

“GROWING UP AND GROWN UP ... IN OUR FUTURE CITY”:

Discourses of Childhood and Settler Futurity in Colonial British Columbia

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IN FEBRUARY 1859, COLONEL Richard Clement Moody sent a long letter to Arthur Blackwood, head of the North American Department in the British Colonial Office. Written only weeks after his arrival on the northern Pacific slope of North America, Moody's letter discussed the foundations of governance in the recently claimed colony of British Columbia, which he – and the Royal Engineers detachment under his command – sought to translate into British presence, practice, and power on the ground. But so, too, did Moody describe the familial context in which he worked, complaining that his letter had been “written amidst 10,000 distractions ... [in] a very tiny house full of [his] own dear Children whose shouts[,] sometimes ‘fun’ sometimes ‘wailings[,]’ [did] not tend to compose the thoughts.”¹ While Moody framed his children as wailing interruptions to his official work, in this article I suggest that young people were central to, rather than distractions from, the settler colonial project in mid-nineteenth-century British Columbia. In particular, the idea of children was fundamentally important to a collective politics of aspiration – what I call “settler futurity” – that lay at the very foundations of settler colonialism. In a colony in which white settler power and belonging seemed tenuous, the notion that children were the future was more than clichéd aphorism; here, adult Britons understood their children as critical actors who could ensure an enduring

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¹ Richard Clement Moody in Willard E. Ireland, ed., “First Impressions: Letter of Colonel Richard Clement Moody, R.E., to Arthur Blackwood, February 1, 1859,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 15, 1-2 (1951): 107.

settler political and social order in the future, despite its absence from the present.

In what follows, I investigate the entangled relationship between settler futurity and childhood by examining British adults' representations of children in Sapperton, the Royal Engineers camp under Moody's command.² Sapperton had a remarkably dense concentration of children – an extraordinary cluster that can only be explained through a collective British investment in an imagined settler future. To understand the contours of this history, I draw on a range of sources, including correspondence between colonial administrators, metropolitan civil servants, and military officials as well as newspapers, personal letters, and reminiscences. I demonstrate that, in the context of failing colonial expectations in the present, adult Britons evoked inextricable connections between children and the future in order to inform policies on immigration, education, military missions, and land. Although adult discourses never entirely determined children's experiences or later memories, such discussions and policies did significantly influence young people's lives and facilitated their remarkable quantitative clustering in Sapperton. The particularities of the military detachment made these children especially subject to official attention and intervention, but discussions of the Royal Engineers' children were not mere parochial anomalies; rather, I conclude that these discourses reflected a broadly shared British vision of families, childhood, and the colonial future that was critical in shaping mid-nineteenth-century British Columbia.

Through this discussion of futurity and discourses of childhood, I aim to open two analytical avenues for future research on settler colonialism. First, I contend that it is critical to understand how settler colonialism has been configured by distinctive (if never uncontested) efforts to generate a particular future. In developing this point, I am influenced by a wider scholarship on the future, which asserts that how one envisages the future affects one's actions, understandings, feelings, and experiences in the present. In this framing, time is a way of understanding and acting in the world, not merely a container in which events happen. For historians, David Engerman argues, it should thus be "impossible to

² Here I use "British" and "Briton" to refer to people who identified (and were identified) with their personal and familial links to the British Isles, participated in the settler project, were particularly privileged by colonial political and legal structures, and in most cases were generally racialized as white. See Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31, 4 (1992): 309–29; and Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007).

analyze experience without incorporating expectation; how historical subjects imagined their futures is crucial to understanding their pasts.”³

These insights have important implications for settler colonial studies. A burgeoning interdisciplinary scholarship examines settler colonialism as a distinct project of power aimed at the dispossession and elimination of Indigenous peoples and the establishment of new political, legal, social, cultural, and economic orders that privilege and empower (some) settlers.⁴ Research on nineteenth-century British Columbia has especially focused on the relationship between race, bodies, and space in shaping settler formations.⁵ However, scholars must also analyze settler colonialism as a project in and for time. Settler colonialism’s distinguishing features are the expectations that drive it. In other colonial enterprises, such as British India, colonizing powers generally expect(ed) to leave after extracting resources and exploiting Indigenous or migrant labour. Although extraction and exploitation characterize settler colonies too, these projects are pointed towards different ends: their imagined futures turn on an ongoing and exclusive settler presence, power, sovereignty, and belonging. It is this anticipated destination – the *staying*, and all that it entails – that sets settler colonialism apart. By developing the concept of settler futurity, I call for further analysis of the processes by which a particular vision of the future came to shape policies, practices, and lives in British Columbia, and the ways that this settler futurity has been contested and challenged by alternative visions of a time-to-come.

Second, I underscore the inextricable relationship between settler futurity and colonial families, particularly children. A rich field of trans-imperial scholarship demonstrates that the family was central to the politics of empire.⁶ In British Columbia, the existing work focuses

³ David C. Engerman, “Introduction: Histories of the Future and the Futures of History,” *American Historical Review* (December 2012): 1402. See also Andrew Baldwin, “Whiteness and Futurity: Towards a Research Agenda,” *Progress in Human Geography* 36, 2 (2012): 172–87; and Ben Anderson, “Preemption, Precaution, Preparedness: Anticipatory Action and Future Geographies,” *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (2010): 777–98.

⁴ See Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁵ For example, Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); R.W. Sandwell, *Contesting Rural Space: Land Policy and Practices of Resettlement on Saltspring Island, 1859–1891* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005); Renisa Mawani, *Colonial Proximities: Crossracial Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871–1921* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); and Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010). Not all of these scholars affiliate with settler colonial studies, but these works share conceptual and historical concerns with the field.

⁶ For an overview, see Esmé Cleall, Laura Ishiguro, and Emily J. Manktelow, “Imperial Relations: Histories of Family in the British Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 14, 1 (2013), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/503247>.

especially on marriages or sexual relationships between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men.⁷ Although historians of childhood have argued that young people were essential to imperial projects around the world, settler children remain largely absent from the literature on British Columbia, investigated neither as political actors nor as politicized subjects.⁸ However, a focus on futurity in Sapperton reveals that children were critical to the settler project in a wide range of ways, from immigration and education systems to military policy and colonial budgets.⁹ Weaving together these points, I call for scholars of settler colonialism to attend to the critical significance of expectation, aspiration, and the reproductive family, particularly as children were invested with the generational power and responsibility to create racialized and exclusive settler futures.

