

# ANXIETY AT THE GATES OF HELL: *Community Reputation in the Georges, 1908–15*

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**S**PEAKING BEFORE THE Presbyterian Church of Canada Congress in Toronto in early June 1913, Reverend C. Melville Wright had reason to be nervous. A curate just five years out of college, he was on the verge of national prominence.<sup>1</sup> If he navigated through this hometown return, perhaps a leadership role awaited in the coalition fighting for social reform and against vice. Here was an opportunity to make a lasting impression. Wright's parish at Fort George in British Columbia's northern Interior sat at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers, where the church gamely fought for notice from men for whom "the rattle of coins is so loud they cannot hear the voice of conscience."<sup>2</sup> A flourishing hotel and bar were second only to local brothels in attracting custom. Sowing the Lord's message required conviction. Despite the challenge, Wright assured his audience that the church would persist for it was "worth all the struggle when we can defeat sin at the very gates of hell."<sup>3</sup> Even among the church veterans assembled in Toronto's Massey Hall, the young minister's call to action was a sensation. Waves of applause circled as he resumed his seat.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *Westminster Hall Magazine (WHM)*, a publication of Presbyterian seminarian students enrolled at Westminster Hall in Vancouver, recalled "Mel" Wright's brief attendance at the hall (where he took one semester of his theological studies) before being assigned to Fort George. The magazine followed Wright's early efforts and his Massey Hall address. See "The Church's Outposts – Pioneer Work at Fort George," *WHM* 1, nos. 10 and 11 (1912): 28–29; "Pioneering Outpost Work," *WHM* 2, no. 4 (1912): 40, 42; and "Should Men Bribe the Devil?," *WHM* 3, no. 6 (1913): 5–8.

<sup>2</sup> Reverend C.M. Wright, "The Church's Task in Canada," in *Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Board of Foreign Missions Presbyterian Church of Canada, 1913), 95.

<sup>3</sup> "Walked 350 Miles from the Very Gates of Hell," *Toronto Globe*, 3 June 1913; and "Worth Struggle to Defeat Sin at the Gates of Hell," *Toronto Star*, 3 June 1913. Wright's speech is reminiscent of Reverend John G. Shearer's condemnation of Winnipeg in 1910. See Marianna Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 57.

<sup>4</sup> "Lurid Pictures of northern Interior – Minister from Fort George Creates Sensation at Toronto Gathering – Tells of Weary Trek from the Very Gates of Hell – All Manner of Vice Exists in Smaller Towns, Declares Rev. C.M. Wright – An Appeal for Aid in Work of Church in Remote Districts," *Vancouver Province*, 3 June 1913; and "Fled from the Suburbs of Hades," *Fort George Herald*, 14 June 1913.

A day later and away from the rapturous reception, Wright momentarily retreated. “I did not mean to describe Fort George as the very gates of hell. It’s no worse than any other place. Toronto for instance.”<sup>5</sup> As a balm for the wounded pride of Fort George residents, the relief was temporary. Asked “what particular form of vice is rampant in Fort George,” Wright returned to the previous evening’s themes. “In the first place, the liquor traffic is flourishing. There are two saloons with four to six bartenders each ... There is a segregated district, four big houses with thirty women, in South Fort George, two blocks from Knox Church.”<sup>6</sup> It was not an accident that South Fort George had been singled out. While ministering across the immediate area, Wright was pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Fort George – a structure financed by and built on land donated by the Northern Resources Security Company (NRSC), the sole land agent in the neighbouring (and competing) townsite of Fort George.<sup>7</sup> His concern for the state of local morals was not without self-interest. After all, if desirable, Christian, and upright settlers chose to locate in Fort George, as opposed to the seething den of iniquity in South Fort George, then Wright’s church would surely profit. Having learned of the speech through the *Province* newspaper, the *Fort George Herald* dismissed the depiction as an “extravagant and ill-considered statement,” adding that “we have had several examples of this weakness from the Rev. Mr. Wright to draw unto himself the fleeting attention of the public by methods which would indicate that he seeks reputation rather by notoriety than by more commendable actions.”<sup>8</sup> The *Herald* offered a rejoinder. “Wright strives to obliterate sin from the surface. He would drive out houses of prostitution, he would close up hotel bars, and would make religion compulsory. This sort of thing has all been tried before. It gives way to an illicit liquor traffic; to the erection of foundling hospitals for misbegotten children, and to atheism.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite the quick dismissal, the description was telling. Barely five years since its establishment as a white settler community, South Fort George had a tawdry reputation. Even if the minister had exaggerated,

<sup>5</sup> “Fled from the Suburbs of Hades,” 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Wright exaggerated: the Northern Hotel possessed the only liquor licence in the region.

<sup>7</sup> Copy of letter from Reverend Alfred T. Bell, Empress, Alberta, 4 January 1937; Dr. George A. Wilson to Reverend F.J. Runnalls, 6 April 1943, in Reverend F.J. Runnalls Papers, Exploration Place, Prince George, A 986.5.4a.

<sup>8</sup> Untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 14 June 1913. A *Vancouver Province* editorial added that, while Wright had been earnest in his comments, he had “unconsciously” libelled the “salt-of-the-earth” people developing the northern Interior. See “The Gates of Hell,” *Vancouver Province*, 4 June 1916. An edited version of the *Province* article was republished south of Fort George in Quesnel. See “Gates of Hell,” *Cariboo Observer*, 14 June 1913.

<sup>9</sup> Untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 14 June 1913.

his portrait was uncomfortably close to the mark. In fact, reports of immorality and vice at the Georges – South Fort George, Fort George, and, in time, Prince George – were journalistic staples. After all, one reason that Wright had been invited to speak at the Church Congress was because Fort George had been “prominent in the public mind” for a number of years.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, in the spring of 1910, the question of whether investors in the NRSC’s Fort George townsite were being duped sparked a newsprint battle between the *Toronto Saturday Night* (also known as *Saturday Night*) magazine and the *BC Saturday Sunset* (also known as *Saturday Sunset*) that paralleled a local contest between South Fort George and Fort George over which community was the deserving destination for incoming white settlers. Predictably, this dispute provided more fodder for the battle between the Toronto- and Vancouver-based publications. The result was an escalating war of words between the South Fort George-based *Fort George Herald* and the *Fort George Tribune* in Fort George that was relayed, embroidered, and amplified by *Saturday Night* and *Saturday Sunset* before being reprinted elsewhere in Canada and beyond. For those hoping to attract settlers and capital to the Georges, the near-constant supply of allegations and insults served little purpose but to prolong an anxiety-inducing and self-defeating farce performed on a national stage.

