

A NEW TAKE ON AN OLD TOWN: *New Directions in Research on Barkerville and the Cariboo*

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AFTER YEARS OF LANGUISHING at the edge of historical writing on British Columbia, the Cariboo gold rush now seems poised to become the focus of new attention. Until fairly recently, writing about this rush has been dominated by local histories, and it has been largely ignored in national and even provincial studies. When it does appear in such histories, it does so most often as a side note to the Fraser River gold rush, which is itself usually depicted as a quick transition from a fur trade-dominated territorial past to a lumber-, coal-, and fishing-dominated future.¹ Now, however, a new generation of scholars is starting to focus on the Cariboo rush, stressing its importance to provincial and national developments, its duration, and its connections with international flows of people, ideas, and capital. An analysis of the literature on the Cariboo, combined with an evaluation of the available source material, suggests some possible avenues for future research that will deepen our understanding of the importance of the Cariboo gold rush for provincial, national, and international history.

Histories of the Cariboo gold rush share much in common with histories of gold rushes throughout the inter-mountain west and, indeed, around the Pacific Rim. The literature on gold rushes everywhere is dominated (at least according to number of titles) by local histories, and most of these emphasize the strange, unusual, or distinctive events and characters involved in each rush, what one author calls the “colorful days of a century ago.”² In the case of the Cariboo, there was John “Cariboo”

¹ See, for example, Patricia Roy and John Herd Thompson, *British Columbia: Land of Promises* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005); Hugh Johnston, ed., *The Pacific Province* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996); Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (1958; reprint, Vancouver: MacMillan, 1971); Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).

² Art Downs, *Wagon Road North: The Story of the Cariboo Gold Rush in Historical Photos* (Quesnel, BC: Northwest Edition, 1960), 3.

Cameron, who packed his wife's body back to Canada West for burial.³ There was also William "Billy" Barker, who kept digging in an area everyone thought had no gold, made a fortune, and then died penniless.⁴ And there was Wellington Moses, a barber, hair-tonic salesman, and the most well-remembered of Barkerville's black residents.⁵ While each of these men is an important figure in the history of the Cariboo, narratives that celebrate the unusual and exciting aspects of their lives, rather than examine the everyday events and circumstances of life in the goldfields, end up reinforcing a mythical image of gold rush society, filled with larger-than-life figures, odd coincidences, and humorous stories. Perhaps this is part of the reason that gold rushes, including the Cariboo rush, have been considered unworthy of scholarly attention and have so often been treated as an aside in the "real story" of provincial or national development.

The early amateur and popular literature on the gold rush consistently emphasized the "colourful days" of the Cariboo. Two of the most widely available and well known of these early accounts are Agnes Laut's *The Cariboo Trail* and Art Downs's *Wagon Road North*.⁶ Unsurprisingly, both accounts have strong narratives and are filled with unusual personalities and vivid details. Originally a novelist, Laut became one of the best known popular Canadian historians of her time.⁷ Though of a later generation, Art Downs, another prolific amateur historian of

³ On Cameron, see Richard Thomas Wright, *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields* (Victoria: Heritage House, 2013), 65–68.

⁴ See Ken Mather, "William 'Billy' Barker – Myth and Reality," in Anne Laing, *The Traveller's Site Guide to Barkerville Historic Town* (Burnaby: Vanpress, 2009), 88–95.

⁵ Other gold rushes have similar "strange-but-true" stories. In Australia, there was the story of the man who dressed as a woman, ostensibly to avoid paying a miners' tax, but decided to remain in women's clothes afterwards. During the California gold rush, a story circulated of a man who, while in a drunken stupor, fell down a hill and passed out. When he awoke, he found a large gold nugget in front of his face and staked a discovery claim. Regardless of their veracity, these stories speak to a continuity in the way that popular histories, in particular, have remembered gold rushes. For Moses, see Wright, *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields*, 104–8.