“CHILDREN OF EVERY SIZE AND EVERY DESCRIPTION”:
CHILDREN IN THE ROYAL ENGINEERS COMMUNITY

At first glance, a military detachment seems an unlikely place to study settler children. Officially, the Columbia Detachment consisted of approximately 165 men, members of the Royal Engineers, a corps of the British Army trained in engineering and other trades. During the late 1850s and early 1860s, they were stationed at Sapperton, adjacent to New Westminster (the colonial capital that they surveyed and established) on the Fraser River. Formed and sent to the newly proclaimed mainland colony of British Columbia in 1858, the detachment’s official role was to aid in the “maintenance of order and the protection of British interests” and to survey land and build infrastructure. In so doing, it was to lay the foundations – literally and figuratively – for white settlement in British

⁷ For example, Jean Barman, “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850–1900,” *BC Studies* 115/116 (Autumn/Winter 1997–98): 237–66; Sylvia Van Kirk, “From ‘Marrying-In’ to ‘Marrying-Out’: Changing Patterns of Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Marriage in Colonial Canada,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, 3 (2002): 1–11; and Richard Phillips, “Settler Colonialism and the Nuclear Family,” *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* 53 (2009): 239–53.

⁸ See Shirleene Robinson and Simon Sleight, eds., *Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). In a notable exception in British Columbia, Kathryn Bridge explores settler children’s experiences; in contrast to Bridge’s approach, this article focuses on adults’ discursive representations of children. See Kathryn Anne Bridge, “Being Young in the Country: Settler Children and Childhood in British Columbia and Alberta, 1860–1925” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2012).

⁹ This argument speaks to a wider scholarship on childhood. For one article that signals the possibilities of fruitful comparative study in this area, see Joy Schulz, “Birthing Empire: Economies of Childrearing and the Formation of American Colonialism in Hawai’i, 1820–1848,” *Diplomatic History* 38, 5 (2014): 895–925.

Columbia.¹⁰ Secretary of state for the colonies Edward Bulwer Lytton favoured the Royal Engineers for this task because he imagined them as “the raw material” necessary for securing the colony’s intended future; their particular training, he wrote, would enable them to build “roads and bridges – the foundation of a future city &c.”¹¹ Historical accounts of the Royal Engineers in British Columbia generally follow this lead and frame the detachment as a group of military men whose work as surveyors, engineers, and military personnel shaped the colony during its foundational years.¹² Although some scholars examine the significance of women in Sapperton, children rarely figure in such discussions.¹³

There were children in the military community, however. Most of the detachment – 122 men – travelled from Britain to British Columbia on the *Thames City* between late 1858 and early 1859. They were accompanied by thirty-one women and thirty-four children.¹⁴ According to a shipboard newspaper, the *Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette and Cape Horn Chronicle*, at least five more children were born on the five-month voyage.¹⁵ The remainder of the men arrived on separate ships, accompanied by at least seven women and eight children.¹⁶

¹⁰ Great Britain Colonial Office, memorandum, “The Royal Engineers in British Columbia,” 1860, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), GR 0319.

¹¹ Edward Bulwer Lytton, first minute, enclosed in James Douglas to Edward Stanley, Victoria, 19 August 1858, p. 98, Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 60/1, 10342; and Lytton, second minute, enclosed in Douglas to Stanley, Victoria, 19 August 1858, p. 101, CO 60/1, 10342. All cited CO records were accessed through *Colonial Despatches of Vancouver Island and British Columbia*, <http://bcgenesis.uvic.ca/>.

¹² For examples across the twentieth century, see Frederic W. Howay, *The Work of the Royal Engineers in British Columbia, 1858 to 1863* (Victoria: Richard Wolfenden, 1910); Mary Catherine Lillian Cope, “Colonel Moody and the Royal Engineers in British Columbia” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1940); Robert England, “Disbanded and Discharged Soldiers in Canada Prior to 1914,” *Canadian Historical Review* 27, 1 (1946): 12–14; Frances M. Woodward, “The Influence of the Royal Engineers on the Development of British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 24 (Winter 1974–75): 3–51; and Beth Hill, *Sappers: The Royal Engineers in British Columbia* (Ganges, BC: Horsdal and Schubart, 1987).

¹³ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 147; Jacqueline Gresko, “Roughing It in the Bush in British Columbia: Mary Moody’s Pioneer Life in New Westminster, 1859–1863,” in *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, ed. Gillian Laura Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, 38–51 (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992); and Laura Ishiguro, “Material Girls: Daughters, Dress and Distance in the Trans-imperial Family,” *Colonial Girlhood in Literature, Culture and History, 1840–1950*, ed. Kristine Moruzi and Michelle J. Smith, 214–27 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁴ William Romaine to Herman Merivale, 30 August 1859, p. 40, CO 60/5, 8652.

¹⁵ *Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette and Cape Horn Chronicle*, 6 November 1858; 27 November 1858; 4 December 1858; 15 January 1859; 26 February 1859; and 2 April 1859. See also Douglas to Lytton, 25 April 1859, p. 322, CO 60/4, 5891.

¹⁶ Woodward, “Influence of the Royal Engineers,” 12.

These numbers did not go unremarked. One article in the *Emigrant Soldiers' Gazette* notes, for example:

There are doubtless many occasions which call for the mild reproof, "Little children should be seen and not heard." Still there is no reason why they should not be thought of, and to judge from our column of births since our departure, it is evidently the mature resolution of the Columbia Detachment of the Royal Engineers to increase the rising generation to the best of their ability.

The article then describes this "rising generation":

We have children of every size and every description on board, children with names and children without names, pink children, and red children, and yellow children, and white children, children with comforters round their necks, and one child with occasionally white tape round its neck, children who can walk, children who can only toddle, and children who can do neither; children who blow their noses and children who don't blow their noses; ... children of every colour, every age and every temper, and there will probably ere long be just as many more children as different from these as these are from one another.¹⁷

This article should not be taken literally: other sources make it clear that the child with "white tape round its neck" was a cat, for example, and the children were, to my knowledge, all white and certainly not of "every colour." Nonetheless, its hyperbole grew from some truth and can be read as part of an ongoing commentary on the remarkable, expanding place of children in the detachment.

More children were born, and attracted comment, after the detachment's arrival in British Columbia. In 1858, Mary Hawks Moody accompanied her husband Richard to the colony, with their four children; three more daughters were born to the couple before the detachment disbanded in 1863.¹⁸ In letters to her mother and sister, Hawks Moody noted the rising numbers of children in Sapperton. In September 1859, for example, she remarked to her sister Emily, "All the babies are to be christened ... – 5 or 6 all ready. We have a 'Francis Thames City' & a 'Euphrates Thomas'" – named for the ships on which they were born.¹⁹ In 1859, Anglican chaplain John Sheepshanks estimated that there were

¹⁷ *Emigrant Soldiers' Gazette and Cape Horn Chronicle*, 29 January 1859.

¹⁸ Ishiguro, "Material Girls," 217.

