater emphasis was placed on coal and copper mining, farming, fishing, and forestry. By the autumn of

⁸ Francis to Seward, 9 January 1866.

⁹ Francis to Seward, 1 October 1866.

¹⁰ Francis to Fish, 6 January 1870.

1866, the colonial government noted the great productivity of agricultural land and how well the region was suited to stock raising.¹¹ The economy was already in transition, as new export staples began to be developed in the coal and lumber industries.¹² By 1869, the prospects of the united colony had turned around, according to Governor Anthony Musgrave; even though the population had decreased substantially since 1862, “in fact the community should be regarded as much better without the scum of the population which has floated off. Those who have remained to settle steadily to occupation are almost without exception prosperous.”¹³ Furthermore, by 1868 the population was increasing, not decreasing as Francis claimed. The white population of the colony rose from 6,424 in 1868 to 7,886 in 1869 and 8,576 in 1870. Between 1868 and 1869, the population of Victoria grew from 2,000 to 3,676.¹⁴

This raises the question of why Francis so obviously exaggerated the decline of Vancouver Island and the mainland. One possible explanation is that his daily experience put him in contact with many of his compatriots, who had either returned penniless from the gold mines or lost their businesses in Victoria and were returning to the United States. The decrease in the number of American ships registering at his consulate would also seem to indicate further decline. Nevertheless, his correspondence demonstrates a clear motive for exaggerating the despair. Francis wished to show that British Columbia’s problems ran deeper than just the hazards of a gold rush economy, and he went to considerable pains to discredit the colonial government. He argued that the British officials, “a horde of inexperienced men,” did not have the competence to manage the economy and that the people considered the British system of government oppressive.

Francis tried to demonstrate that the region had great potential for prosperity. Vancouver Island with its abundant deposits of coal, iron, and other minerals was, he claimed, well suited for the development of manufacturing. It was the fault of the government that this was not realized. At the time when gold mining had brought prosperity and a larger population, the government should have developed other industries on which to fall back. Francis accused the government not only of failing to aid the development of the colony, but also of actively impeding its progress, as “onerous laws are made and enforced which drive the toiling and persever-

¹¹ Birch to Carnarvon, 31 October 1866, CO 60/25.

¹² Paul Phillips, “Confederation and the Economy of British Columbia” in W. George Shelton, ed., *British Columbia and Confederation* (Victoria, 1967), 49-54.

¹³ Musgrave to Granville, 15 October 1869, CO 60/36.

¹⁴ J. T. Marshall, *Vital Statistics in British Columbia* (Victoria, 1932), 189-91.

ing miners out of the country."¹⁵ Agriculture as well had been hurt by "a want of liberality in the laws."¹⁶ People were leaving because of "the political trammels which fetter the energy and cramp the development of Vancouver Island."¹⁷ Francis did not elaborate on these criticisms, and there is little evidence to support his claims. His assertion that the new tariffs diminished imports is valid,¹⁸ but these taxes provided benefits to the agricultural interests, whose lack of development Francis constantly criticized. Furthermore, the government depended on revenues from the tariffs for its financial survival.

Francis also deeply deplored the cost of the colonial government. In explaining the major causes of the economic decline of Vancouver Island, he first cited "a form of government, that while imposing heavy burdens on the people for its support, acts in antagonism to the people's views. . . ."¹⁹ He was not alone in this criticism. Various members of the public and the press clamoured over the expense of the government. The Legislative Assembly often refused to vote supplies and salaries because, members claimed, the cost of government was too high. Francis often cited editorials from the anti-government press, but perhaps none with more relish than this excerpt from the *British Columbian* in 1869:

The expense of our government is too much, very much too great; but if every interest were flourishing, the difference would be a small consideration. A cheaper government is wanted, — but what is far more wanted is a *People's Government*. Give us that, and the people have only to be true to themselves in order to lift up this sinking dying colony, to a healthy and flourishing condition.²⁰

Francis disparaged any efforts by the government to become more economical. He claimed that the union of the colonies, which had been initiated to decrease expense by eliminating duplication, "has been carried in opposition to the expressed wishes of the people in this colony, and is now received with the greatest dissatisfaction."²¹ Later Francis claimed that the government had ignored further promises of reform, causing "the people to be restless and dissatisfied, and to abuse the country, the govern-

¹⁵ Francis to Seward, 10 January 1866.

¹⁶ Francis to Seward, 1 October 1866.

¹⁷ Francis to Seward, 15 September 1866.

¹⁸ Francis to Seward, 1 April 1867.

¹⁹ Francis to Seward, 15 September 1866.

²⁰ Francis to Secretary of State, 5 April 1869.