⁶ Agnes Laut, *The Cariboo Trail: A Chronicle of the Gold-Fields of British Columbia* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook and Co., 1916); Downs, *Wagon Road North*. See also Fred Ludditt, *Barkerville Days* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1969); E.O.S. Scholefield and Frederic Howay, *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Vancouver: S.J. Clarke, 1914); Frederic Howay, *The Early History of the Fraser River Mines* (Victoria: C.F. Banfield, 1926).

⁷ Anne Innis Dagg, *The Feminine Gaze: A Canadian Compendium of Non-Fiction Women Authors and Their Books, 1836–1945* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 161; William New, ed., *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (Toronto; Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 636–37.

the Cariboo, reflects Laut's emphasis on strong narratives, unusual personalities, and vivid details.⁸

Though readable, both authors have a number of weaknesses, most notably in their reliance on stereotypes in place of analysis. Both authors understand the "real" miners of the Cariboo as the "solitary [and] determined" white men who came with wants that were "not simple and modest."⁹ In their narratives, these "unprecedented" men transformed British Columbia, catalyzing change in a region that had, along with its "bronze skin[ned]" indigenous population, been frozen in time.¹⁰ According to these accounts, once in the colony, these white miners quickly overcame violent Native resistance and started the colony on a trajectory that culminated in contemporary, modern British Columbia.¹¹ This narrative grossly misconstrues Native reactions and adaptations to the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rushes and, indeed, to the process of colonization itself.¹² Similarly, though both authors note the lack of (white) women in the mines, they refuse to explore either the possibility of prostitution or the impact such a homosocial environment might have had on men. Instead, women are largely notable for their absence, and, when they do appear, they are treated as just another aspect of the "colour" of the gold rush. Finally, although the gold mines of the Cariboo were capital-intensive from the very early days of the rush, both authors emphasize individual miners, remaining blind to the impact of capital and the class dimensions of the Cariboo gold rush.¹³

By the 1980s, a new generation of amateur and popular historians of the Cariboo had begun to feel the effects of the New Social History of the 1960s. Among them were Robin Skelton and Richard Wright. In *They Call It the Cariboo* Skelton demonstrates a far greater awareness of the malleable and diverse nature of Cariboo society than either Laut

⁸ Downs, *Wagon Road North*. See also Art Downs, *Pioneer Days in British Columbia: A Selection of Historical Articles from BC Outdoors Magazine* (Surrey, BC: Foremost Publishing, 1973). Downs was the owner of *BC Outdoors Magazine*.

⁹ Laut, *Cariboo Trail*, 1; Downs, *Wagon Road North*, 4.

¹⁰ Laut, *Cariboo Trail*, 1; Downs, *Wagon Road North*, 4. In her review of Laut and another of Downs's works on the Cariboo, Mica Jorgenson makes much the same point – that is, that both authors "see 'Indians' as incompatible with progress." See Mica Jorgenson's reviews in *BC Studies* no. 183 Autumn 2014 of *The Cariboo Trail: A Chronicle of the Gold-Fields of British Columbia* by Agnes Laut; *Cariboo Gold Rush: The Stampede That Made BC* by Art Downs, ed.; and *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields* by Richard Wright.

¹¹ Downs, *Wagon Road North*, 4–10, 76.

¹² For better accounts of Natives during the BC gold rushes, see Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Daniel Marshall, "Indians, Goldseekers and the Rush to British Columbia" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2000); Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*.

¹³ Laut, *Cariboo Trail*; Downs, *Wagon Road North*.

or Downs. Yet he retained an inordinate focus on interesting events, strange characters, and vivid details (even at the price of accuracy).¹⁴ Wright, the most successful popular historian of Barkerville in recent decades, likewise tends to focus on notable or exceptional characters even as he engages far more thoroughly with archival research than do any of his counterparts.¹⁵ Ultimately, popular histories of the Cariboo gold rush suffer from the same propensity for description over analysis that plagues popular histories elsewhere. This results in the production of narratives in which miners sweep into the Cariboo and reshape it in astounding and quirky ways before fading away in the face of declining gold yields and time. In this respect, though the product of far more sophisticated research, the narrative presented by Richard Wright is not structurally different from that presented by Laut almost a hundred years earlier.