¹⁹ The *Euphrates* left London on 3 January and arrived 27 June 1859. Mary Susanna (Hawks) Moody, Mary Hawks Moody to sister Emily, New Westminster, 22 September 1859, BSA,

between fifty and sixty children in the community.²⁰ Child mortality rates were low – an 1860 medical report praised Sapperton for being “remarkably free from childhood diseases” – and the number of children kept expanding.²¹ Richard Moody reported seventy in March 1861 and eighty-seven (including fifty under the age of five years) in May 1862.²² In January 1863, Anglican bishop George Hills wrote that Sapperton had “about 120 children who increase at the yearly rate of 25.”²³ Four months later, Governor James Douglas claimed that the number of children had more than tripled since the detachment’s arrival in the colony.²⁴ By this estimate, there were almost nine children for every ten men in the detachment in 1863.

To judge from their repeated comments on the matter, those engaged in the colonial project found these numbers both remarkable and significant. They were not wrong in this. Military and colonial administrators supported unusually large numbers of women and children from the beginning. As War Office staffer Edward Lugard later noted, the initial inclusion of “35 women and their children” in the detachment was “considerably in excess of the regulated number.”²⁵ An astonishingly high birthrate meant that, by 1863, the proportion of children in the population of Sapperton (approximately 42 percent) was considerably higher than that in England and Wales (35 percent).²⁶

This cluster of children was especially striking because, in general, early colonial British Columbia seemed to fall far short of British aspirations for an enduring white settler society rooted in heterosexual nuclear family life, small-scale agriculture, and the dispossession of Indigenous

MS-1101; BCA, baptism record index, 88-1-68, Francis Thames-City Price, Victoria, 2 June 1859; and Woodward, “Influence of the Royal Engineers,” 12 and 42.

²⁰ John Sheepshanks to Moody, New Westminster, n.d., CO 60/5, 12496, enclosed in Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 19 October 1859, pp. 154-55.

²¹ Quoted in Gresko, “Roughing It in the Bush,” 49n30, from Army Medical Department records for 1860, cited by the *British Columbian*, 1 July 1863.

²² Moody to Colonial Secretary, New Westminster, 19 March 1861, CO 60/11, 404, copy enclosed in Douglas to Newcastle, 14 November 1861, p. 140; and Cope, “Colonel Moody and the Royal Engineers,” 114.

²³ UBC Rare Books and Special Collections, RBSC-ARC-1245, George Hills Fonds, box 1, vol. 6, journals, 1 January 1863.

²⁴ Douglas to Newcastle, 22 April 1863, pp. 249-51, CO 60/15, 5956.

²⁵ Edward Lugard to Frederic Rogers, War Office, 27 January 1864, p. 266, CO 60/20, 776 (*Colonial Despatches* transcription); and Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), esp. 36.

²⁶ Michael Anderson, “Social Implications of Demographic Change,” in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, vol. 2, *People and Their Environment*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 46, fig. 1.10.

peoples.²⁷ Even as they were written out of settler visions of the future, Indigenous peoples significantly outnumbered newcomers to the colony, and settlers relied – heavily – on their labour and knowledge.²⁸ British Columbia had comparatively little arable land, and in the 1850s and 1860s, at least, few settlers were much interested in establishing long-term agricultural settlements. Instead, the Fraser and Cariboo gold rushes attracted (and disappointed) a very diverse range of migrants – mostly men, not necessarily white or British, most of whom intended to leave the colony rather than to stay in it. Beyond Sapperton, British women and children were a small minority; colonial visions of a British Columbia transformed by white settler families seemed remote indeed.²⁹ Amid these disappointments at the course of colonial development, the Royal Engineers’ children came to embody British hopes for the colony’s future.

“INTENTION TO STAY”: THE IMMIGRATION OF COLUMBIA DETACHMENT FAMILIES

Staffers in the Colonial Office and the War Office, with the support of the Treasury, facilitated the immigration of women and children with the Columbia Detachment because they hoped that these families would help to create an ongoing white familial settler future. In this sense, the detachment’s role in British Columbia was twofold. First, and most commonly discussed, it had a temporary military mission to establish infrastructure and to defend the interests of the British Crown. In addition, it had a civil purpose in a larger and longer-term project to move “actual settlers” to a colony that otherwise seemed unlikely to attract and retain British families of “character.”³⁰

²⁷ For example, T. Frederick Elliot, minutes on Douglas to Newcastle, 8 October 1861, CO 60/11, 10955; Lytton, second minute, enclosed in Douglas to Stanley, Victoria, 19 August 1858, p. 103, CO 60/1, 10342; and Douglas to Lytton, Victoria, 4 July 1859, in *Further Papers Relative to the Affairs of British Columbia: Copies of Despatches from the Governor of British Columbia to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and from the Secretary of State to the Governor, Relative to the Government of the Colony*, Part III (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1860), 29.

²⁸ Perry, *Edge of Empire*, 13–14; John Douglas Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 41; and John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

²⁹ On settler children after 1860, see Bridge, “Being Young in the Country.” On gender and the settler population, see Perry, *Edge of Empire*; and Robert Hogg, *Men and Manliness on the Frontier: Queensland and British Columbia in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

³⁰ Douglas to Newcastle, New Westminster, 23 May 1860, in *Further Papers Relative to the Affairs of British Columbia: Copies of Despatches from the Governor of British Columbia to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and from the Secretary of State to the Governor*, Part IV (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1862), 6; and Lytton to Douglas, Downing Street, 2 September 1858, p. 134,

Unlike most British military regiments in the mid-nineteenth-century empire, the Columbia Detachment was formed especially for its BC assignment. Arguing that the colony desperately needed “Englishmen of character and respectability,” Lytton encouraged the strategic selection of men for official positions there, hoping to encourage the migration of people willing to translate temporary appointments into permanent settlement.³¹ In this spirit, the Royal Engineers detachment was formed primarily by volunteers from existing regiments, who declared their desire to take discharges upon disbandment and to stay in the colony as “the first settlers” instead of returning to Britain.³² As particular incentive, the men were offered land grants in British Columbia in exchange for their service.³³ Through this strategy, colonial administrators hoped to create a detachment of “Military Settlers” who would help to establish a “farming class” and a “dwelling place for Englishmen” – both characteristics upon which the colonial future was imagined to depend.³⁴

Colonial administrators knew that men alone would not make the British settler society to which they aspired. White women and children were necessary to the permanent and ongoing refiguring of British Columbia – and, in particular, to the reproductive and generational work of British families in establishing and maintaining a settler society. Governor Douglas on Vancouver Island worried that British women and children remained “a class of which the Colony [was] still lamentably deficient” and envisaged the ideal migrant to British Columbia as “the actual settler investing his own labour in the formation of a permanent home and property for himself and family.”³⁵ Similar concerns were common in the second half of the nineteenth century. They lay behind the assisted immigration of white British women to Canada after 1860

Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG7, G8C/6 (CO 398/1). All cited LAC records were accessed through *Colonial Despatches*, <http://bcgenesis.uvic.ca/>.