²¹ Francis to Seward, 1 October 1866.

ment, and everything connected with it.”²² Francis’s constant message from 1866 until his departure in 1870 was that the people were desperate for a change in government.

While Francis may have been mirroring opinions expressed by others in the colony, there are several problems with his argument. The issue of taxation was the most important, and controversial, which he discussed. On the surface, Francis appears to have been right. Complaints about taxation and government spending led to the paralysis of the government of Vancouver Island during the period immediately prior to the union with British Columbia in November 1866. The Legislative Assembly, as mentioned above, refused to vote some of the supplies and went so far in its defiance of the governor as to initiate a budget of its own, a prerogative which by law was given exclusively to the governor. The crisis became so serious and Governor Arthur Kennedy worked so hard to defend himself that his dispatches and other documents concerning the affair were printed for Parliament in the confidential print series.

These documents demonstrate that there was real question as to whether the popular grievances were justified. According to Kennedy, taxation in the colony was very light. The only form of direct taxation was the real estate tax, assessed at 1 percent per annum. Furthermore, the method of appraising real property and collecting the taxes was so imperfect that much less was collected than ought to have been.²³ In 1865, the average tax rate per head, based on the white population of 8,000 and excluding all other residents, was calculated at \$15.09 per annum. This led Kennedy to conclude that “in the aggregate, the people may be congratulated upon the lightness of taxes imposed upon them.”²⁴ Of his problems with the Legislative Assembly, he wrote:

The impossibility of conciliating the present majority of the House, or removing their non-existent grievances, is too apparent; short of the surrender of all it is my duty to guard into the hands of a few, I fear very unscrupulous men [*sic*].²⁵

In opposition to the government the assembly proposed to abolish the real estate tax and lower the rate of liquor licences. As these levies formed the bulk of government revenue, Kennedy considered this programme “a

²² Francis to Seward, 30 September 1868.

²³ Kennedy to Cardwell, 18 July 1865, Public Record Office, Colonial Office, Confidential Print CO 880/5, f. 377. Henceforth cited CO 880.

²⁴ Kennedy to Cardwell, 22 September 1865, CO 880/5, f. 378.

²⁵ Kennedy to Cardwell, 8 February 1866, CO 880/5, f. 389.

very insane proceeding.” The assembly’s alternative was to finance the government through further borrowing which, according to historian Robert L. Smith, would have bankrupted the colony. Smith not only supports Kennedy’s version of events, but also defends the governor’s record on reform and retrenchment.²⁶ Historian Harry Gregson explains that these opponents of the governor were political opportunists, many of whom were land speculators and therefore would have profited by the abolition of the real estate tax.²⁷

Furthermore, while attacking the government, Francis ignored other causes of the recession. For example, Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken, speaker of the British Columbia Legislative Council, held the American miners partially responsible for the economic decline in the region. He claimed that the miners thought the gold fields would continue to be productive and so spent money carelessly. Moreover, they lived on credit; when the gold did not “pan out” they could not pay their bills and thus ruined their creditors as well as themselves. At the same time, most of the Americans who became successful in the colony had no intention of staying. They were not patient enough to wait during bad times for the revival of business. These men played an important role, therefore, in the great fluctuations of prosperity in the region.²⁸

There is further evidence to suggest that the government was being carried out in a more capable and effective manner than Francis would acknowledge. Francis inadvertently undermined his own argument when he observed in 1866 that the colonial government encouraged the coal industry to a greater extent than the government of the Washington Territory.²⁹ Within two years there was an increased demand for a production of Vancouver Island’s coal.³⁰ In addition, Francis’s observation that the union of the colonies was universally unpopular is misleading. While Frederick Seymour, the governor of British Columbia, and most of the residents on the mainland preferred to remain separate from their sister colony because of its debt, most of the residents of Vancouver Island supported union. The Chamber of Commerce of Victoria expressed its desire for union as a measure to cut government expenditure and ensure that Victoria

²⁶ Robert L. Smith, “The Kennedy Interlude,” *BC Studies* 47 (1980): 70-77.

²⁷ Harry Gregson, *A History of Victoria, 1842-1970* (Victoria, 1970), 44.

²⁸ John Sebastian Helmcken, *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*, ed. Dorothy Blakey Smith (Vancouver, 1975), 208-10.

²⁹ Francis to Seward, 10 January 1866.

³⁰ Francis to Seward, 30 September 1868.

would remain the port of supply for the British Columbia gold fields.³¹ The Legislative Assembly also demonstrated its preference by voting eleven to four in favour of unconditional union. It is curious that, while living in Victoria, Francis was not aware of these expressions of opinion.