While popular accounts of the Cariboo rush have appeared fairly regularly, academic attention has waxed and waned over time. Perhaps reflecting the way that it straddled the divide between amateur popular history and academic history, Frederic Howay and E.O.S. Scholefield's *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* devotes a number of chapters to the Cariboo gold rush.¹⁶ This account is heavy on descriptions of how mining was carried out, where miners went, lists of gold yields and the cost of goods, and the difficulties of transportation in the Cariboo. The authors do comment on the lack of women in the Cariboo rush, noting the presence of the Hurdy-Gurdies, Native women, and "women of the underworld," as well as the efforts of the British Columbia Emigration Society to bring more white women to the colony.¹⁷ With these and a few other small exceptions, however, the focus is entirely on white men, working alone or in small groups, encountering strange events and the harsh terrain of the Cariboo. Scholefield and Howay's analysis is severely lacking in terms of understanding the impact of large-scale economic and political forces, and, as a result, the development of the Cariboo is attributed almost entirely to the character of the men who went there. Despite these weaknesses and the narrow focus of the

¹⁴ Robin Skelton, *They Call It the Cariboo* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1980).

¹⁵ Richard Wright, *Discover Barkerville: A Gold Rush Adventure – A Guide to the Town and Its Town* (Vancouver: Special Interest Publications, 1984); and Wright, *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields*.

¹⁶ Scholefield and Howay, *British Columbia from the Earliest Times*, 69–107, 110–23. For a useful discussion of Howay's contributions to the historiography of British Columbia, see Chad Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History, 1784–1958* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 71–94.

¹⁷ Scholefield and Howay, *British Columbia from the Earliest Times*, 112–15.

work, *British Columbia from the Earliest Times* does devote considerable attention to the Cariboo, laying the groundwork for subsequent studies.

The next major general history of the province is by Margaret Ormsby, the first innovative, academically trained scholar of BC history. Ormsby's *British Columbia: A History*, published in 1958 as part of the same centennial celebrations that brought major government support for the historic town of Barkerville, quickly became the standard for BC history. Though far better researched than its predecessors, *British Columbia* draws on established narrative patterns in BC history, with "prominent individuals ... depicted as representing larger forces and developments."¹⁸ Apparently the Cariboo gold rush lacked "prominent individuals" in Ormsby's eyes as she focused on Governor Douglas throughout the gold rush period, paying only cursory attention to conditions in the goldfields of the Cariboo.¹⁹

Ormsby's work remained the standard history of British Columbia until the publication of Jean Barman's *The West beyond the West* in 1991. In the intervening decades the field of history was dramatically refigured by the emergence of the New Social History and the "cultural turn," and Barman's work reflects these influences. Although Barman notes that the gold rushes "irrevocably shattered" the status quo in British Columbia, she is primarily interested in how that changing situation played out in terms of the development of colonial authority, the construction of roads, the justice system, and political tensions within the colony, chiefly interpreted from the perspective of the Lower Mainland.²⁰

More recent general histories of the province have tended to follow in Barman's footsteps. Both Jack Little and Sharon Meen pay some attention to the Cariboo gold rush in their contributions to *The Pacific Province*, but their primary focus is on the economic and political development of British Columbia.²¹ Similarly, *British Columbia* by Patricia Roy and John Thompson considers the Cariboo gold rush only briefly and mainly through the lens of state and economic development.²² In other words, as general histories of British Columbia have become more sophisticated in their analyses, they have become narrower in

¹⁸ Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History*, 135.

¹⁹ Ormsby, *British Columbia*, 183-89, 208-12, 226-27, 240-41.

²⁰ Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 61.

²¹ Jack Little, "The Foundations of Government," in *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia*, ed. Hugh Johnston, 68-96 (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996); Sharon Meen, "Colonial Society and Economy," in Johnston, *Pacific Province*, 97-132.