³¹ Lytton to Douglas, Downing Street, 2 September 1858, p. 134, LAC RG7, G8C/6 (CO 398/1).

³² Blackwood, 27 October 1858, minutes on William Gosset to Under-Secretary of State, Windsor, 25 October 1858, p. 115, CO 60/3, 10964.

³³ Woodward, “Influence of the Royal Engineers,” 39–48. This was part of a longer history of soldier settlement policies, which offered land as incentive for service. See England, “Disbanded and Discharged Settlers”; and Michael Roche, “World War One British Empire Discharged Soldier Settlement in Comparative Focus,” *History Compass* 9 (2011): 1–15. Thank you to Jonathan Weir for this point.

³⁴ Lytton to Douglas, Downing Street, 2 September 1858, p. 132, LAC RG7, G8C/6 (CO 398/1); Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 18 October 1859, in *Further Papers*, Part III, 67; and Moody in Ireland, “First Impressions,” 103.

³⁵ Douglas to Newcastle, New Westminster, 23 May 1860, in *Further Papers*, Part IV, 6; and Douglas to Newcastle, 2 July 1863, p. 18 (*Colonial Despatches* transcription), CO 60/16, 8065. See also Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 18 October 1859, in *Further Papers*, Part III, 67; and Douglas to Newcastle, 29 May 1862, p. 236, CO 60/13, 7709.

and the movement of eighty thousand British children to Canada after 1868; most of these “labouring children” were under fourteen years of age and came from working-class backgrounds, and almost all were apprenticed as agricultural labourers and domestic servants.³⁶

The Royal Engineers’ children were perhaps more fortunate, at least in the sense that they moved with their parents and had a wider range of future careers imagined for them as settlers.³⁷ However, their migration to British Columbia similarly rested on adult visions of the colony’s future. The relationship between their migration and settler futurity was perhaps clearest in 1860, when civil servants, colonial administrators, and military officers debated whether and how to support the travel of more women and children than originally envisaged.³⁸ In early 1860, Richard Moody sought financial support for seven women and six children to travel from Britain to join

certain married men of the Royal Engineers under my command who ... were obliged to leave their wives & families behind them on the Detachment embarking for this colony ... [or to join] men of steady character, to whom, on *their notifying to me their intention of settling in the colony*, I have given permission to marry.³⁹

The decision hinged on the question of long-term family settlement.⁴⁰ The undersecretary of state for the colonies, Chichester Fortescue,

³⁶ Perry, *Edge of Empire*; Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Emigration to Canada and Australia, 1860-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Ellen Boucher, *Empire’s Children: Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World, 1869-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

³⁷ Lugard to Rogers, War Office, 27 January 1864, p. 266 (*Colonial Despatches* transcription), CO 60/20, 776.

³⁸ Stephen Walcott to Elliot, Emigration Office, 31 August 1860, from p. 279, CO 60/9, 8564; Lugard to Rogers, War Office, 15 September 1860, from p. 274, CO 60/9, 9021; George A. Hamilton to Rogers, Treasury, 9 October 1860, p. 234, CO 60/9, 9623; Walcott to Rogers, Emigration Office, 20 October 1860, p. 87, CO 60/9, 10092; Thomas Murdoch to Rogers, Emigration Office, 14 November 1860, from p. 89, CO 60/9, 10674; and Hamilton to Rogers, Treasury, 18 November 1861, pp. 234-35, CO 60/12, 10231.

³⁹ Emphasis in original. Moody to Douglas, New Westminster, 29 March 1860, enclosed in Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 12 May 1860, p. 270, CO 60/7, 7719. See also Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 12 May 1860, from p. 268, CO 60/7, 7719, especially enclosure, Moody, List of Royal Engineers who had applied for transport assistance for women and children; and, minutes, Elliot, in Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 3 November 1863, p. 246, CO 60/16, 12528.

⁴⁰ Chichester Fortescue, minutes on draft, Rogers to Emigration Commissioners, 14 August 1860, enclosed in Moody to Under-Secretary of State, New Westminster, 9 April 1860, p. 369, CO 60/9, 5416. On the McColl family as good settlers, for example, see Moody to Douglas, New Westminster, 2 February 1860, enclosed in Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 12 May 1860, p. 273, CO 60/7, 7719; Vane Jadis, minutes in Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 3 November

reminded his colleagues that they should “ascertain whether the men who send for their families [were] prepared to take their discharge & stay in the Colony.”⁴¹ Colonial Office servant Frederic Rogers was optimistic, suggesting: “the men sending for their wives is so strong an indication of an intention to stay.”⁴² The Colonial Office’s assistant under-secretary Frederick Elliot declared: “the more of them that remain as Settlers the better and ... there will be no danger of error in sending out the families.”⁴³ Collectively convinced of the families’ potential value as future settlers, the Colonial Office, War Office, and Treasury agreed: these Royal Engineers men would need to swear that they “intend[ed] to remain in British Columbia after their discharge from the service,” and, in exchange, they would receive support for the travel of wives, fiancées, and children not already with the detachment.⁴⁴

These administrative decisions – to support the initially large migration, then additional women and children, with promised land grants at the end of the men’s service – were rooted in a shared commitment to a white familial settler future. Because of their families’ “intention to stay” and their anticipated futures as settlers, the Royal Engineers children were allowed to join the detachment in Sapperton. In this way, the children became the very point, and the intended beneficiaries, of their parents’ labour abroad. Here, the children represented seeds of settler colonial optimism in a place for which an ongoing white British future seemed so vulnerable, even unlikely, without them.

“TO CARRY ON THE SAME HEALTHY INFLUENCE”:
EDUCATION AND THE ENGINEERING OF SETTLER ADULTS

In early 1859, the *Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette* imagined a future British Columbia populated by the detachment children “growing up and grown up” in the world that their fathers had built. In this vision, the children had become:

1863, p. 247, CO 60/16, 12528; Lugard to Rogers, War Office, 27 January 1864, p. 266 (*Colonial Despatches* transcription), CO 60/20, 776; Hamilton to Rogers, Treasury, 23 February 1864, p. 158 (transcription), CO 60/20, 1683; and Hamilton to Rogers, Treasury, 24 March 1864, p. 164 (transcription), CO 60/20, 2840.

⁴¹ Fortescue, minutes on Moody to Under-Secretary of State, New Westminster, 9 April 1860, p. 365, CO 60/9, 5416.

⁴² Rogers, note on draft reply, George C. Lewis to Douglas, 21 July 1860, enclosed in Moody to Under-Secretary of State, New Westminster, 9 April 1860, p. 367, CO 60/9, 5416.

⁴³ Elliot, minutes on Moody to Under-Secretary of State, New Westminster, 9 April 1860, p. 364–65, CO 60/9, 5416.