Although it is likely that Francis truly believed that the colonial government was a liability to the region, his continued attacks in the face of contrary evidence point to some deeper motive. His exaggeration of the state of the colonies and the evils of the British system of government are likely connected with his desire to have the region annexed to the United States. He wished, however, to demonstrate the altruism of such a move and the ease with which it might be accomplished, so it would not appear that he was forcing the issue. From the beginning of his term, he emphasized the dependence of the region on the United States. Most of the food and other imports came into Victoria from California, Oregon, and Washington. Communication was carried by American steamers from San Francisco, until the laying of a telegraph line in 1865 by an American company. Most of the miners were Americans, and Francis estimated that one-half of the commercial business in Victoria was in American hands and conducted in decimal currency.³²

Francis argued further that Americans were responsible for whatever success the colony had experienced: "It is a fact patent, and almost universally acknowledged, but for the adventurous spirit and enterprise of Americans these colonies would have remained in nominal obscurity."³³ Francis claimed that American explorations, toil, and enterprise were responsible for the discovery and development of the British Columbia gold fields, which had been overlooked by the British fur-trading companies. Americans also serviced the region by building steamers, roads, and bridges. He conveniently ignored Sir James Douglas's role in initiating the building of the wagon roads and the colonial government's financing of these projects, as he wished to demonstrate that Americans were really in charge of the regions already.

Contemporaries and historians alike have conceded the importance of British Columbia's connections with San Francisco, but there is evidence to suggest that the colony was not simply a commercial appendage of California. Keith Ralston's study of the British Columbia salmon canning industry demonstrates that British capital and markets exercised consid-

³¹ Kennedy to Cardwell, 21 March 1865, Public Record Office, Colonial Office Correspondence, Vancouver Island CO 305/25.

³² Francis to Seward, 30 September 1862.

³³ Francis to Seward, 10 January 1866.

erable influence. J. M. S. Careless's analysis of James and Thomas Lowe, commodity merchants in Victoria, indicates the extent to which former employees of the Hudson's Bay Company had infiltrated the commerce of the Pacific coast of the United States. He concludes that some of the "American" commercial interests in Victoria were not necessarily American in origin, but had merely arrived via San Francisco. Both articles cite the strong influence of British trade in San Francisco and suggest that commercial relations among California, British Columbia, and Britain were triangular in nature. Furthermore, they indirectly raise the question as to whether San Francisco, an isolated port thousands of miles from the commercial and political centre of the United States and populated by a large proportion of recent British and European immigrants, can be considered to be exerting an "American" influence on British Columbia.³⁴

The next piece in Francis's argument was that the region had to be annexed to the United States, if it was to be saved from economic collapse. British Columbia was full of natural resources that could not be exploited because its only markets were California and Oregon, which were tariff protected. If annexed to the United States, Francis claimed, British Columbia would no longer be dependent on the unpredictable gold industry: mineral deposits would be worked; forests would provide a thriving lumber industry; and salmon fisheries would provide valuable exports.

Every natural resource, in fact, which now lies dormant, would be stimulated into activity, and instead of witnessing the Island becoming gradually but surely depopulated, — an expense without an equivalent to Great Britain, — the inhabitants would have the gratification of seeing capital and labor flowing in, and industry replacing the present listlessness [*sic*].³⁵

Again, Francis probably believed his assertions to be true, but they cannot be accepted without criticism. It is granted that, until lines of communication were improved, the Pacific coast of the United States, San Francisco in particular, would continue to be British Columbia's most important export market. Nevertheless, it is not clear that freer trade with the United States was necessarily in British Columbia's best interests. There were many disadvantages, which Francis ignored. Local industries, protected by tariffs, would be hurt by American competition. By 1869, the agricultural interests began to oppose reciprocity, and the Legislative Council had con-

³⁴ Keith Ralston, "Patterns of Trade and Investment on the Pacific Coast, 1867-1892: The Case of the British Columbia Salmon Canning Industry," *BC Studies* 1 (1968/9): 37-45; J. M. S. Careless, "The Lowe Brothers, 1852-1870: A Study in Business Relations on the North Pacific Coast," *BC Studies* 2 (1968/9): 1-19.

³⁵ Francis to Seward, 15 September 1866.

cluded that natural advantages such as superior quality were sufficient to secure ready markets for coal and lumber.³⁶ The government also desperately required the revenue from tariffs which had been the primary reason for introducing them in the first place. Even taking the other side of the argument, reciprocity with the United States did not require annexation. Canada negotiated a reciprocity treaty with the United States in 1854, and was thus able to enjoy freer trade without surrendering political sovereignty. This was certainly an option for British Columbia. In fact, in the late 1860s, the colonial government considered asking to be included in future reciprocity treaties between Canada and the United States.