The play of these elements in shaping the Georges’ pre-First World War reputation occupies the centre of this article, which is part of a larger study of crime and community identity. Resting on contemporary newspaper commentary tracing the establishment of white settler communities on the territorial lands of the Lheidli T’enneh at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers in British Columbia’s northern Interior, this account explores the persistence of unease over reputation and the anxious pursuit of respectability marked out in the efforts to secure provincial government offices, a BC Provincial Police constable, and jail as symbols of stability and permanence bestowed upon the victorious community. Here we see the play of anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s maxim that culture is comprised of the stories that people tell themselves, about themselves, intersecting with the scholarship on boosterism in western Canada.<sup>11</sup> Yet rather than emphasize the outward expression of the booster mindset as it has been examined on the Canadian Prairies, this treatment touches on how these

<sup>10</sup> F.E. Runnalls, *The History of the Knox United Church – Prince George, British Columbia* (Prince George: Prince George Printers, 1986), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 448.

depictions tinted the settler population's self-perception.<sup>12</sup> In this, the approach also reflects on how the language of race informed and distorted local identity in the Georges.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, for the Interior's white settlers, the provincial government's eventual response to the Georges' competing demands satisfied few and contributed to a gnawing fear that opinion leaders and policy-makers in southern and urban British Columbia neither heard nor cared about concerns born beyond their own communities. This unease nourished a hardening identity in the northern Interior of being unappreciated, overlooked, and disregarded. What had been launched as an enterprise to introduce Christian ideals and notions of white ordered space onto the province's settlement frontier demonstrated the tenacity of reputation and produced, instead, the groundwork for a regionalized sense of self that viewed the urban Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island with distrust and defensiveness. While there is little reason to conclude that the Georges were alone in the mounting animus directed towards opinion leaders and decision-makers in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island, the persistence of the community's reputation as a rough and tumble "gritty mill-town" continues to echo a deeply etched historical identity.

## REPUTATION

Although Reverend Wright's unflattering June 1913 description of the community triggered anxious hand-wringing in Fort George, even the most enthusiastic booster would have admitted that the local setting was not one of well-ordered civility, with residents faithfully attending church services and avoiding all forms of strong drink, games of chance,

<sup>12</sup> Alan Artibise, "Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities, 1871–1913," in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 515–43. While Max Foran's exploration follows Artibise's outward projection of the booster mindset and method, it concentrates on individuals rather than institutional sources. See Max Foran, "The Boosters in Boosterism: Some Calgary Examples," in *Urban History* 8, no. 2 (October 1979): 77–82. See also Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) and *High River and the Times: An Albertan Community and Its Weekly Newspaper, 1905–1966* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> See David M. Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 15 and 173–80; Kimberley Mangun, "The (Oregon) Advocate: Boosting the Race and Portland, Too," *American Journalism* 23, no. 1 (2006): 7–34; and Cory Wimberley, Javier Martínez, David Muñoz, and Margarita Cavazos, "Peons and Progressives: Race and Boosterism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1904–1941," *Western Historical Quarterly* 49 (Winter 2018): 437–63.

and personal indulgence.<sup>14</sup> Before Wright arrived on the scene, the Georges had already been marked as places where aspirations born elsewhere thrived amidst sharp business practices and simmering grudges. Predictably, the result was not one that spoke well of local residents or community reputation. Notwithstanding the adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity, in the five years preceding the First World War, the communities earned national and international notoriety thanks to an uncivil press war and a corresponding association with thievery, fraud, criminal libel, drunkenness, gambling, and wanton sexuality. Their reputation was such that Wright's allegations at Massey Hall served mainly to add additional details to a tattered story written in the half-decade straddling 1910.

After years of negotiation and manoeuvre, the confirmation in 1902 that the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTP) would be built through northern British Columbia sparked the enthusiastic search for prime locations along the anticipated line.<sup>15</sup> An immediate point of interest was the region near the junction of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers, where commentators believed the line would cross on route from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific coast (see Figures 1 and 2).<sup>16</sup>

While the railway, the federal government, and the provincial governments argued, pushed, and prodded each other into concessions and agreements, settlers and adventurers ventured into the northern Interior, and South Fort George emerged as an unincorporated cluster of homes, roads, and businesses huddled alongside the paddlewheel landing established on the Fraser River in early June 1909.<sup>17</sup> Founded by Alexander G. Hamilton in 1906 when he opened a store at the site, the community owed its name to the fact that it lay south of Fort George, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post sited by fur trader Simon Fraser in 1807.<sup>18</sup> That post rested on a separate parcel of land south of Fort George

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Campbell, *Demon Rum or Easy Money: Government Control of Liquor in British Columbia from Prohibition to Privatization* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 9–42; Douglas L. Hamilton, *Sobering Dilemma: A History of Prohibition in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2004), 62–94; Albert John Hiebert, “Prohibition in British Columbia” (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1969), 9–40.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Arthur Lower, “The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and British Columbia” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1939), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders: The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996); Lower, “Grand Trunk Pacific Railway”; and Neil Bradford Holmes, “The Promotion of Early Growth in the Western Canadian City: A Case Study of Prince George, 1909–1915” (History honours thesis, University of British Columbia, 1974), vii–viii.

<sup>17</sup> “Local and District News,” *Cariboo Observer*, 5 June 1909.

<sup>18</sup> F.E. Runnalls, *A History of Prince George* (Vancouver: Wrigley Printing Company Limited, 1946), 85.



Figure 1. Adapted from John Curry and Jason Llewellyn, "The Revitalization of Downtown Prince George," *BC Studies* 124 (Winter 1999/2000): 70.

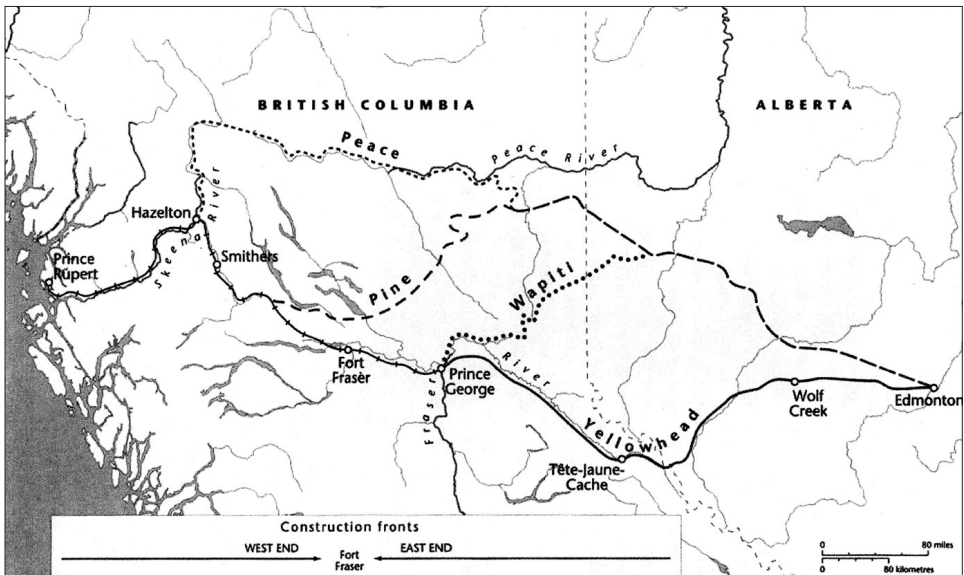


Figure 2. Route of the GTP from Edmonton to Prince Rupert, adapted from Frank Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders: The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 64.

Reserve No. 1, laid out for the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation in 1892, which, by 1910, included a local cemetery and a village of twenty-nine families with 144 people.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, as one travelled south from the confluence, the Lheidli T'enneh village, the HBC post, and South Fort George formed a broken line of settlement on the Fraser River's west bank (see Figure 3).