⁴⁴ Lewis to Douglas, Downing Street, 21 July 1860, p. 288, LAC, RG7, G8C/9 (CO 398/1).

land-owners and house-owners, doing their duty like Englishmen and Englishwomen in every walk of life, editors of Colonial newspapers, actors and actresses, aldermen and burgesses, perhaps even Johnny Scales town-councilman, and Miss Judy the prima donna of the Italian Opera, in our future city on the banks of the river Fraser.⁴⁵

Even though they might not have remembered or ever known England, the children were invested with the “duty” of reproducing Englishness as adults in British Columbia. At the same time, British adults tended to view children as vulnerable and malleable, and agreed that numbers alone would not guarantee their future characters or colonial roles. In this light, adults discussed how to shape colonial childhoods in order to ensure the children met this future responsibility. Focusing on schooling, Britons agreed that careful crafting of children would help to create the right sort of person to contribute to the right kind of settler society – one that was respectably and loyally “British,” both politically and culturally.

In general, education was seen as a critical tool for cultivating values in children and the colony, although administrators did not always agree on specific policies.⁴⁶ For example, as Jean Barman explains, the colonial period was marked by debates about whether non-Indigenous children’s education should follow the “British class-based denominational model” or “a free non-sectarian system similar to that desired ... elsewhere across North America.”⁴⁷ At stake in these discussions were visions of British Columbia’s future. Some administrators feared that a failure to provide a “British” education would have a negative impact on British Columbia, including its class structures and social divisions, and its loyalty to the metropole. In 1864, for example, Governor Frederick Seymour requested support for school books to enable a more securely and staunchly metropolitan education in the colony. He despaired that BC schools used “American School Books, of rather an objectionable kind. The spelling [was] that adopted by some classes in the United States. The sentiments [were] violently republican. The United States [was] lauded

⁴⁵ *Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette and Cape Horn Chronicle*, 29 January 1859.

⁴⁶ For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, schooling was clearly aimed at crafting individual and collective futures. See Jean Barman and Mona Gleason, eds., *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: Brush, 2003). On settler education in particular, see Sean Foster Patrick Carleton, “Colonizing Minds: Public Education, the ‘Textbook Indian,’ and Settler Colonialism in British Columbia, 1920-1970,” *BC Studies* 169 (Spring 2011): 101-30; and Jean Barman, *Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984).

⁴⁷ Jean Barman, “The Emergence of Educational Structures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia,” in Barman and Gleason, *Children, Teachers and Schools*, 13.

at the expense of England.⁴⁸ Such concerns about American schooling reflected a broader pattern of anti-Americanism among many British administrators in British Columbia.⁴⁹ Whatever an individual's specific position, however, debates about education were also underpinned by a broadly shared certainty that settler children, education, and the colonial future were intimately entwined. As Attorney General Henry Crease argued, education was about the "future of this country," which would "depend on our children and children's children."⁵⁰

The question of education arose early in Sapperton. Here, a range of parties involved themselves in the children's schooling, including local representatives of the Anglican Church, military officers in the detachment, War Office and Colonial Office staffers in London, colonial administrators in British Columbia, and parents and children in the community. The detachment's chaplain, John Sheepshanks, started the discussion in 1859 when he wrote to Moody requesting support for a school:

I immediately on my arrival here instituted enquiries as to the state of the regimental school, when to my surprise I learned that up to the present time nothing of the kind has been established. There are some fifty or sixty children now in the camp, a considerable portion of whom are ready to go to school.

In this letter, Sheepshanks expressed particular concern about the effects that a lack of education might have on children so far from metropolitan influence. While the *Emigrant Soldiers' Gazette* had imagined the children as destined to become "Englishmen and Englishwomen," Sheepshanks worried that already "many of them [were] forgetting all they learned in England." Because of this, he argued: "I would urge upon you the desirability, nay the necessity of immediately affording some means of instruction for these children." Otherwise, they would "go about wild and untaught," with serious and wider implications, "inflict[ing] a deep injury upon the parents as well as the children themselves."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Frederick Seymour to E. Cardwell, 28 November 1864, p. 427 (*Colonial Despatches* transcription), CO 60/19, 1378.

⁴⁹ See Daniel Patrick Marshall, "Claiming the Land: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to British Columbia" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2000), 159; Barry M. Gough, "Keeping British Columbia British: The Law-and-Order Question on a Gold Mining Frontier," *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 38, 3 (1975): 269–80.

⁵⁰ "Public Education in British Columbia," *British Colonist*, 18 July 1864.

⁵¹ Sheepshanks to Moody, New Westminster, n.d., copy enclosed in Douglas to Newcastle, Victoria, 19 October 1859, pp. 154–55, CO 60/5, 12496.

Other settler children were already attending a newly established private school in New Westminster, run by Emily Woodman. According to an interview with settler George Green, recorded in J.S. Matthews's *Early Vancouver*, Woodman had arrived with a group of Methodist missionaries in 1859. Like Sheepshanks, she was concerned to find that "no school existed, and the children were doing nothing. Government refused any assistance." So she opened a private school – initially for five children, but very soon seventeen. However, this was of little avail to the people of neighbouring Sapperton. Sheepshanks argued that Woodman's school was too distant for the Royal Engineers' children to attend, and Moody "discouraged the mixing of civilians and militia."⁵²

Instead, drawing on funds from Royal Engineers families, Sheepshanks established a separate school for the detachment's children. There, they were "instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, singing and the rudiments of the Christian faith." In 1860, Sheepshanks reported that there were "twenty eight children in regular attendance for four hours daily, except Saturday when there [was] a half-holiday." The schoolteacher was "a daughter of one of the men" who had trained in England. He made particular note that "the children ha[d] already made satisfactory progress; their improvement ha[d] been marked especially in general behaviour" – they were no longer, we might surmise, "wild and untaught."⁵³

Subsequent requests for financial support for the Sapperton school further underscored the significance of education in ensuring the children's future, and the future of colonial society, so far from Britain. For example, when Sheepshanks reported on the children's "progress" in 1860, he also requested additional funding. In this letter, he argued that it would be "undesirable" for the "care of the welfare of the children of our soldiers" to be "slackened" in a place "where it [was] of such high importance that they should be brought up in the fear of God, and in principles of loyalty to the Crown."⁵⁴ Such concerns were echoed in 1861 when the Sapperton schoolmistress was fired for unspecified "misconduct." Her forced departure meant that there was again, to Moody's

⁵² In this interview, George Green passed on information from James White, who had arrived as a young child in New Westminster in 1859. See J.S. Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, vol. 6, City of Vancouver Archives, 2011 [ed. originally 1945], 37, available at <https://archive.org/details/EarlyVancouverVolume6>.