²² Patricia Roy and John Thompson, *British Columbia: Land of Promises* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005).

their focus and briefer in their treatment of the Cariboo gold rush. One suspects that the tendency of popular and amateur historians to focus on unusual events and personalities in the gold rush, and the location of the gold rushes outside the Lower Mainland, has led a generation of historians to dismiss the Cariboo gold rush as a temporary aberration from the province's "real" path of development.²³

This is ironic given the recent appearance of strong monographs that situate the Cariboo gold rush more meaningfully within the history of British Columbia. One of the first of these was Tina Loo's *Making Law, Order, and Authority in British Columbia*. Although it treads much well-worked ground in examining the formation of legal and political authority in the colonial period, it does so in innovative ways and puts considerable emphasis on the Cariboo gold rush. Specifically, Loo argues that gold miners challenged the "club law" of the Hudson's Bay Company by articulating an alternative shaped by "laissez-faire liberalism."²⁴ In Loo's telling, rather than being a temporary aberration, the gold rush society of the Cariboo was crucially important for understanding the development of British Columbia.

Adele Perry's *On the Edge of Empire* is the first work to take the insights of the new wave of studies linking race and gender to imperialism and to apply them to the Cariboo. Throughout, Perry weaves a deft exploration of the goldfield society of the Cariboo and shows in particular how the colonial project was shaped by logics of race and gender. Perry finds that the homosocial environment of the goldfields both confirmed and challenged many of the imperial claims that miners and colonial officials made about British Columbia. To Perry, in other words, the Cariboo was important as a site of cultural production, and it is useful for understanding not only British Columbia but also the larger global process of imperialism of which it was a part.²⁵

Overall, academic treatments of the Cariboo rush share much in common with academic treatments of the mid-nineteenth century gold rushes elsewhere. These often depict the rushes as part of a process of nation building and as watershed moments bringing a massive influx of people who create a new social order that forms the nucleus of a new state or polity. The underlying narrative of many of these analyses concerns the creation of order out of disorder and the incorporation of

²³ This would be an academic echo of the old BC saying: "If it is beyond Hope, it is beyond hope."

²⁴ Tina Loo, *Making Law, Order, and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 3.

²⁵ Perry, *Edge of Empire*.

gold rush society into the nation-state.²⁶ Whether they celebrate or, more recently, criticize this process, most studies tend to focus on a single rush or political jurisdiction. By ignoring similar events across provincial, state, or national borders they tend to downplay (or miss altogether) the powerful transnational forces that acted to shape the gold rushes.²⁷

As scholars begin to push research on the Cariboo gold rush in new directions, they are forced to deal with the available sources on the region. Written records for the Cariboo, especially before 1865, are sparse. The most voluminous and easily available source, the *Cariboo Sentinel*, did not begin publication until 1865, at least six years after prospectors located gold in the Cariboo region.²⁸ Nor are other “traditional” written accounts – such as journals, diaries, letters, and official correspondence – very rich, due to some combination of the high cost of paper; the lack of time, energy, or desire to write; and inevitable losses.

The single largest repository of materials on the Cariboo rush are located in the British Columbia Archives (BCA) in Victoria. This repository holds copies or originals of virtually all the government correspondence, personal letters, private diaries and journals, and newspapers that deal with the Cariboo, and it has an extensive collection of visual records of the landscape, settlements, and mining claims of the Cariboo that can be used to fill the holes in the written accounts.

Remoteness has its advantages for Cariboo researchers. In California, especially, gold rush settlement and mining sites are buried under concrete, housing developments, and other aspects of urban sprawl, but the Cariboo remains comparatively undeveloped. That degree of isolation has allowed the preservation of a historic site, now known as Barkerville Historic Town, as well as the surrounding landscape and

²⁶ See, for example, J.S. Holliday, *Rush for Riches: Gold Fever and the Making of California* (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 1999); H.W. Brands, *The Age of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the New American Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 2002); Malcolm Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Ralph Mann, *After the Gold Rush: Society in Grass Valley and Nevada City, California, 1849–1870* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982). This is not to criticize a generally excellent body of work, merely to point out a lacuna in the literature.