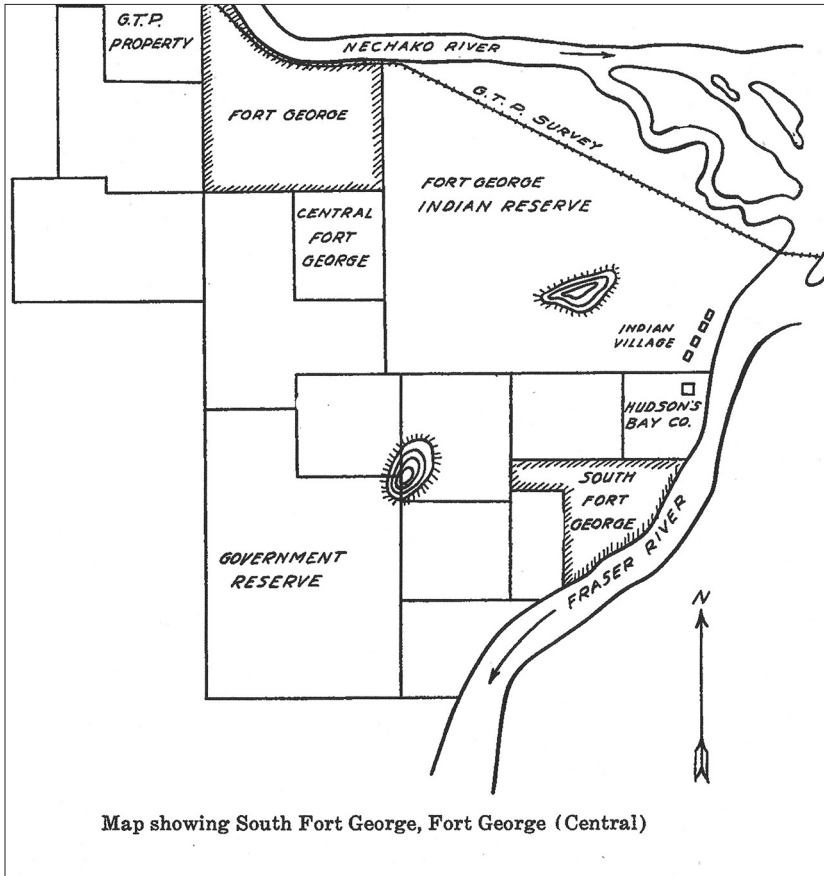


Figure 3. The “Georges,” ca. 1910 (adapted from F.E. Runnalls, “Boom Days in Prince George, 1906–1913,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 8, no. 4, (1944): n.p.

<sup>19</sup> David Vogt and David Gamble, “You Don’t Suppose the Dominion Government Wants to Cheat the Indians?: The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and the Fort George Reserve, 1908–12,” *BC Studies* 166 (Summer 2010): 59; Leonard, *Thousand Blunders*, 167; Holmes, “Promotion of Early Growth,” 2; and “Fort George of Today,” *Cariboo Observer*, 21 May 1910.



Buoyed by the operation of Nick S. Clark's Fort George Lumber and Navigation Company, which was launched in June 1908 and began operating its mill in September 1909, and a second sawmill, run by Russell Peden and William F. Cooke, South Fort George emerged as the region's primary community.<sup>20</sup>

Counted among the new arrivals in the autumn of 1909 was veteran newspaper man John Houston, who opened his printing shop in South Fort George and immediately began heralding the northern Interior's virtues in the *Fort George Tribune*.<sup>21</sup> Of particular note was his contrast – referring to the region's administrative designation – between the “old” and “new” Cariboo. In Houston's telling, the old Cariboo represented dependence on the Lower Mainland and Victoria, corrupt partisan politics, the uncontrolled sale and consumption of liquor, and reliance on racialized Asian labour in developing local resources.<sup>22</sup> The new Cariboo was imagined as a region answering to no one – a region that championed the northern Interior's interests before all others, that possessed a self-aware and temperate disposition towards alcohol, and that adhered to an unapologetic preference for white labour and society as an integral element of a thriving economy and moral community. Houston articulated a preliminary draft of what hardened into the Interior's early twentieth-century political culture: regional animus towards the provincial capital, persistent worries about venal public figures, the

<sup>20</sup> Runnalls, *History of Prince George*, 88–89. See “Old Fort George the Real Townsite,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 25 February 1910. Although South Fort George was associated with Alexander Hamilton and his store, the site was owned by Beach A. Laselle, W.C. Fry, W.F. Cooke, and M.C. Wiggins. See “Fort George of Today.” On Laselle, see “Beach Adonijah Laselle,” in Frederic W. Howay and E.O.S. Scholefield, *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Vancouver: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1914), 3:312–16. Following the declaration of war in 1914, Cooke secured the financial support of Charles Millar, the Toronto millionaire, for the creation of a “machine gun squad.” Cooke was an active recruiter. See “W.F. Cooke Forms Machine Gun Squad,” *Prince George Post*, 7 August 1915; “Millar Machine Gun Has Been Ordered,” *Prince George Post*, 25 August 1915; and “William F. Cooke,” Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, regimental no. 102524, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/personnel-records.aspx#f>.

<sup>21</sup> Houston arrived in South Fort George on 2 September 1909. See “Illegal Sale of ‘Booze’ at Fort George,” *Fort George Tribune*, 13 November 1909; “John Houston Here,” *Cariboo Observer*, 9 April 1909; and “Houston Will Publish,” *Cariboo Observer*, 18 September 1909. See Patrick Wolfe, “Tramp Printer Extraordinary: British Columbia's John ‘Truth’ Houston,” *BC Studies* 40 (winter 1978–79): 5–31; “A History of John Houston,” at <http://www.kootenayhistory.com/john-houston/>; and Lynne Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017): 74–76.

<sup>22</sup> Untitled article, *Fort George Tribune*, 25 December 1909. Houston's juxtaposition of “Old” and “New” Cariboo and the assertion that the more settled regions did not have the region's best interests at heart drew the ire of John Daniell, writing as owner and editor of the *Cariboo Observer*. See untitled article in *Cariboo Observer*, 11 December 1909; “Editorial,” *Cariboo Observer*, 11 December 1909; and “Editorial,” *Cariboo Observer*, 15 January 1910.



juxtaposition of Vancouver Island government with Interior interests and natural resources, and an unapologetic racism targeting “Asian” labour in particular and that championed “whiteness” in general.<sup>23</sup> This racism was nothing new for Houston or for a provincial political culture in which Richard McBride, the province’s premier from 1903 to 1915, campaigned on a platform of preserving British Columbia as a “white-man’s province.”<sup>24</sup> What was notable was the attack on liquor that, for the newspaperman, signalled the latest iteration of his personal battle with the bottle and the toll that it had taken on his life.