⁵³ Woodward, "Influence of the Royal Engineers," 24; and Sheepshanks to Moody, New Westminster, 27 June 1860, in City of Vancouver Archives, AM54, Major (J.S.) Matthews Collection, series 23, subseries 1, Schools – Private – Royal Engineers, box 506-B-3, fol. 28.

⁵⁴ Sheepshanks to Moody, New Westminster, 27 June 1860.

great concern, a “total absence” of formal education in the community.⁵⁵ The following year, Anglican archdeacon Henry Press Wright wrote to the War Office to call for government support for the school:

The officers and men of the Military Settlement have not only been professionally useful to B. Columbia but they have given to New Westminster a British character which will long have an influence for good upon the Colony and it would be hard indeed if the children of the Detachment, many of whom will settle in the colony[,] should from neglect in early life not be able to carry on the same healthy influence.⁵⁶

For Wright, the children were future adults destined to have a “healthy influence” on the colony by sustaining its “British character.” Education was the primary route to this end: to “neglect” the children’s education would be to neglect the “good” of the British colony into the future.

By 1862, local military officers, church representatives, and politicians had attracted enough financial support from the British government to sustain the education of Sapperton’s children.⁵⁷ The children’s sheer numbers and geographic clustering were key factors in the creation and maintenance of the detachment school; settler futurity not only shaped arguments for their education but also helped to garner support from distant colonial administrators. In these discussions, education was positioned as a critical colonial tool for engineering British adults who would have a “healthy influence” on British Columbia into its indefinite settler future.

⁵⁵ Moody to Colonial Secretary, New Westminster, 19 March 1861, enclosed in Douglas to Newcastle, 14 November 1861, p. 140, CO 60/11, 404.

⁵⁶ Henry Press Wright to Secretary of State for War, 17 January 1862, quoted in Cope, “Colonel Moody and the Royal Engineers,” 114. Similar concerns were expressed locally across the colony. See, for example, Barkerville’s *Cariboo Sentinel*, including “Public Schools,” 14 July 1869; “Train Up a Child in the Way He Should Go,” 26 November 1870; “Education,” 11 March 1871; and “The School Question,” 28 September 1872. Thank you to Alice Gorton for sharing her *Sentinel* findings with me.

⁵⁷ Lugard to Moody, War Office, 24 February 1862, enclosed in Newcastle to Douglas, 1 March 1862, pp. 54–55, LAC, RG7, G8C/10 (CO 398/2).

"I DID NOT GET MUCH EDUCATION":
REMEMBERING CHILDHOODS DIFFERENTLY

These discursive expectations and policy decisions reflected a broader project of settler futurity in British Columbia. Although settler futurity was thus important in shaping the lives of children in the Royal Engineers community, however, young people did not receive, interpret, experience, or perform the expectations held for them in a straightforward way. As this section demonstrates, later recollections of mid-nineteenth-century childhoods, included in James Skitt Matthews's *Early Vancouver*, reveal significant tensions and divergences between adults' plans and children's experiences. The *Early Vancouver* interviews were conducted between adults in the 1930s and 1940s, and as such, they should be read only as partial and mediated reflections of young people's understandings of colonial lives. Nonetheless, these memories serve as critical reminders that children played an active role in shaping and complicating adult aspirations for a settler British Columbia in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁸

In their interviews with Matthews, former members of the Sapperton community tended to narrate childhood experiences as forms of pleasure, causes of fear, or settler "firsts" in which they participated. All of their stories suggest that adult expectations had shaped their youth, and that their lives had also spilled beyond official narratives about childhood and the colonial future. For example, John Scales – one of the *Thames City* children – recalled accompanying his father to Burnaby Lake for the first time. He did not provide a date with the story, but it was probably during the detachment's official tenure in British Columbia as he remembered that Richard Moody had sent his father to round up cattle near the lake. Scales explained this excursion as a leisure-time adventure:

Father did not know where to go hunt for them [the cattle], so we just got a lunch and away we went. Somehow we got away down around Burnaby Lake; Father said, "Oh, look here; there is a lake down here or something," so we stopped then and had lunch at the top end, at the east end, and had lunch ... I said to Father, "Oh, look here, at the fish here; if I had a hook I'd catch some." So Father said, "I'll get you a hook," so he bent a pin, and with the string off our lunch I made a

⁵⁸ On adult memoirs as sources for children's history, see Paula S. Fass, "Childhood and Memory," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, 2 (2010): 155-64. On methodology and children's history more broadly, see Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, 1 (2008): 114-24; and Kristine Alexander, "Can the Girl Guide Speak?: The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Research," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4, 1 (2012): 132-45.

hook and line, and was hooking them in like old Harry, so Father saw what I was doing, so he thought he'd try it too, so he came out on the log with another bent pin, and, well, the end of it was we got a little sack half full of trout.⁵⁹

Scales's story presents a different narrative of childhood in the Royal Engineers detachment – one less concerned with schooling and the future and more engaged with the pleasures of exploration, adventure, engagements with nature, and impromptu fishing.

Other Sapperton stories focused more on childhood experiences with schooling. Interviewees implied that, while the provision of schooling may have concerned adults, it troubled children little; certainly, the existence of a school did not guarantee attendance, let alone a child's future. For example, when Matthews asked, "What education did you get?" Scales responded:

Not much. [With emphasis.] Mother used to go out to nurse ... Sometimes my sister thought she was boss, sometimes I did, and between the two of us and Mother away, I got mighty little. Mrs. Moresby had a school, and we used to pay a dollar a month; it was back of the present penitentiary buildings at New Westminster; then, after we moved from the Camp to New Westminster, I went to a public school.⁶⁰

Similarly, William Murray – son of sapper John Murray – attended school in New Westminster but, as he remembered: "I did not get much education. Would go to school for a day or so, and then someone would lose a horse or a cow, and I would take my pony and go after it; might stay away from school three or four days."⁶¹ Such patterns suggest a significant gap between aspiration and practice in children's education. At the same time, children's non-attendance at schools likely contributed to ongoing debates and anxieties among colonial administrators about the provision of settler education in British Columbia.

Contemporaries of the Sapperton children similarly recalled experiences with colonial education that varied from mid-nineteenth-century

⁵⁹ Moody left British Columbia when the detachment disbanded in 1863. J.S. Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, vol. 3, City of Vancouver Archives, 2011 [ed. originally 1935], 48, available at <https://archive.org/details/EarlyVancouverVolume3>. For another Royal Engineers' child, John Murray, with similar reflections on childhood leisure, see Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, 3:159.

⁶⁰ Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, 3:50–51. Anne Moresby taught in Sapperton; see BCA, GR-1372, Colonial Correspondence, box 95, file 1164, microfilm reel B01347.