The crux of Francis's argument for annexation was, however, that it was desired by British Columbians. As early as 1866, he reported that residents considered annexation as the only means of resolving their economic problems.³⁷ His explanation for the fact that no movement had been made towards joining the United States was that the measure was opposed by "government officials and those immediately connected with them" who feared for their jobs. Of the rest of the population, Francis was convinced that three-fourths would support annexation.³⁸

Francis was greatly encouraged by the purchase of Alaska by the United States in 1867. He considered Alaska valuable, not only for its own sake as a supply of resources, but also because it gave greater impetus to the annexation of British Columbia. As this colony was a barrier separating Alaska from the rest of the United States, its acquisition had become a geographic necessity, and he tried to convince the American government that residents would acquiesce. Immediately after the purchase of Alaska he wrote, "the people, those claiming to be loyal subjects included, are now urging with great unanimity, annexation to the United States. . . ."³⁹ Later in the year he submitted a copy of a petition to Queen Victoria by residents of the colony requesting imperial assistance or permission to join the United States.⁴⁰

By 1867, however, a new problem confronted Francis's annexation scheme. A few months after the Alaska purchase, the Confederation of the Dominion of Canada was proclaimed. This provided an alternative for those in British Columbia who desired political and economic change but

³⁶ Musgrave to Granville, 22 November 1869, CO 60/36.

³⁷ Francis to Seward, 15 September 1866.

³⁸ Francis to Seward, 1 October 1866.

³⁹ Francis to Seward, 23 April 1867.

⁴⁰ Francis to Seward, 2 July 1867.

did not wish to join the United States, and a movement to confederate British Columbia with the Dominion was created. Therefore, Francis had to depreciate the efforts of the confederationists, if his presentation of annexationist sentiment was to remain believable. In 1867, he claimed that only one unnamed newspaper supported confederation. A year later he observed that a public debate over the future of British Columbia was occupying the population, but that "the mass of the more intelligent and influential citizens of the colony boldly avow that they prefer annexation to confederation."⁴¹ To further discredit confederation, he added that Governor Seymour and the majority of the Legislative Council were opposed to it. In 1869, Francis held fast to his interpretation of public opinion, arguing that American citizens were not alone in supporting annexation:

Among the English residents there is a large majority favoring annexation to the United States, and they urge it openly as being the only means of restoring confidence and prosperity, — whilst the minority are advocacy [*sic*] confederation with the Dominion of Canada on the condition that Vancouver Island being [*sic*] secured as a free port.⁴²

The confederationists, Francis claimed, were generally Canadians whose influence was exaggerated because they controlled the press. The rest of the residents, including Americans, British colonists, and the Hudson's Bay Company, preferred annexation.⁴³

Assessing popular opinion is always difficult, in this case particularly so, owing to a lack of hard evidence or data. Nevertheless, Francis's projections of support for annexation were almost certainly wrong. Historians agree that support for annexation was weak, representative of the views of only a small number of non-British residents, and never had a realistic chance of succeeding.⁴⁴ Governor Seymour claimed that the mainland was thoroughly loyal,⁴⁵ and that the annexationists seemed to be confined to the

⁴¹ Francis to Seward, 2 April 1868.

⁴² Francis to Fish, 6 July 1869.

⁴³ Francis to Fish, 4 October 1869.

⁴⁴ Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver, 1971), 244; F. W. Howay et al., *British Columbia and the United States* (Toronto, 1942); Willard E. Ireland, "The Annexation Petition of 1869," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 4 (1940): 267-87; Walter N. Sage, "The Annexation Movement in British Columbia," *Royal Society of Canada Transactions*, series 3, 21 (1927), section II, 97-110; Isabel Bescoby, "A Colonial Administration: an Analysis of Administration in British Columbia, 1869-1871," *Canadian Public Administration* 10 (1967): 48-104; H. L. Keenleyside, "British Columbia — Annexation or Confederation?" *Canadian Historical Association Report* 1948, 67-73; Gregson, 46.