Houston’s vision of a region as one arrayed against entrenched interests within provincial politics proved to be especially durable. Targeting Asians and “undesirable or non-assimilative people” whose racialized identity disqualified them from embodying “good material for citizenship” was broadly accepted as good sense, needing no further explanation.<sup>25</sup> Here is an example of anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s “common sense”: conclusions drawn by minds already filled with

<sup>23</sup> A month before he died, Houston developed the platform of the Progressive Liberal Party of British Columbia. See “A New Party,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 9 February 1910; “The Fort George Liberal Platform: Platform of Principles of the Progressive Liberal Party of British Columbia,” *BC Saturday Sunset*, 19 February 1910; and “Old John’s New Party,” *Cariboo Observer*, 12 February 1910. See Houston’s argument about the availability of white labour in northern British Columbia in an untitled article in the *Fort George Tribune*, 14 December 1909. On Houston’s death see “John Houston Is Still Alive,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 4 March 1910; “Death of John Houston,” *Cariboo Observer*, 12 March 1910; “John Houston,” *Cariboo Observer*, 12 March 1910; untitled article, *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 13 March 1910, Sunday Supplement; “Too Many Editors for One Paper,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 11 April 1910. Houston’s failing health is noted in the HBC Fort George Journals beginning on 25 February 1910. See Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, B.280/a/9, 3 August 1906 – 18 November 1911.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia E. Roy, *Boundless Optimism: Richard McBride’s British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012). McBride was one of many provincial politicians who built a career attacking and marginalizing people of colour. See W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978 [2002]); Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875–1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); Renisa Mawani, *Colonial Proximities: Crosscultural Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871–1921* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Timothy J. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); Julie Gilmour, *Trouble on Main Street: Mackenzie King, Reason, Race, and the 1907 Vancouver Riots* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2014); and Sarah Isabel Wallace, *Not Fit to Stay: Public Health Panics and South Asian Exclusion* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 69. See “A New Party,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 9 February 1910; and “The Fort George Liberal Platform,” *BC Saturday Sunset*, 19 February 1910. The value of whiteness involved the question of who was to be granted the supposed distinction of being the first white woman in Fort George. See “First White Woman,” *Prince Rupert Optimist*, 27 May 1910.

presuppositions.<sup>26</sup> This thinking sustained the belief that those possessing the “white man’s gift” for self-control and self-government need not answer to lesser peoples whose penchant for disorder and criminality flowed from innate irresponsibility and uncivilized behaviour.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, when in later years “a number of well-meaning people” commenced to “meddle” in the “Chinese question” by petitioning in favour of granting the electoral franchise to naturalized “Chinese” residents, the idea was dismissed by the *Prince George Citizen* as folly. “If the Chinese were made electors, they would have the right to sit in the legislature. Do these good people who are surcharged with brotherly love desire this? If they do, they are out of touch with public sentiment. The only good which could come out of a movement of this kind would be a rousing of public opinion which would result in chasing all the Chinese that are here back into the Flowery Kingdom. It’s a good thing to let well enough alone.”<sup>28</sup> Through their presence, along with other non-preferred immigrants, racialized Asians provided Houston and like-minded individuals with a scapegoat to be saddled with the region’s failure to thrive and to account for why its fortunes were blighted with a disorderly reputation. Would the New Cariboo be a well-ordered community of law-abiding white families? Or would its potential remain hobbled by a distant and uncaring government and liquor interests? Would it be peopled with unwelcomed intruders who ought to be chased back to their homelands?

A second arrival in October 1908 was George C. Hammond who, after a perilous career as a stock promoter in Chicago where he narrowly escaped criminal prosecution, established the Natural Resources and Security Company, which looms large in the Georges’ early twentieth-century history.<sup>29</sup> The company functioned as the sales agent for the Fort George/Central Fort George townsite established on the western boundary of the Fort George Reserve (see Figure 3).<sup>30</sup> Hammond’s

<sup>26</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 84.

<sup>27</sup> James Fenimore Cooper as cited in Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 69.

<sup>28</sup> Untitled article, *Prince George Citizen*, 15 March 1921.

<sup>29</sup> See “A Canadian ‘Promoter,’” in John J. Hill, *Gold Bricks of Speculation: A Study of Speculation and Its Counterfeits, and an Exposé of the Methods of Bucketshop and “Get Rich Quick” Swindles* (Chicago: Lincoln Book Concern, 1904), 27–35. The NRSC’s operations were noted in late October 1909. See “Fort George Land Sells Fast in Vancouver,” *Cariboo Observer*, 30 October 1909. George and W.H. Hammond controlled the NRSC. See “Hammond Brothers Visit Quesnel,” *Cariboo Observer*, 16 July 1910.

<sup>30</sup> When referring to the NRSC townsite, I use the name “Fort George” rather than differentiating between Fort George and Central Fort George. See Wilfrid Playfair, “The Miracle of Cities,” *British Columbia Magazine* 7, no. 4 (1911): 253–54. In the contemporary street grid of Prince George, Carney Street (the former Fraser Street) represents the line dividing the Fort George Indian reserve to the east and the Fort George townsite to the west.

campaign to sell lots was spectacular: by 1912, his company had invested \$170,000 on improvements, including the construction and subsidization of local businesses in addition to \$100,000 on advertising.<sup>31</sup> But, owing to his extravagant claims in attempting to populate the community (and perhaps force the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway to locate its station on the townsite or on its edge), Hammond attracted an unsavory reputation. Trouble surfaced in mid-March 1910 when *Toronto Saturday Night* magazine initiated a series of articles suggesting that investors in the Fort George townsite were being swindled. Beginning with a query on 12 March 1910, the magazine's "Gold and Dross" financial advice column warned of exaggerations and outright falsehoods in NRSC publications.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, the magazine questioned Hammond's unsubstantiated claim that the Fort George townsite would include the Grand Trunk Pacific station.<sup>33</sup> Yet, in sounding the alarm, *Saturday Night* used descriptions and photographs of South Fort George, the rival townsite on the banks of the Fraser River. Suggesting that perhaps the reporter had been nursing a hangover when drafting the article that depreciated "the value of a great country in its infancy," the *Fort George Herald* lamented what it believed was shoddy journalism.<sup>34</sup> The confusion – and the tendency to assume that all of the Georges were essentially the same community – remained a worrying theme that allowed unappreciative and ill-informed outside commentators to paint their condemnations with a broad brush.

This ongoing confusion, along with the exchange of half-truths and accusations, thickened with the involvement of another publication, the Vancouver-based *BC Saturday Sunset*, which criticized *Saturday Night* while defending the NRSC and George Hammond. Launched in mid-June 1907, the *Saturday Sunset* was operated by John P. McConnell, a former *Saturday Night* journalist who, along with his brother-in-law Richard S. Ford, eventually founded the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper.<sup>35</sup> McConnell waded into the province's Interior affairs in

<sup>31</sup> Leonard, *Thousand Blunders*, 187. See "No. 2 Announcement," *Vancouver Daily World*, 21 October 1909; "No. 3 – More Proof," *Vancouver Daily World*, 22 October 1909; "No. 5 – Ft. George," *Vancouver Daily World*, 26 October 1909; "BC Government Will Back Railroad to Fort George," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 February 1912.

<sup>32</sup> "Gold and Dross," *Toronto Saturday Night*, 12 March 1910, 5; *Toronto Saturday Night*, 26 March 1910, 6; and *Toronto Saturday Night*, 2 April 1910, 5.