⁶¹ J.S. Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, vol. 5, City of Vancouver Archives, 2011 [ed. originally 1945], 113, available at <https://archive.org/details/EarlyVancouverVolumes5>.

adult narratives. In one story relayed to Matthews in the early 1940s, Jimmy White remembered his schooling in New Westminster in the 1860s – an experience that he likely shared with children of the Royal Engineers. White described one teacher, “Hughie Barr,” as “the owner of a very strong raw hide strap (and he used it).” He then explained a collective form of childhood resistance to Barr’s schoolroom punishments, saying: “the pupils each took turns in cutting a notch each day, a little bit at a time, so that they couldn’t be accused of cutting the strap.” In addition, White remembered another teacher, named “MacIlveen,” primarily as “a man who drank a lot and gave the pupils a holiday.” In contrast, an 1863 article in the New Westminster *Columbian* celebrated “Mr. McIlveen” as “a first class teacher, of fourteen year experience.”⁶²

Mediated and retrospective glimpses into childhood experiences though they are, such memories offer an important reminder that discursive histories of childhood – particularly as they reflect adult expectations, anxieties, and interventions into children’s lives – were refracted and remade (and, in some cases, resisted) by children themselves.⁶³ In part because children navigated leisure and school on their own terms, there was never a simple relationship between aspiration and practice or between policy and result. Indeed, the failures of British expectation in British Columbia – including the small numbers of settler children in the colony and their limited schooling – contributed to the urgency, anxiety, and repetition of settler futurity in adult discussions about the colony. In this way, discursive expectations were important in shaping the conditions of life for British children; at the same time, the children’s activities were influential in shaping adults’ perceptions of, and policies related to, a vulnerable settler future.

⁶² Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, 6:37; and the *Columbian*, 1 April 1863, quoted in Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, 6:39.

⁶³ Further study could flesh out the children’s perspectives and experiences, for example through analysis of photographs, including New Westminster Archives (hereafter NWA), British Columbia Pioneers Collection, IHP2491, “Miss Fanny Morey,” [186-]; IHP2495, “Miss Marina Morey,” [187-]; and IHP2397, “Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Deasy and Family,” [186-]; and Photo Collection, IHP1422-001, “May Queen Nellie McColl,” [ca. 1870], IHP2672, “May Day, Queensborough, 1870,” IHP0295, “May Day 1871,” and IHP1267, “May Queen and Suite,” [1874?]. On photography in children’s history, see Kristine Alexander, “Picturing Girlhood and Empire: The Girl Guide Movement and Photography,” in Moruzi and Smith, *Colonial Girlhood in Literature*, 197-213.

“OUT OF ALL PROPORTION”: DISBANDING AND
RELANDING THE DETACHMENT FAMILIES

The imagined settler future was vulnerable in other ways, too. Many Britons shared a general commitment to settler futurity, for example, but they did not necessarily agree on a strategy for achieving (or paying for) it. While there was widespread approval of detachment families in British Columbia, colonial and military officials repeatedly squabbled about the costs of feeding and otherwise supporting them. This was apparent in negotiations over the initial immigration of women and children, in debates about the children’s education, and, most of all, in discussions about how and when to disband the detachment. Some scholarly attention has been paid to administrative debates about disbandment, primarily focusing on discussions about the value of the detachment’s work.⁶⁴ However, these debates were underpinned by concerns about the growing numbers of children in the community. Discussions of disbandment came to a head in 1863, and, ultimately, it was the high cost of supporting the families that led to the detachment’s resettlement on land grants in British Columbia. This strategy, colonial officials determined, was the best path towards an envisioned white familial settler society. In this sense, although the children’s lives were shaped by the politics of settler aspiration, they, in turn, shaped the trajectories of the Columbia Detachment’s military mission and the families’ resettlement in British Columbia.

Governor James Douglas led the debate on disbandment because his already financially struggling colonial government bore the primary cost of feeding and housing the military families. While the War Office had determined the initial numbers of women and children, metropolitan administrators appear to have lost track of the expanding numbers once the detachment was in British Columbia. By 1863, Douglas’s letters to London were increasingly frustrated with what he saw as his administration’s disproportionate financial burden in relation to the Royal Engineers. In April 1863, he sent a detailed account to the Colonial Office, identifying a significant rise in ration costs from £6,020 in 1861 to £7,805 in 1862. He explained:

At present I do not exactly know how to account for this large increase but a portion of it is no doubt attributable to the greater number of persons rationed – the number of children in the Detachment having

⁶⁴ For example, Cope, “Colonel Moody and the Royal Engineers,” chap. 13; Woodward, “Influence of the Royal Engineers,” 19–21; and Frances Woodward, “‘Very Dear Soldiers’ or ‘Very Dear Laborers’: The Royal Engineers in British Columbia, April 1860,” *BC Historical News* 12, 1 (1978): 8–15.

been more than trebled since it left England; and the number is increasing every day. I believe the number of the women and children rationed at the present moment exceeds 150 and as this is beyond the strength of the whole detachment I believe it is out of all proportion to what is authorised by the regulations of the army.

As a result of these costs, Douglas requested permission to “reduce the establishment,” proposing first to discharge men “who may have large families” and “who may wish to settle in the Colony,” and then to provide them with land grants.⁶⁵ This strategy would save Douglas from rationing large numbers of children, while furthering the colony’s anticipated path towards a future in which British families would form the backbone of society and agricultural settlement.

Colonial Office staffers concurred. Remarking on Douglas’s budget, Frederick Elliot bemoaned the “immense cost” of rationing “the whole of the numerous wives and families of these Engineers.”⁶⁶ As administrators agreed on this point, the entire detachment was disbanded shortly thereafter, and the men were discharged or withdrawn to Britain, if they so chose.⁶⁷ In November 1863, only twenty-two men (mainly officers), eight women, and seventeen children returned to Britain.⁶⁸ The rest – including at least one hundred children, most born in the colony – stayed in British Columbia.

In January 1859, the *Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette* had imagined that the Royal Engineers were destined “by and bye” to create a future in which “many of the detachment, with their wives and families, [would be] comfortably settled on comfortable little farms.”⁶⁹ Five years later, this came to pass. Many families founded and sustained agricultural communities in the Fraser Valley, clustered around their promised land grants. Others remained in New Westminster, where they were critical to the nascent city’s development.⁷⁰

As adults, the children had a range of futures in British Columbia. Many contributed both to the settler population through their reproductive familial lives and to the work of the growing settler state in British Columbia. In the early years of the twentieth century, for example,

⁶⁵ Douglas to Newcastle, 22 April 1863, pp. 249–51, CO 60/15, 5956.

⁶⁶ Elliot, minutes in Lugard to Elliot, 28 May 1863, pp. 360–61, CO 60/17, 5193. See also Elliot, minutes in Douglas to Newcastle, 22 April 1863, p. 252, CO 60/15, 5956.