⁴⁵ Seymour to Buckingham, 26 June 1867, CO 60/28.

city of Victoria. According to historian Walter Sage, even there a minority made a "noise out of all proportion to their numbers."⁴⁶

Two petitions which circulated around Victoria support these conclusions. The first, compiled in 1867, only mentioned annexation as an alternative to further imperial aid. In fact, many in government circles on both sides of the Atlantic assumed that annexation was being used simply to get more money from Westminster.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the signatures on that petition have not been investigated. By contrast, Willard Ireland has provided an in-depth analysis of a petition sent to President Ulysses S. Grant in 1869 requesting him to secure the annexation of British Columbia to the United States. Ireland shows that of the forty-three original signatures an overwhelming majority were foreign, mostly German and East European. Identifying only three British subjects, he concludes that the petition was neither representative of the colony nor considered of much interest or importance.⁴⁸

Support for confederation, on the other hand, was much stronger both within the government and among the populace than Francis acknowledged. In 1867, the Legislative Council voted unanimously in support of the principle of confederation with Canada. The British, Canadian, and British Columbia governments could not proceed, however, until the intervening territory had been acquired by Canada from the Hudson's Bay Company. This was accomplished in 1869, and in 1870 terms for British Columbia's entry into Canada were devised in Victoria and negotiated in Ottawa. The general feeling among residents in British Columbia also favoured confederation. A memorial sent by residents of Victoria, including Mayor James Trimble, to the Governor General of Canada on 1 February 1868 declared that public opinion in the colony overwhelmingly supported confederation.⁴⁹ Although an exaggeration, this was closer to the truth than Francis's portrayal of public sentiment. Even Francis's successor, David Eckstein, was convinced of the favourable opinion towards confederation. In describing the terms of British Columbia's entry into confederation he remarked, "the conditions embodied therein, appear to be regarded, by people of British Columbia, as exceedingly favorable to this colony, and

⁴⁶ Sage, 109.

⁴⁷ Dallas to Helmcken, 15 November 1866, quoted in Bescoby, 87; minute on Seymour to Buckingham, 15 July 1867, quoted in Ireland, 269; Gregson, 46.

⁴⁸ Ireland, 277-82.

⁴⁹ *Correspondence Respecting the Northwest Territory including British Columbia* (Ottawa, 1868), 13.

they will, doubtless, be accepted by them."⁵⁰ After British Columbia had officially joined Canada, he added that British subjects in the colony were "more than commonly loyal and enthusiastic . . . in consequence of confederation. . . ."⁵¹

While Francis doubtless believed some of what he said, it was often so far from the truth that he must have tried intentionally to mislead the Secretaries of State. But why would a consul go to such lengths to present a false interpretation of the politics of the region under his responsibility? Francis gave no direct explanations. Therefore, one can only speculate as to his motives. He obviously hoped to secure the annexation of British Columbia to the United States. He concluded that the colony was so geographically isolated from the rest of the British Empire that it would take only the initiative of the United States government to secure peaceful annexation. To convince the government to act, he had not only to show that the region had economic potential which was not being properly exploited, but also that annexation was desired by the people of the region and would be achieved with relative ease:

I am satisfied . . . that the people of Vancouver Island and British Columbia are almost unanimous in the desire for annexation to the United States, and did they see a corresponding desire on the part of our government to further their views, would take immediate steps to petition Her Majesty's government to allow them to be annexed . . . if the people of these colonies were only made aware of the disposition of our government before the end of the year . . . they would take measures to bring the matter before Parliament at its next meeting.⁵²

This leads to the question of why Francis wished to have British Columbia annexed. On a general level, he was imbued with a strong sense of American patriotism. While living in Illinois, Francis has worked hard on behalf of the Republican party and had contributed towards the election of Lincoln. He was also a staunch supporter of the Union cause during the Civil War and, while in Victoria, reported on activities of Confederate agents along the Pacific coast. In November 1862, when a Confederate flag was raised in Victoria during the celebration of the Prince of Wales having reached his majority, Francis made a strong protest to Governor Douglas and refused to fly the American flag at the consulate or join in the celebration.

⁵⁰ Eckstein to Davis, 31 August 1870.

⁵¹ Eckstein to Davis, 22 August 1871.

⁵² Francis to Seward, 15 September 1866.

For many Americans at this time patriotism was intimately connected with support for territorial expansion. They held to the wholly unsupported and unjustifiable notion that the United States was destined by providence to occupy the entire North American continent. Part of this mission was to bring the “blessings” of American institutions to their neighbours, who, if they were in their right minds, would be grateful for such beneficence. Francis believed that British Columbians were jealous of their American neighbours. He claimed that one of the causes of discontent was that “contiguous to the colony, under a republican form of government, are seen a people and country happy, prosperous and progressive, possessing in point of resources, no advantage superior to their own.”⁵³ Americans were always baffled by the desire of Canadians to maintain their British connections and to reject American republicanism. The condescending reference in the address of the Continental Congress of 1774, instructing Canadians that they were not free and had no right to think that they were, was typical of the American attitude towards their neighbours to the north.⁵⁴ For the next hundred years, Americans, whenever they paid any attention, thought about Canadians in these terms.