<sup>33</sup> "Shacks and Forest at Fort George: Natural Resources Security Co., Limited Pushing Expensive Campaign in Effort to Sell Town Lots and Farms," *Toronto Saturday Night*, 30 July 1910, 23.

<sup>34</sup> "Saturday Night; or The Morning After: Toronto Scribe in Attacking Fort George Townsite Gets Mixed," *Fort George Herald*, 20 August 1910.

<sup>35</sup> John Mackie, "Our Liberal Beginnings," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 October 2012, <http://www.vancouver.sun.com/Liberal+beginnings/6122051/story.html>.

February 1910 by publishing in full John Houston's platform for the Progressive Liberal Party of British Columbia, describing it as "making a full throated, deep chested demand for reform and straight dealing in public affairs."<sup>36</sup> After tentative comments in the spring of 1910, McConnell committed himself to visiting the region since "the world want[ed] to know something about Fort George and the hinterland of the Northern Interior." He added that the trip would also provide an opportunity to address the attacks on some local land companies "by certain eastern newspapers."<sup>37</sup> Detailing his journey north under his pen name of Bruce – after the Ontario county in which he was born – McConnell arrived in the Georges in mid-August and, having set the scene, attacked *Saturday Night* for its prejudicial treatment of George Hammond, the NRSC, and the Fort George townsite.<sup>38</sup> Claiming that the Lheidli T'enneh would never sell the reserve, "Bruce" admitted that South Fort George was, in the summer of 1910, a centre of "considerable activity." This, however, did nothing to change the reality that the bustling community was too distant from the proposed rail corridor. Given these assumptions, the NRSC townsite of Fort George was fated to become the region's pre-eminent community. For "Bruce," the conclusion was plain to see: *Saturday Night* had "entirely misrepresented the situation and that it has done so willfully and malevolently because the truth has been offered to it and it refused to consider it."<sup>39</sup>

Notwithstanding McConnell's certainty, the GTP's specific plans remained unclear. As early as April 1908, the railway had identified the Fort George Reserve as an ideal location for its station. The Lheidli T'enneh, their village, and cemetery, however, remained on the eastern edge of the 1,366-acre parcel, overlooking the Fraser River.<sup>40</sup> In that regard, McConnell's account accurately depicted the reserve's fate as central to the play of local developments. Negotiations for the purchase of the reserve proceeded slowly, with two potential agreements collapsing at the last moment.<sup>41</sup> Rumours circulated of the townsite company banqueting the Lheidli T'enneh leadership in the hope of convincing them that their land was worth \$1,000 an acre. The NRSC evidently believed that, if the Lheidli T'enneh demanded what outsiders thought was an exorbitant amount for the reserve, the railway company would be more

<sup>36</sup> "In the Sunset Glow," *BC Saturday Sunset*, 19 February 1910, 1; and "The Fort George Liberal Platform," *BC Saturday Sunset*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> "In the Sunset Glow," *BC Saturday Sunset*, 30 July 1910, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 August 1910, 1 and 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Vogt and Gamble, "You Don't Suppose," 59–60.

<sup>41</sup> "Indians Refuse to Give Up Land," *Vancouver Daily World*, 28 September 1910.

inclined to come to an agreement with Hammond and the Fort George townsite. For its part, and given an estimate that the land was worth six dollars an acre on the open market, the *Fort George Herald* thought that \$100 an acre was an inconceivable offer. However, since the potential buyer was a railway company, the newspaper thought the land might fetch fifty dollars an acre.<sup>42</sup> Whether the Lheidli T'enneh were willing to sell the reserve depended, in part, on who was consulted and on who the white newspapermen, evidently expecting a "chief" to speak for the entire community, chose to believe. McConnell, whose involvement aligned with Hammond and the Fort George townsite and thus was contrary to the GTP and its acquisition of the reserve, drew on the authority of "Chief Joseph Quachm" – Joseph Quah – who was reportedly disinclined to support the sale. At the same time, the *Fort George Herald*, based in South Fort George and openly antagonistic to Hammond and favouring the GTP, dismissed Quah as "a wily old red-skin who has very little influence" and preferred Chief Louis Stanislaus, known as Chief Louie, who was more open to the sale.<sup>43</sup> Setting aside the blinkered and racist expectations of the two newspaper accounts, historians Vogt and Gamble argue that the two Lheidli T'enneh leaders' economic interests may explain their positions. Quah's family and security were tied to the crops and livestock on the reserve, while Stanislaus "derived his personal income mainly from trading furs."<sup>44</sup> That both men eventually sided with a transfer went some distance to settling the matter, leading to the \$125,000 sale of the reserve being agreed upon on 18 November 1911.<sup>45</sup>

In the interim, by the late summer of 1910, the elements giving form to the Georges' early notoriety were established. Antagonistic townsites defending their interests through separate newspapers, the *Fort George Herald* in South Fort George and the *Fort George Tribune* in Fort George,

<sup>42</sup> "Indians Send Delegate to Ottawa to Negotiate a Sale," *Fort George Herald*, 21 January 1911. The banquet story initially surfaced in "Tea in the NRC Garden of the Grafting Gods," *Fort George Herald*, 14 January 1911; and "Editorial," *Fort George Herald*, 21 January 1911. It was recalled in "Another Attempt to Secure the Reservation Proves Futile," *Fort George Herald*, 3 June 1911; and repeated in "Fort George: The Original Hot-Air Townsite," *Winnipeg Saturday Post*, 12 August 1911.

<sup>43</sup> "Bruce' Starts Something," *Fort George Herald*, 20 August 1910. Dr. Theodore Binnema confirmed that, after 1902, Louie Stanislaus is regularly referred to in the Fort George Hudson's Bay Post Journals. See Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.280/a/8 (Fort George post journals, 1902–06). The *Herald* account uses the spelling "Stanaslus."

<sup>44</sup> Vogt and Gamble, "You Don't Suppose," 67.

<sup>45</sup> Leonard, *Thousand Blunders*, 175; and Vogt and Gamble, "You Don't Suppose," 55, 67, 69; "Fort George Townsite," *Prince Rupert Journal*, 24 February 1911; "GTP Secures Indian Reserve at Fort George," *Cariboo Observer*, 25 February 1911. For a racist depiction of the Lheidli T'enneh's efforts to defend their interests, see F.A. Talbot, "Opening up the Last Wilderness," in F.A. Talbot, *The Making of a Great Canadian Railway* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1912), 229–31.

with parallel outside interests – the GTP, *Saturday Night*, and *Saturday Sunset* – all engaged in a hyperbolic war of words.<sup>46</sup> What began as a dispute exchanging broadsides between Toronto- and Vancouver-based publications echoed through local newspapers acting as surrogates for the competing communities. Had the effect not been counterproductive, it would have been comical. Almost overnight the Georges emerged as a cartoonish jumble of battling townsites, heaving liquor joints, gambling dens, and brothels frequented by scarlet women, card sharps, drunks, wily “Indians,” and dishonest businessmen, all of whom would gladly separate honest Canadians from their hard-earned money. The mudslinging at both the local and national levels was breathtaking. That in the late autumn of 1910 there was perhaps a total population of six hundred people – Indigenous people and newcomers – in the immediate area, suggests that the sinning attributed to the local population was boldly exaggerated.<sup>47</sup>