²⁷ Some exceptions are Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West*; Jay Monaghan, *Australians and the Gold Rush: California and Down Under, 1848–1854* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Jan Nicholson, “Procedures and Perceptions of Authority: The Gold-Rush Camps of Australia, Canada and the United States,” in *Public Administration: The Journal of the Australian Regional Groups of the Royal Institute of Public Administration* 32, 4 (1973): 392–403; Keir Reeves, Lionel Frost, and Charles Fahey, “Integrating the Historiography of the Nineteenth-Century Gold Rushes,” *Australian Economic History Review* 50 (2010): III–28.

²⁸ Robert M. Galois, “Gold Mining and Its Effects on Landscapes of the Cariboo” (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1972), 3, 34.

outlying settlements.²⁹ Even here, though, scholars must be cautious. Barkerville has been considerably rebuilt and reconstructed, sometimes from scratch, sometimes by moving buildings from outlying settlements into the historic site.³⁰ Nor is Barkerville an ideologically neutral space. Much of the support and funding for the original preservation and reconstruction of Barkerville came out of the 1958 Centennial celebrations, the goal of which, at least in part, was to produce an aesthetically pleasing space that would celebrate British Columbia's progress and advance the region's tourist industry.³¹

The historic town houses a small archive of original material not available elsewhere, including an alphabetically organized series of files under such titles as: "Barbers," "Benedixon, Fanny," "Go At Them Saloon," and "Scandinavian."³² Some files are virtually empty, others are chock-full of newspaper clippings, handwritten notes, and personal accounts. Though the provenance of some of the information is uncertain, and many documents lack citations of any kind, these files include information that is virtually impossible to find elsewhere. They provide a useful starting point, especially for inquiries in which it is helpful to link names through census and other records. Given the primary function of Barkerville as a historic site it is perhaps not surprising that the files on buildings and businesses are some of the most complete, and they, too, can serve as springboards to a range of potential projects.³³

What the Barkerville town lacks in extensive archival holdings, it makes up for in material culture. Academia's recent interest in interdisciplinarity is tailor-made for studies of the Cariboo. Scholars need to look across disciplinary boundaries in order to bring new aspects of the history of the Cariboo to light. Here, continuing archaeological research at Barkerville is particularly exciting. Recent work has begun to reveal some heretofore unknown aspects of life in the Cariboo, most

²⁹ Compare this with Sutter's Fort (now surrounded by Sacramento) or the lower Fraser Valley (now largely overtaken by the Greater Vancouver metropolitan area).

³⁰ Fred Ludditt, *Barkerville Days* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1969); Bill Quackenbush, conversation with author, 7 June 2012. For detailed accounts of the reconstruction and rebuilding at Barkerville, see Laing, *Traveller's Site Guide*, 9 and passim; Wright, *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields*, 128–31.

³¹ Mia Reimers, "'BC at Its Most Sparkling, Colourful Best': Post-War Province Building through Centennial Celebrations" (PhD diss., University of Northern British Columbia, 2007), 32.

³² These files appear to have been compiled by several generations of park officials and curators.

³³ These files form the basis of Anne Laing's detailed building histories. See Laing, *Traveller's Site Guide*.

notably concerning the sizeable Chinese population.³⁴ Indeed, findings in the Cariboo might be generalizable to other gold rushes, where the material remains of the rushes have been obliterated by development or obscured by the passage of time. Likewise, as our knowledge of the environment and geography of the region deepens it opens the door to other non-traditional sources of knowledge about the Cariboo.³⁵ For example, further archaeological work in the surrounding territory might help to give us a better picture of the extent and nature of miners' settlements and diggings in the region.³⁶

There are several aspects of the Cariboo's past about which we need to know more. Barkerville and the surrounding towns formed a striking cluster of newcomer settlement in the north of British Columbia. This is in keeping with Richard Wade's insight, over a half-century ago, that "towns were spearheads of the frontier ... [P]lanted far in advance of the line of settlement, they held the West for the approaching population."³⁷ Somewhat surprisingly, the now-robust literature on "frontier" towns has not been applied to Barkerville.³⁸ How did the extreme remoteness of Barkerville and the surrounding towns, the goldfield economy, and the skeleton apparatus of British colonial authority shape life in these towns? To what extent does the experience of the Cariboo confirm or challenge the findings of scholars working on similar frontier towns? In particular, how was space perceived, occupied, and organized? Scholars working on Victoria's Chinatown have done much to challenge the assumption of strict racial segregation in a slightly later time period, and complementary work on Barkerville's sizable Chinatown and non-white populations would do much to shed light not only on the urban space of the Cariboo but also on colonial urban spaces in British Columbia more broadly.³⁹