⁶⁷ W.F. Forster to Under Secretary of State, War Office, 21 May 1863, in Lugard to Elliot, 28 May 1863, p. 362, CO 60/17, 5193.

⁶⁸ Woodward, “Influence of the Royal Engineers,” 20–21.

⁶⁹ *Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette and Cape Horn Chronicle*, 29 January 1859.

⁷⁰ Howay, *Work of the Royal Engineers in British Columbia*, II; Woodward, “Influence of the Royal Engineers,” 24–26; and Cope, “Colonel Moody and the Royal Engineers,” chap. 14.

W.H. Keary, who had been an infant emigrant with the Royal Engineers on the *Euphrates*, would serve as mayor of New Westminster. Thomas Deasy, also an infant on the *Euphrates*, would work as an Indian agent on Haida Gwaii.⁷¹

Whatever their eventual career paths, the resettlement and lives of dozens of British children in colonial British Columbia owed a good deal to the material work of the Royal Engineers, and rather more to the ways in which the policy discussions of civil servants and military officers, church officials, newspaper editors, and settlers centred on the future. The Columbia Detachment's children had been encouraged in their immigration, shaped in their education, and then resettled on land grants because they were imagined as especially and fundamentally significant to the colonial future in British Columbia: potential adult settlers in a place where an envisaged future of enduring white settlement seemed dauntingly difficult to realize. In short, settler colonial aspirations buttressed policies that made possible the significant numbers of children in Sapperton and shaped their long-term settlement in British Columbia.

"A WORK OF TIME": ASPIRATION TOWARDS OTHERWISE

In May 1860, British Columbia's governor James Douglas reported on a recent journey up the Fraser River, the mainland colony's major river artery. Moving between a romanticized appreciation of present landscape and a desire for a reordered settler future, he wrote:

As our boat, gliding swiftly over the surface of the smooth waters, occasionally swept beneath the overhanging boughs which form a canopy of leaves, impervious to the sun's scorching rays, the effect was enchanting; yet amidst all this wealth and luxuriance of nature, I could not repress the wish that those gorgeous forests might soon be swept away by the efforts of human industry, and give place to cultivated fields and the other accessories [*sic*] of civilization. This, however, will be a work of time.⁷²

The opening kilometres of the river had few markers of settler presence in 1860. Two years later, Clement Francis Cornwall would describe New

⁷¹ See NWA, IHP7947, Keary Family Fonds; and BCA, MS-1182, Thomas Deasy Fonds. For more on the post-disbandment lives of detachment children, see J.S. Matthews's interviews in *Early Vancouver*; and community research by the Royal Engineers Living History Group, Nominal Roll, *The Royal Engineers in Her Britannic Majesty's Colonies of Vancouver's Island and British Columbia*, available at <http://www.royalengineers.ca/CDroll.html>.

⁷² Douglas to Newcastle, Fraser River, 31 May 1860, in *Further Papers*, Part IV, 8.

Westminster as “a mere small clearing amongst interminable forest.”⁷³ In this context, Douglas’s cultivated fields could only be settler aspiration. However, he was far from alone in anticipating the “work of time” in the creation of a different future.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Britons near and far repeated anticipatory visions of British Columbia, even as the present seemed to refuse their expectations of a stable, white, familial, agrarian society. In these years, British Columbia was a tenuous paper claim imposed on a distant imperial map and was imagined atop a vast and diverse Indigenous territory that remained well beyond British knowledge and control. Here, settler colonialism was a project of aspiration whereby Britons collectively imagined a future towards which they directed policies and practice; inscribed survey lines and future cities onto land they did not understand; anticipated and pursued an exclusive future, despite Indigenous peoples’ continued survivance; and imagined their children as future “Englishmen and Englishwomen” even though many would never know the metropole.⁷⁴ In this project of aspiration, the reproductive family was critical. Without settler children, the colony had no future.

It was in this context that a range of British adults discussed, debated, supported, and shaped the lives of Sapperton’s children. Their history reflected and reveals broader political and social efforts to anticipate, then craft, a future settler order in British Columbia. Against a backdrop of colonial expectation and the failure of those expectations, the children were positioned as politicized subjects in a white settler project of future-building. Although the children would experience and later remember their Sapperton lives differently, adult discourses underscore the prevailing importance of the future. Specifically, adult Britons invested in their children, politically and financially, with both anxiety and hope for a future white settler British Columbia. Building a colony with bodies, families, and generations as well as with roads and surveys, the Royal Engineers aimed to displace, dispossess, and marginalize Indigenous peoples, while facilitating the establishment of an enduring long-term community of non-Indigenous settlers. Although the nature of the military detachment made these children particularly subject to governmental intervention, British adults’ discussions of the

⁷³ Clement Francis Cornwall, diary, New Westminster, 10 June 1862, 7, BCA, MS-0759, quoted in Edward Philip Johnson, “The Early Years of Ashcroft Manor,” *BC Studies* 5 (Summer 1970): 4.

⁷⁴ Gerald Vizenor defines Indigenous survivance as “an active sense of presence over absence,” more than mere survival. See Joelle Rostkowski and Deborah L. Madsen, eds., “Prologue: Conversation with Gerald Vizenor,” *Conversations with Remarkable Native Americans* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), xlvii.

Sapperton children were inseparable from broader aspirational ideas about childhood, family, and the colonial future.

The examination of past futures, as exemplified by this article, offers new insights into the historical trajectories of settler colonialism and family in British Columbia. It might also fuel a different aspirational politics in the present. In British Columbia, expectations of enduring settler power – and the violence, inequality, and marginalization inherent in those expectations – have come to be normalized, and thus unheeded, by many who benefit from them. By returning to interrogate the conception and infancy of such expectations, histories of settler futurity serve as a reminder that settler colonialism itself is a contingent form of aspiration, a contested vision among alternative futurities. In this light, settler colonialism is powerful and destructive, but it is always also project and projection – “a work of time” aimed at “a society ‘to come’” in the absence of its total realization in the present.⁷⁵ Without meaningful attention to the politics of aspiration, we can neither understand the foundations of settler colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century nor denaturalize and challenge their enduring forms in the present. In this spirit, histories of settler futurity, childhood, and family might help us to recognize and unmoor the long-embedded anchors of settler expectation.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Douglas to Newcastle, Fraser River, 31 May 1860; and Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 23.

⁷⁶ This point does not stand alone. I particularly acknowledge incisive, critical, and important work on decolonization and Indigenous futurity, which does not merely reconfigure settler colonial narratives of futurity but aims to dismantle them entirely. For example, Aman Sium, Chandni Desai, and Eric Ritskes, “Towards the ‘Tangible Unknown’: Decolonization and the Indigenous Future,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, 1 (2012): <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18638/15564>; and Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, 1 (2012): <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18630/15554>.