Predictably, the jousting produced allegations of criminal libel. Most complaints failed to gain traction beyond finger pointing, preliminary investigations, and ongoing newsprint commentary.<sup>48</sup> Two cases, George Hammond’s suit against *Saturday Night* and a separate complaint levelled against John B. Daniell and the *Fort George Herald* did, however, go to trial.<sup>49</sup> In the former, Hammond’s attempt to secure an injunction preventing the magazine from commenting on Natural Resource Security Company’s activities was rejected by Mr. Justice William E. Middleton of Ontario’s High Court of Justice, Chancery Division, on 15 September 1910.<sup>50</sup> Characterized by historian Frank Leonard as seriously damaging the company’s credibility, the ruling terminated Hammond’s case against

<sup>46</sup> Rhys Pugh, “The Newspaper Wars in Prince George, BC, 1909–1918” (MA thesis, University of Northern British Columbia, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Discussing the mail service to South Fort George during the winter months, the *Fort George Herald* estimated the population in that community to be around five hundred in October 1910. See “Better Mail Facilities,” *Fort George Herald*, 15 October 1910. The newspaper dismissed the claim that Fort George had a population of six hundred and estimated that Fort George had fewer than ten residents. See “The Fort George Commercial Club and Who They Are,” *Fort George Herald*, 26 November 1910.

<sup>48</sup> Allegations of criminal libel aimed at John P. McConnell continued past preliminary hearings but then faltered. See “‘Bruce’ Held for Libel,” *Cariboo Observer*, 26 November 1910; “Libel Action,” *Prince Rupert Journal*, 6 December 1910; “The ‘Sunset’ Lies in the Limelight Facts Regarding ‘Bruce’s’ Libelous Articles,” *Fort George Herald*, 17 December 1910, and “Not Worth Much Bail,” *Fort George Herald*, 17 December 1910.

<sup>49</sup> Pugh, “Newspaper Wars”; and “Court Proceedings in Criminal Libel Suit,” *Fort George Herald*, 1 June 1912.

<sup>50</sup> “At Osgoode Hall: Plaintiffs Fail to Secure Injunction,” *Toronto Globe*, 17 September 1910; “Not Entitled to Injunction: Motion of Fort George Townsite Promoters Refused,” *Toronto Daily Mail and Empire*, 17 September 1910; and “Natural Resources Co. Refused Interim Injunction Restraining *Toronto Saturday Night* from Mentioning Their Townsite,” *Fort George Herald*,



*Saturday Night* and forced the promoter to initiate negotiations with the railway company over its station site.<sup>51</sup> The second case, in which Hammond sued *Herald* publisher Daniell for describing the businessman as a “jailbird” whose photograph was included in a “rogues’ gallery,” was launched in late 1911.<sup>52</sup> Initiated in Fort George but eventually played out in full in Kamloops, Daniell was found guilty on 18 October, in part because the entirety of his material gathered on Hammond’s earlier chequered career and reputation could not be presented in court.<sup>53</sup> Hammond’s victory proved costly for Daniell, who later claimed that, in fighting his corner, he had accumulated between \$7,000 and \$8,000 in debts. Within a year, he sold the *Herald* to Russell R. Walker, allowing the combative Daniell to temporarily abandon the newspaper business.<sup>54</sup>

Secured one month after the Lheidli T’enneh had agreed to sell the reserve to make way for the GTP’s new townsite, Hammond’s victory, as an extension of the battle between South Fort George and Fort George, was meaningless. Neither townsite was fated to be the region’s pre-eminent community.<sup>55</sup> However, since clearing the former reserve, establishing a street grid, and surveying lots would take the better part of two years, the increasingly pointless civil war continued. Hammond held to the tactic of attempting to force the railway to locate its station as close as possible to the NRSC Fort George townsite. In turn, South Fort George boosters emphasized that their community had the largest population and a thriving business core with established waterfront

8 October 1910. See John D. Arnup, *Middleton: The Beloved Judge* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 1988).

<sup>51</sup> Leonard, *Thousand Blunders*, 187–88.

<sup>52</sup> “Court Appoints Commission to Investigate Hammond’s Career,” *Fort George Herald*, 4 May 1912; untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 2 December 1911; untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 17 February 1911; “Daniell Up Against a Criminal Libel Charge,” *Cariboo Observer*, 24 February 1912; “Daniell Sent for Trial,” *Cariboo Observer*, 2 March 1912; “Criminal Libel Action Dismissed,” *Cariboo Observer*, 4 May 1912; “The Daniell Case Not Dismissed,” *Cariboo Observer*, 25 May 1912; “Judge Allows *Herald* Editor to Apologize,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 18 October 1912; “Criminal Libel Charge Proved,” *Kamloops Standard*, 18 October 1912; and “Daniell Found Guilty,” *Cariboo Observer*, 19 October 1912.

<sup>53</sup> “Geo. Hammond Objects to Cariboo Jury,” *Fort George Herald*, 5 October 1912; “Hammond-Herald Suit at Kamloops: Came Up on October 10,” *Fort George Herald*, 12 October 1912; and “Daniell’s Statement Regarding the Recent Libel Suit,” *Fort George Herald*, 14 December 1912. The surviving court documents are limited to the ruling moving the trial from Clinton to Kamloops. See *R. v. Daniell*, BCA, GR 2486, box 83.0932.0045.

<sup>54</sup> “The Newspapers of Cariboo,” *Prince George Citizen*, 13 March 1923. A contemporary account indicated that W.E. Playfair of the *Fort George Tribune* headed the group that bought out Daniell. See untitled article, *Cariboo Observer*, 29 November 1913. On Walker, see Russell R. Walker, *Bacon, Beans ’n Brave Hearts* (Lillooet: Lillooet Publishers, 1972); and “Returns to City,” *Prince George Post*, 18 September 1915.

<sup>55</sup> “GTP Station at Fort George: Bitter Townsite War Near Its Settlement,” *Cariboo Observer*, 16 March 1912.

access to the riverboat trade. The communities' respective newspapers followed suit, exchanging insults and extolling their own virtues. While the result was petty and reinforced the impression that the Georges were disruptive and ill mannered, the eruption of controversy over where the provincial government office, police station, and jail ought to be constructed shifted the contest to one in which policing and its physical presence became enveloped in the pursuit of respectability, permanence, and community identity.