³⁴ See, for example, Ying-ying Chen, "In the Colonies of the Tang: Historical Archaeology of Chinese Communities in the North Cariboo District, British Columbia, 1860s-1940s" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2001). Currently, excavations are under way on a series of Chinese terrace gardens on the hills above Barkerville.

³⁵ See Megan Prins, "Seasons of Gold: An Environmental History of the Cariboo Gold Rush" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2007). Galois, "Gold Mining."

³⁶ See the article by Douglas Ross, this volume.

³⁷ Richard Wade, *The Urban Frontier, 1790-1830: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1959), 1.

³⁸ See, for example, Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (Oxford University Press, 1975); David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

³⁹ Patrick Dunae, John Lutz, Donald Lafreniere, and Jason Gilliland, "Making the Inscrutable, Scrutable: Race and Space in Victoria's Chinatown, 1891," *BC Studies* 169 (2011): 51-72.

Before the completion of the Cariboo Wagon Road in 1865, the goldfield towns were weeks away from the other major population centres of the lower Fraser River and Vancouver Island. While the goldfield towns of the Cariboo were part of an economic, political, and legal system centred on Victoria and the Lower Mainland, it is equally obvious that the vast territory around Barkerville, extending all the way up into the Peace River region, existed as the economic hinterland of the Cariboo towns. Caribooites manifested an intense interest in this hinterland, reporting on prospecting, mining, and trading operations sometimes hundreds of kilometres distant.⁴⁰ Yet we know next to nothing about the people in the area around Barkerville. Ned Blackhawk's work on the "ripple effects of colonialism," the unforeseen consequences of colonialism that precede the actual arrival of settlers into a region, is particularly suggestive here.⁴¹ New studies could begin to explore the impact of gold miners on the Native world of the northern interior. We know that the gold rush directly affected some Native groups and individuals, but how did their reactions cause those even further afield to react? Did territorial boundaries shift? Did involvement in the gold rush create greater connections between Native groups, helping move them towards an incipient "Pan-Indian" identity?

Of course, to begin to answer those questions, we first need to know more about the Natives in whose traditional territory the gold rush occurred. In the hinterland and goldfield towns, Natives were at once ubiquitous and invisible. They worked as cooks, labourers, guides, and packers, and they formed friendships and various types of relationships with the newcomers. However, we know very little about these individuals: Who were they? Were certain tribes or bands more concentrated in the goldfield towns? Did some tribes or bands adjust their seasonal rounds to integrate aspects of the goldfield economy? If so, how did that process affect Native communities? Answering these questions and others like them will necessitate the close reading of conventional written sources against archaeological analysis and oral

⁴⁰ Argus, "Letter from Quesnelle City," *British Colonist*, 9 August 1861; Observer, "Letter from Richfield," *Victoria Daily Chronicle*, 29 January 1864; "The Horse Fly Prospecting Expedition," *Cariboo Sentinel*, 23 July 1865; "Good News from the Interior," *British Columbian*, 7 October 1865; "Latest from Cariboo," *Daily British Colonist*, 18 May 1866; "Up Country Telegrams," *British Columbian*, 19 May 1866; "Return of the Telegraph Expedition," *British Columbian*, 27 October 1866; "Prospecting," *Cariboo Sentinel*, 22 July 1867; "John Chinaman and Wages," *Cariboo Sentinel*, 11 June 1870; "From Cariboo," *Mainland Guardian*, 25 June 1870.