The other face of the notion of “manifest destiny” was plain territorial aggression. Americans wanted territory for the power which accompanied it. Speaking on the occasion of the purchase of Alaska, Senator Charles Sumner boasted, “with an increased size on the map there is an increased consciousness of strength, and the citizen throbs anew as he traces the extending line.”⁵⁵ The Earl of Rosebery’s description of imperialism as “a larger patriotism” is also an apt description of the type of “continental imperialism” expressed by many Americans. It is noteworthy that these sentiments were strongest in the Midwest region, which included Illinois, where Francis had lived for many years.

Such opinions were not held by every American, but for years there were many in Congress, the media, and the government who believed that British North American territory should and would be absorbed by the United States. In July 1866, General Nathaniel P. Banks made motion in the House of Representatives for the annexation of British territory once the consent of the British and colonial governments had been obtained. Senator Ramsey of Minnesota introduced a bill in the Senate on 9 December

⁵³ Francis to Seward, 30 September 1868.

⁵⁴ Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Gloucester, Mass., 1958), 357.

⁵⁵ *Speech of the Hon. Charles Sumner of Massachusetts on the Cession of Russian America to the United States* (Washington, 1867), 13.

1867 to offer to purchase the territory west of Ontario from the Hudson's Bay Company. Elwood Evans made several public speeches in which he claimed that British Columbia really belonged to the United States, because the British had obtained it in the Oregon boundary treaty through deception.⁵⁶ During the Civil War, the New York *Herald* called for the acquisition of British North America as compensation for the loss of the southern states, while the Chicago *Tribune* regretted the missed opportunity for taking Canada in the last war with Great Britain.⁵⁷ Both Secretaries of State during the 1860s showed interest in Canada. William Seward considered annexation to balance the possible acquisition of Cuba by the South, and he and Hamilton Fish discussed with the British Minister in Washington the cession of Canada as reparation for the *Alabama* claims.⁵⁸ Although he took no official action, President Grant often spoke of his desire to annex Canada, even by force if necessary.⁵⁹ Therefore, Francis had some reason to believe that the acquisition of British Columbia would be looked on favourably by his government. Historian David Mitchell suggests that Francis might even have considered this to be his diplomatic mission in Victoria.⁶⁰

The best possible explanation of Francis's actions is, however, concern for his own career. This appointment had not solved his financial problems, as the office was not salaried but paid out of fees charged for the registration of American vessels and other minor administrative functions. Francis soon realized that these funds were inadequate for him to meet the costs of running the consulate. By 1865, the costs of providing relief for destitute American miners was becoming a considerable burden. In that same year Lincoln, Francis's major connection in the government, was assassinated, thus removing his best hope of promotion, for unlike the British diplomatic service, which was becoming professionalized and bureaucratic, the American service was still a system of spoils. The President made all diplomatic and consular appointments almost unfettered by Con-

⁵⁶ Elwood Evans, *The Re-Annexation of British Columbia to the United States: Right, Proper and Desirable. A speech given by Hon. Elwood Evans before the Tacoma Library Association, Olympia W. T., January 18, 1870*, reprint (Victoria, 1965).

⁵⁷ L. B. Shippee, *Canadian-American Relations, 1849-1874* (New Haven, Conn., 1939), 183, 191.

⁵⁸ James Morton Callaghan, *American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations* (New York, 1937), 300, 312.

⁵⁹ Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (New York, 1957), 296-300, 385-99.

⁶⁰ David J. Mitchell, "The American Purchase of Alaska and Canadian Expansion to the Pacific" (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1976), 67.

gress or considerations of merit. Without a pool of professional diplomats or civil servants to choose from, appointments were subject only to the political climate and personal preference of the President at the time. Thus, a change of Presidents often led to new diplomatic appointments. Francis likely would never have been appointed had the system been different, as he had absolutely no experience as a public servant, let alone a diplomat. Having lost his patron, however, Francis had to fear for his present as well as his future prospects.⁶¹

It is likely that Francis saw the annexation of British Columbia as his only hope of obtaining a better position. Once the territory was brought into the union, there would be better-paying jobs within the gift of the United States government. Who would be better qualified to serve in one of these offices than the American official already living in the region, especially if the annexation was accomplished as a result of his initiative? There is no evidence to support the view that Francis ever considered these questions, but they seem well within the scope of his character and circumstances. In 1869, Francis, claiming that he could no longer support the financial burdens of his office, gave notice of his intent to resign. Nathaniel Niles, the man appointed to succeed Francis, was one of two men who declined the offer after learning how poorly the office paid.⁶² David Eckstein, however, agreed to take over and was installed on 13 June 1870.