#### A SYMBOL OF PERMANENCE

Fairly described, the tug-of-war over the government office, police station, and jail was a low comedy. Its resolution dovetailed neatly with John Houston's declaration that the "new Cariboo" needed to distance itself from the partisan squabbles of the province's political life centred in Victoria. His diagnosis remains an article of faith that the northern Interior's genuine interests rarely shape British Columbian policy conversations. For local residents in the early part of the twentieth century, the question was also one of practicality, given that the nearest government agent was located 183 kilometres to the south in the gold-mining community of Barkerville. Owing to an expected wave of settlers arriving in anticipation of completing the GTP Railway and the expansion of white settlement at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers, establishing a government office and police station became, in 1910 and 1911, a matter of rising importance for residents advocating on behalf of their respective townsites. Therefore, when government land agent Reginald Randall from Barkerville travelled north in the third week of July 1910 to declare that a government office and new ferry facilities would be established at the NRSC townsite of Fort George, howls of protest from South Fort George soon echoed through the halls of government in Victoria.<sup>56</sup> On his own authority, George Walker, gold commissioner and government agent at Barkerville, also travelled north, halted work on Randall's chosen site, and scheduled a local vote to determine the government office's location.<sup>57</sup> Reporting from the safety of Quesnel,

<sup>56</sup> "Fort George Is Growing," *Cariboo Observer*, 23 July 1910; "Controversy Over Site of Building," *Cariboo Observer*, 30 July 1910; "Government Buildings for Fort George," *Vancouver Daily World*, 3 August 1910. For a slightly fuller version of the decision, see "Another Estimate of 'Bruce'," *Fort George Herald*, 19 November 1910. On the ferry development, see "Government Supervisor Chooses Ferry Location," *Fort George Tribune*, 31 December 1910.

<sup>57</sup> Walker argued that locating the office in Fort George made little sense when "the business was being done" in South Fort George. See "Another Estimate of 'Bruce,'" *Fort George Herald*, 19 November 1911.

the *Cariboo Observer* newspaper noted that “the population of South Fort George is usually larger than Fort George and there is no doubt but that the election will favor South Fort George. The report will be interesting to those who have purchased lots in Fort George. This will decide the question, but too much hard feeling has apparently been aroused over the matter for it to let loose the dove of peace between the two townsites.”<sup>58</sup> Held on 30 July, despite the complaints of a faulty electoral process from the Fort George townsite backers (who seem to have boycotted the contest), the near unanimous vote favoured building the government office in South Fort George.

Chastened, Randall returned following the tally to scout a location in South Fort George after the provincial secretary in Victoria had seemingly given the go-ahead.<sup>59</sup> This proved not to be the case. The government had become uneasy, and this discomfort was not without reason. Building a *permanent* office anywhere in the Georges before the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway negotiations for purchasing the Lheidli T'enneh reserve had concluded – which would not be the case until October 1910 – and in anticipation of laying-out the new townsite, would be foolish. However, since the vast majority of local settlers were in South Fort George, establishing a *temporary* office there represented a reasonable convenience. Perhaps hoping that a personal touch might smooth ruffled feathers and provide some clarity, Conservative premier Richard McBride and an entourage, including C.H. Lugin, editor of the *Daily Colonist* in Victoria; F. Carter-Cotton, former editor of the *Vancouver News Advertiser*; British member of Parliament and railway contractor, John Norton-Griffiths; Harry Brittain, organizer of the Imperial Press Conference in 1909; and Lord Dunmore of the House of Peers, journeyed north to assess both the situation and the region's potential for sustaining a growing community of white settlers.<sup>60</sup> Rather than confirming the pragmatic choice of locating temporary government facilities in South Fort George, McBride equivocated. What might seem to be a logical choice was no more. By late October, the *Fort George Herald* believed it had solved the mystery of why the government had failed to act: interests representing the NRSC had been arm-twisting in the provincial capital

<sup>58</sup> “Controversy Over Site of Building,” *Cariboo Observer*, 30 July 1910.

<sup>59</sup> “South Fort George Is Chosen Site,” *Cariboo Observer*, 6 August 1910; “That Board of Trade (?) Public Meeting,” *Fort George Tribune*, 6 August 1910; untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 20 August 1910.

<sup>60</sup> “Premier M'Bride on His Way North,” *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 25 August 1910; “By the Back Door Route,” *Prince Rupert Optimist*, 26 August 1910; “Our Distinguished Visitors,” *Fort George Herald*, 27 August 1910; and “Well Received in Old Cariboo,” *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 31 August 1910. See also Roy, *Boundless Optimism*, 182.

in favour of building the offices in Fort George. For Daniell of the *Herald*, the editor of a newspaper with unalloyed Conservative Party credentials, the McBride government had been hoodwinked by corporate interests instead of taking heed of local sentiment.<sup>61</sup>

The matter festered through the autumn of 1910 and then through the winter and spring of 1911. All the necessary building material, including the steel jail cells, remained in storage at the Barnard Express (BX) warehouse in South Fort George.<sup>62</sup> Returning to the topic in mid-March 1911, the *Fort George Herald* conjured up images of *Alice in Wonderland*, declaring that the time had come for the McBride administration to act. Otherwise, the incoming settlers would have to trek to Barkerville to complete government business.<sup>63</sup> Finally, on 1 April 1911, word was received from J.A. Fraser, the local member of the Legislative Assembly, that, with Solomon-like wisdom, the government had decided to build its temporary offices on the Hudson's Bay Company's land, one and a half kilometres north of South Fort George and two and a half kilometres east of the NRSC Fort George townsite. The compromise offended both communities and proved to be an aggravating inconvenience.<sup>64</sup> In the same issue, reporting on the site for the government office, the *Herald* carried an editorial that had evidently been set out in type before the front-page announcement. Demanding that the offices and jail be located in South Fort George, editor Daniell harkened back to John Houston's early differentiation between the shortcomings of the "Old Cariboo" and the promise of the "New": "The residents of the 'New Cariboo' are all grouped within its confines under pressure of discomfort, merely because a provincial unpaternal [*sic*] government is not clothed with the spirit of enterprise. The government officials who visited the district last summer were then alive to the needs of the district; today, however, they are not alive. They have forgotten that such a place as South Fort George is on the map."<sup>65</sup> Simply put, the "New Cariboo" could not rely on a provincial government whose favours were available to the highest bidder.

<sup>61</sup> "The Cobwebs Gather: Government Building Site Still an Undecided Problem – Matter Ends in a Fiasco?" *Fort George Herald*, 29 October 1910; and untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 12 November 1910.

<sup>62</sup> "Offices Not Built though Equipment Is Here," *Fort George Herald*, 3 December 1910.

<sup>63</sup> "The Time Has Come the Walrus Said," *Fort George Herald*, 18 March 1911.

<sup>64</sup> "Government Offices to Be Erected Immediately: Will Be Located on the Hudson's Bay Company's Property," *Fort George Herald*, 1 April 1911; "Government Office at Fort George," *Cariboo Observer*, 1 April 1911; "Site Selected for Government Offices," *Fort George Herald*, 20 May 1911; and "A Community without a Jail," *Fort George Herald*, 24 June 1911.

<sup>65</sup> Untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 1 April 1911.