⁴¹ Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

histories. Daunting as it may be, this project would allow scholars to better understand the complex interconnections between newcomer and Native populations in much of the north and central interior of the province at this crucial juncture.⁴²

Most of the work on gold rushes describes the transition of rowdy mining camps into orderly communities. In these histories, non-whites tend to appear as secondary figures, primarily serving to illustrate the unsettled and diverse nature of the goldfields before “order” is imposed. There is some truth to this narrative. Gold rushes in the Cariboo and elsewhere displaced Natives and relegated them to a second-class, and often invisible, status in new settler societies. However, as scholars increasingly come to interpret the gold rushes of the mid-nineteenth century as imperial projects, the importance of destabilizing this narrative becomes apparent.

Considering the Cariboo as part of a colonial society shifts our understanding of Barkerville and its surroundings. Though scholars like Adele Perry, Tina Loo, and others focus on how people of European descent created a colonial society in British Columbia during the gold rush, we know too little of how non-white actors understood, participated in, subverted, or rejected the creation of this colonial society in the Cariboo.⁴³ For example, despite Ying-ying Chen’s excellent study of the Chinese population of the Cariboo, we know too little about how this population understood, let alone shaped, early colonial society.⁴⁴ Imperial discourse usually portrayed non-whites as passive and submissive in the face of colonial authority, but imperial histories elsewhere suggest that supposedly colonized people often contested or selectively adopted aspects of the imperial project.⁴⁵ Given what Adele Perry uncovers in her study, it seems likely that the colonial project was far more contested during the Cariboo gold rush than has heretofore been acknowledged. Drawing on insights from the innovative work being done on empire internationally may give scholars a starting point from which to uncover the hidden histories of how non-whites in the Cariboo reacted to the colonial project.

⁴² See the article by Mica Jorgenson, this volume.

⁴³ Perry, *Edge of Empire*; Tina Loo, *Making Law, Order, and Authority in British Columbia*; Christopher Herbert, “White Power, Yellow Gold: Colonialism and Identity in the California and British Columbia Gold Rushes, 1848–1871” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2012).

⁴⁴ One of the most insightful studies remains Chen, “Colonies of the Tang.”

⁴⁵ See, for example, Albert Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the Californian Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

Linking the Cariboo to other contexts has further benefits. Adele Perry and others show that immigration and imperial identity were a major concern of the colonial authorities in British Columbia and London.⁴⁶ But in his study of immigration in the United States, Paul Spickard identifies an Anglo-normative bias in both immigration policies and in the historiography of immigration.⁴⁷ We see this bias operating in histories of the Cariboo, where much attention has been focused on non-white immigrants, particularly the Chinese, but where there has been a decided tendency to ignore the racial, ethnic, and gender identities of European immigrants. Part of the problem is that scholars simply do not know enough about the migration to the Cariboo from Europe or anywhere else. The number and characteristics of migrants and from whence they came all need to be revealed in more detail.⁴⁸ It would be enlightening to find out how the Cariboo gold rush was understood in source countries because this might help us understand the expectations these people had before departure, how those expectations were reconfigured by the reality of the Cariboo, and how that process shaped the ways in which individuals and groups acted in the Cariboo.

Studies of the Cariboo would also benefit by drawing on some of the latest trends in the study of gold rushes and colonial societies elsewhere, in particular, the growing attention being paid to issues of gender and sexuality. Due to the overwhelmingly male character of the gold rush migrants, women's history has been given short shrift in most studies of gold rushes. This ignores not only the small, but important, number of newcomer women who migrated to the goldfields but also the substantial number of Native women whom miners encountered in British Columbia.⁴⁹ Second, given the homosocial nature of goldfield society, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the most exciting recent work on gold rushes explores the way that gender concepts

⁴⁶ Perry, *Edge of Empire*; Herbert, "White Power."

⁴⁷ Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Mae M. Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *Journal of American History* 86, 1 (1999): 67-92.