Francis's career pattern continued. After leaving the consulate, he along with his two sons formed an Alaskan fur-trading company, but within two years business was so poor that he tried to get back his old job at the consulate. He faced a major obstacle, though, as the position was not vacant. He and his wife worked hard to enlist support, however, and managed to sway many people, from United States senators to Victoria residents, including former governor Sir James Douglas, to write to President Grover Cleveland and Vice-President Schuyler Colfax recommending Francis for his old position. Their efforts were successful, but Francis was not reinstated until 1877. On his second stint he held his patriotism in check: his dispatches were much shorter, less detailed, and confined to commercial business. He made little mention of either British Columbian or Canadian politics. As all hopes of annexation had faded, the politics of the region had

⁶¹ Graham H. Stuart, *American Diplomatic and Consular Practice* (New York, 1952); Warren Frederick Ilchman, *Professional Diplomacy in the United States* (Chicago, 1961); J. Rives Childs, *American Foreign Service* (New York, 1948), 1-17; Raymond A. Jones, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914* (Waterloo, Ont., 1983).

⁶² Niles to Grant, 26 July 1869; Niles to Davis, 19 May 1869; *British Colonist*, 24 March 1870, 3.

become irrelevant, both for Francis and the United States government. In 1884, Francis was transferred to the consulate in St. Thomas, Ontario, where he died in 1887 after having been run over by a fire engine.

Another possible, although speculative, explanation for Francis's distortion of the facts was that his judgement was impaired. S. W. Moody, an American resident in Victoria, wrote to Seward in 1863 that Francis was an alcoholic. According to Moody, Francis's drinking was so bad as to seriously affect his ability to perform his job. Francis was

addicted to drunkenness, and is frequently incapable of performing the simplest duties of his office. He has also brought shame and humiliation upon his countrymen on several occasions by appearing on the streets too far gone to walk without assistance.⁶³

Moody stated further that while Francis was drunk, the office was run by a man known to be a Confederate supporter and probably a spy. That Francis probably enjoyed alcohol is supported by his signature on a letter approving the speech on temperance delivered by Pastor James Smith in 1853 entitled "A Discourse on the Bottle — Its Evils and the Remedy; or A Vindication of the Liquor-Seller and the Liquor Drinker from Certain Aspersions Cast upon them by many."⁶⁴ Excessive drinking could also account for his resignation from the *Illinois Journal*, his financial desperation, and his erratic career. Thus, it is quite possible that alcohol affected his perception of, or reasoning about, the economic and political situation in British Columbia. Moody's description was, however, an isolated reference. Most of those who wrote about Francis to the State Department did so in glowing terms. Several petitions were circulated in Victoria, the Washington Territory, and Washington, D.C., praising Francis and recommending his reappointment. Even Sir James Douglas regarded him well. Consequently, while Moody's opinions should be considered seriously, they may not be accurate. He might have wished to discredit Francis for some grievance. Francis later claimed that there was a conspiracy afoot to have him replaced.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, there is not sufficient evidence to confirm any of these conclusions.

While Francis evidently desired the annexation of British Columbia, it is not clear at precisely what time he decided to promote this idea. It is

⁶³ Moody to Seward, 6 November 1863, National Archives, Washington, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, Entry 331, P. I. 157.

⁶⁴ *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J., 1953), II, 188.

⁶⁵ Francis to Ashley, 1 November 1865, National Archives, Washington, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, Entry 331, P. I. 157.

doubtful that he ever considered the notion before he arrived in Victoria, and during his first few years as consul he was almost completely preoccupied with the Civil War. Nevertheless, he had carried with him a strong belief in the superiority of American forms of government which was confirmed by the contrast in the economic prosperity of Victoria between the time of his arrival and the downturn a few years later. Certainly, from his point of view, annexation must soon have appeared the obvious solution. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in 1865, Francis began to push this argument in his dispatches. First, the Civil War was over and the danger to the Union was ended, leaving both Francis and the central government free to move on to different questions of foreign policy. Second, there arose considerable disaffection in British Columbia, convincing Francis of the rightness of his conclusions and making the issue of annexation more plausible. Third, Lincoln was dead, leaving Francis's career in doubt. Thus, while Francis did not set out to annex British Columbia, circumstances confirmed his preoccupations and drew him to the conclusion that annexation was first possible, and then desirable for British Columbia, the United States, and his career.