That the government offices did not include a police station, quarters, or a jail was entirely consistent with the ongoing fiasco. The absence was answered with a tepid promise that the missing pieces “will probably be built later.”<sup>66</sup> Reportedly, the government agent was aware of the necessity of a jail. So, too, was the attorney general’s office in Victoria. “The mix-up which enveloped the government building location hereabouts involved the losing of the jail, which was provided for in the initial plans of the government, in the shuffle, as the Victoria diplomatists who settled the claims of rival townsites to the location of the buildings in the un-unique [*sic*] manner of placing them on neutral ground, omitted to consider the fact that it was too remote a spot from the populated area to serve as a jail, so the steel cells continue to rust in the ‘B.X’ warehouse.”<sup>67</sup> The *Herald* sniped away at the story until early October 1911, when the construction of a “temporary” jail beside the “temporary” government office was started.<sup>68</sup> Arguing that locating the government office on the HBC parcel had placated other “interests,” the *Herald* held that practicality indicated that a separate police station and jail ought to have been built in South Fort George for the convenience of a community of well-ordered, desirable, white residents. “If it be absolutely compulsory a man will walk half a mile to transact his business with a government agent, but it is a hard matter for a solitary policeman to coax a drunk and disorderly ‘bohunk’ to stagger with him over half a mile of trail, knowing that he is to be put away in a rusty steel cage at the end of his meanderings.” Exasperated, Daniell was left wondering how their interests might attract fair representation: “What have we done? – Most everybody voted right!!”<sup>69</sup>

The competition over the government office, police station, and jail confirmed the Georges’ scorched reputation. Aware of the dubious associations linked with the name Fort George, the GTP hoped that its new townsite – Prince George – resonating of royalty and boasting an architectural design influenced by the City Beautiful Movement and drawn up by the Boston firm of Brett, Hall and Company, might distinguish the new townsite.<sup>70</sup> Neither the proposed name nor the city

<sup>66</sup> Untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 27 May 1911; and “Fort George News Items,” *Cariboo Observer*, 22 July 1911.

<sup>67</sup> “Community without a Jail.”

<sup>68</sup> Untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 7 October 1911.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> John Curry and Jason Llewellyn, “The Revitalization of Downtown Prince George,” *BC Studies* 124 (Winter 1999/2000): 72–73; “Plans for Townsite Are Now Complete,” *Fort George Tribune*, 28 September 1912. On this rationale for the eventual name change, see “Grand Trunk Townsite Named ‘Prince George,’” *Fort George Herald*, 11 January 1913; “Squeal When You’re

plan achieved the desired effect. While it was laid out with sweeping boulevards, crescent-shaped streets on a gentle rise overlooking the city's business section, a traffic circle designed to ease congestion, and a downtown core anchored by a city hall and the railway station at opposite ends of the main business street, a tortuous dispute over incorporation, the relocation of the rail station away from the city hall corridor, and a prolonged series of hearings, reports, and petitions reinforced the impression that, regardless of its name or appearance, fractious and disorderly behaviour dogged the white settler community at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers.<sup>71</sup> Inasmuch as the Georges' bad reputation was rooted in the hyperbole and overheated rhetoric of townsite promoters, newspaper men, and boosters common to western Canada's pre-First World War white settlement history, the resilience of that identity proved to be extraordinarily tenacious.

For local community and opinion leaders, an especially troubling legacy of these controversy-filled early years was that, notwithstanding the self-defeating newspaper war, local leaders had genuinely invested their energies in building what aspired to be well-ordered, Christian communities. As much as Reverend Wright may have antagonized some residents, most self-identified white settlers subscribed to the core beliefs that, if the region, the province, and indeed the nation were to thrive – if a new day was to dawn – they needed to attract the right kind of settler, one whose morality and character would energize public life. As Reverend Dr. A. Carman, general superintendent of the Methodist Church, urged delegates of the Social Service Congress gathered in Ottawa on 3 March 1914, this task of nation-building required nothing less than combatting “the evils that afflict our nation, and arrest or retard our progress, and to lift up and spread abroad the forces that make for righteousness, purity and goodness. Be it ours, by precept and example, to exalt the moral and social standards of the country, to ennoble the manhood and womanhood of the land, and where at all necessary or desirable, to reach the same ends by wise and beneficent law, and its efficient administration.”<sup>72</sup> If the

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Hurt,” *Fort George Herald*, 1 February 1913; untitled article, *Fort George Herald*, 12 April 1913; Leonard, *Thousand Blunders*, 196, 205–7.

<sup>71</sup> The complicated history of incorporation and how it affected the question of the railway station's location is discussed in Holmes, “Promotion of Early Growth.”

<sup>72</sup> Reverend Dr. A. Carman, General Superintendent, Methodist Church, “Opening Address,” *Social Service Congress, Ottawa, 1914, Report of Addresses and Proceedings* (Toronto: The Social Service Council of Canada, 1914), 4. On Carman, see Ramsey Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late-Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 20–24; David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 28–29 and 68–69; and Neil Semple,



nation was to prosper in the face of these many challenges, it required immigration and naturalization policies that attracted desirable immigrants and dissuaded those with unsuitable beliefs, practices, and character.<sup>73</sup> Populated with preferred peoples, Canada, British Columbia, and the northern Interior would quickly demonstrate the outlook and political will to become a well-ordered society.

In hindsight, these early years delivered a more complicated message. For in imagining themselves as heroically establishing such a society in the northern Interior, an unsettling fear emerged on the periphery of white thinking. Had the excess of the newsprint war left an indelible mark? Despite their efforts in setting the foundations of a well-ordered, white, and Christian community, success had been partial and fleeting. Had this result undermined their own claims of superiority? Had they lost elements of their own white privilege? Had they sacrificed their status as the bearers of white superiority? Too often it felt that in the eyes of southern and urban commentators, northern whites and the communities they created were viewed as less refined, less orderly, less civilized, and ultimately, less white and respectable. This nourished a hardening identity in the northern Interior of being unappreciated, overlooked, and disregarded. Here was the groundwork of a regionalized sense of self that viewed the urban Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island with distrust and defensiveness. While there is little reason to conclude that the Georges were alone in demonstrating a mounting animus towards opinion leaders and decision-makers in Victoria, the persistence of the Georges' reputation as rough and tumble "gritty mill-towns," emerges as an echo of a deeply etched historical identity. When viewed from afar, the townsite battle, the accompanying war of words between various publications, and Wright's call to action suggest an underlying tone of disquiet. For when the hopes and

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*Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 271–72.

<sup>73</sup> See Ernest McGaffey, "Immigration – Its Advantages and Disadvantages," *British Columbia Magazine*, 8, 10 (1912): 725–27; W.W. Lee, Immigration Secretary, YMCA, National Council, "Immigration from Europe," in *Social Service Congress*, 242–47; H.H. Stevens, Conservative Party Member of Parliament for Vancouver City riding, "Immigration from the Orient," in *Social Service Congress*, 248–57. Methodist minister J.S. Woodsworth voiced the Social Gospel's racist views of immigration to Canada. See J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers within Our Gates: or, Coming Canadians* (Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, 1909). On Woodsworth's acceptance of the fixed relationship between "race" and fitness for governance, see James W. St. G. Walker, "Race", *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 1997), 14–15; and Renisa Mawani, "In Between and Out of Place: Mixed Blood Identity, Liquor, and the Law in British Columbia, 1850–1913," in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, ed. Sherene H. Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 49.

disappointments are combined, we might wonder if the boosterism and braggadocio of white opinion leaders served two purposes: (1) convincing outside commentators and opinion leaders that the northern Interior represented these high ideals and, perhaps just as urgently, (2) reassuring the white settlement community themselves that such was the case. Centred on community identity and reputation, the contest and the questions it posed generated persistent anxiety at the very gates of hell.