⁴⁸ Wright, drawing on his own gold rush database, has determined some basic patterns of the Cariboo goldfields population. See Wright, *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields*, 53-56.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, there has been greater attention paid to women during the Klondike Rush. The best study to date is Charlene Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998). For an excellent recent overview of the women, European and First Nations, of the Cariboo mining communities, see Wright, *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields*, 81-98.

shaped the perceptions and expectations of participants in gold rushes.⁵⁰ Yet here, too, we have little understanding of the gender constructions and perceptions of non-Anglo-American migrants. Third, the burgeoning field of sexuality studies suggests not only the importance of sexual practices but also the possibility of recovering the histories of these practices (even though there are few available conventional records).⁵¹ The hugely skewed demographics of the Cariboo gold rush would seem to make each of these topics more important, not less.

Environmental history marks another area of research that is just beginning to be explored in the Cariboo. Gold rush letters, journals, and newspaper articles are filled with examples of the extreme hardships faced (some undoubtedly played up for outside audiences) by gold miners in the Cariboo. A thousand metres above sea level, and facing almost subarctic winter temperatures, the miners of the Cariboo had to contend with long winters, large freshets, and swarms of mosquitoes. In response, the miners went to even more heroic lengths than did their counterparts in gentler climes in attempting to control the environment by rerouting rivers, sluicing hills, and building roads and trails they laboured to keep open year-round. In short, the environment mattered a great deal to the gold rush residents of the Cariboo. Although Robert Galois undertook some pioneering work on the interrelation between the geology of the Cariboo and the gold rush, Megan Prins's more recent study of the experience of seasons is one of the first to apply the new approaches of the field of environmental history to the Cariboo.⁵² Yet, because her study is focused on 1862, questions remain about the extent to which her findings can be generalized across time, and more work clearly remains to be done on this and other aspects of the environmental history of the Cariboo gold rush.

The economic history of the Cariboo gold rush also begs attention, and the holdings in Barkerville may be particularly useful here. In the Cariboo, unlike in California and the middle Fraser River, capital-intensive forms of mining (sluicing, wing dams, and deep mines) came

⁵⁰ Adele Perry, *Edge of Empire*; Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000); Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁵¹ For arguably the best survey of the topic, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Sears has done some interesting work applying queer theory to the California gold rush. See Clare Sears, "All That Glitters: Trans-ing California's Gold Rush Migrations," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, 2-3 (2008): 383-402. See also Johnson, *Roaring Camp*; Peter Boag, *Re-dressing America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

⁵² Prins, "Seasons of Gold"; Galois, "Gold Mining."

to dominate very quickly.⁵³ Joint-stock companies and wage labour were soon characteristic of mining in the Cariboo.⁵⁴ In light of an emerging scholarly consensus that many of the miners who rushed to California were attracted by the belief that it offered an alternative to wage labour, it would be helpful to know how the men who came to the Cariboo made sense of wage work in the context of the changing economy in the East.⁵⁵ Perhaps more important, it is also unclear how the companies of the Cariboo fit into a larger, global flow of capital and trade. One very suggestive work here is Kathryn Morse's *The Nature of Gold*. In her study of the Klondike gold rush, Morse traces the economic and cultural ties that linked the Klondike to Seattle, Chicago, and elsewhere.⁵⁶ We need to explore what economic centres the Cariboo was tied to, how those connections operated, and how those relationships affected the Cariboo and its metropole or metropolises.⁵⁷

To summarize, there are two broad, but interlocking, directions for future research on the early Cariboo. First, much remains to be done to get to know the participants: their backgrounds, expectations, perceptions, and experiences. Second, scholars need to connect the Cariboo gold rush to transnational processes of empire, capital, and culture. To do so, they would benefit by looking to developments in the study of gold rushes elsewhere for new methodologies, approaches, and insights. At the same time, they are going to have to think creatively and to cooperate across disciplinary boundaries if they hope to assemble the evidence required to deepen our understanding of the gold rush.

⁵³ See Wright, *Barkerville and the Cariboo Goldfields*, 33, 43, 214-15.

⁵⁴ Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972) saw much the same thing.

⁵⁵ See, in particular, Roberts, *American Alchemy*.

⁵⁶ Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ See the articles by Ramona Boyle and Richard Mackie, and Tzu-I Chung, respectively, this volume.