The last question which remains is why Francis's scheme failed so entirely. In the first place, he overestimated his own influence and the determination of the American government to acquire British North America. Neither Presidents Lincoln, Johnson, nor Grant made motion to annex British Columbia or Canada. Lincoln was too preoccupied with the Civil War, while Johnson and Grant were hampered by the debt from that war and the problems of reconstruction. Although concerned about the threat to the security of the United States by the presence of British soldiers on the continent, the American government would not risk war for the sake of acquiring British territory.

Francis also misunderstood the nature of political opinion and power in British Columbia. He believed that there was enough indecision in the colony for his interference to be able to win the territory for the United States. He was wrong on two counts. First, as I have argued above, popular opinion was generally against annexation. Second, political power was not directly manifest in the populace: the people were represented by a Legislative Council consisting of twenty-two members, thirteen of whom were appointed. This body made political decisions in conjunction with the governor, who was appointed by the Colonial Office. It was these men, not the public at large, who controlled the political destiny of British Columbia. Fearing for their jobs, most of them opposed both confederation and annexation, but they all believed that, burdened by a large government

debt and insufficient export markets, British Columbia's economy could not survive on its own. Following from this premise, many like Attorney-General Henry Pellew Crease recognized that, while they would get only a small pension if British Columbia joined Canada, they would get nothing if it was absorbed by the United States.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, those governing British Columbia did have the best interests of the colony at heart, as there were practical, as well as sentimental, reasons to choose to join Canada rather than the United States. The Canadian government had made a firm and very attractive offer. The Dominion would relieve British Columbia of its debt, provide an annual grant far out of proportion to the colony's population, and build a transcontinental railway. British Columbia would also continue to have preferential access to the markets of the British Empire. The American government, on the other hand, made no offer. British Columbians could only speculate about annexation to the United States; they could not be certain how the American government would treat them. Faced with the specific terms offered by the Dominion government, but only vague assurances from American citizens in Victoria, British Columbians made the only reasonable choice.

This is not to imply that popular opinion played no role in the process of the confederation of British Columbia. Almost half of the members of the Legislative Council were elected, and those representing the mainland were all avowed supporters of confederation. Had there really been serious opposition to confederation, it would not likely have been carried. Although British Columbians did have apprehensions about confederation, they preferred a British to an American connection. Joseph Trutch, who was to become British Columbia's first lieutenant-governor, explained:

They have never as a people had any inclination for the United States or any proclivity toward the institutions of that country; and though there was at one time in the year before last an attempt on the part of a few disaffected persons to raise such an issue, it was so speedily hooted down that the very word annexation has been ever since tabooed [*sic*] among us.⁶⁷

The sentiments of many British residents in the colony were better summarized by Dr. Helmcken, long an opponent of confederation and often mistaken for an annexationist, who concluded that, "as far as dollars were

⁶⁶ Gordon R. Elliott, "Henry P. Pellew Crease: Confederation or No Confederation," *BC Studies* 12 (1971): 63-74.

⁶⁷ *British Columbia and the Canadian Pacific Railway: Complimentary dinner to the Hon. Mr. Trutch, Surveyor General of British Columbia. Given at the Russell House, Ottawa, on Monday, 10th April, 1871* (Montreal, 1871), 10.

concerned their [the annexationists'] arguments were captivating, but we were British and had the Navy at Esquimalt."⁶⁸

Beyond the narrow scope of this one official and the particular circumstances of British Columbia in the 1860s, this study also illustrates some of the characteristics of British North American–American relations. The British and Americans both recognized that they had a cultural and linguistic affinity. To a certain degree they also possessed similar political principles. Nevertheless, British North Americans who wielded political power held some very different values from their American counterparts. The desire to remain loyal subjects of the Crown and empire, their belief in the superiority of their system of government, and their distaste for American institutions were strong forces in British North America which the Americans could not understand.⁶⁹ Americans expected that the prosperity and opportunities for acquiring wealth provided by their country would convince British North Americans to join the Union. Francis believed so. He constantly referred to the difference in prosperity between British Columbia and California and how the former could become like the latter, if it would join the Union. But Francis, like many other Americans, was wrong. Canada was built by people who did not want to become Americans. In joining confederation, British Columbia strengthened the new Dominion not only by providing a Pacific outlet but also by demonstrating the political will to remain connected with Britain and separate from the United States. This did not necessarily imply enmity towards Americans. Although always conscious of the possibility of a continental war, Canadians favoured peaceful coexistence and close commercial intercourse. They were not prepared, however, to accept political assimilation. That Francis did not receive any backing from his government shows how little, in spite of support for "manifest destiny," the independence of Canada really mattered. The themes of Canadian desire to remain distinct and American disregard of their northern neighbours have persisted throughout the history of Canadian-American relations.

⁶⁸ Helmcken, 253.

⁶⁹ Shippee, 182.