

“CHINKS PAY HEAVILY FOR ‘HITTING PIPE’”:

The Perception and Enforcement of Canada’s New Drug Laws in Rural and Northern British Columbia, 1908–30¹

YVAN PRKACHIN

THE FRONT PAGE of the 10 December 1920 *Prince George Citizen* probably did not arouse much excitement among its readers. The main story concerned the completion of a new local curling rink, which had been in the works for some time. National news contained in that issue was equally uninspiring: a proposal had been tabled in Parliament for the construction of an oil pipeline from Mackenzie to the Bering Sea.² Neither of these two stories provoked much editorial comment from the newspaper writers. However, tucked away on the fifth page of that issue, the *Citizen* writers made their opinions perfectly clear on another issue when they declared that “Chinks Pay Heavily for ‘Hitting Pipe’”:

Chief of Police Sinclair has been busy of late in the prosecution of the heathen Chinese [sic] for dallying with the forbidden opium. Under the new Opium Act it is perilous for an Oriental to be found in possession of this drug either for purposes of smoking, chewing or snuffing up the Chinese nose. This offence was made more heinous by an amendment to the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act which came into effect on October 15th. The Act is aimed at the stamping out of the drug habit in all its phases. For being in possession of a narcotic drug without proper authority the minimum fine is now \$200 and the maximum \$1000.³

¹ Special thanks are due to Jonathan Swainger, who supervised the honours thesis upon which this article is based. Thanks also to Mary-Ellen Kelm, Theodore Binnema, and Jacqueline Holler, who provided invaluable editing suggestions, and to Robert McDonald and the anonymous reviewers for *BC Studies*, whose contributions strengthened the article substantially. Thanks also to my family and friends.

² *Prince George Citizen*, 10 December 1920, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

The article went on to detail a number of recent drug cases that had been prosecuted in Prince George, including the arrests of Ah Joe, Wing Song, and Wing Kee, all of whom were sentenced to a \$200 fine or two months in jail for opium possession. Yee Yock, a local laundry owner, was also fined \$100 for opium possession. This would not be Yock's last drug-related encounter with the law.

The historiography of Canada's drug laws has, until recently, emphasized the socio-political motivations for their introduction. These studies have examined the roots of drug laws in racial theories of nationalism and socio-medical discourses of "social purity."⁴ However, with the exception of the work of Catherine Carstairs and Steve Hewitt, few studies have examined how these new morality laws operated at "ground level" – that is, how drug laws were perceived and enforced by the police and the general population.⁵ Furthermore, the history of drug prohibition has generally focused on major urban centres.⁶ Although both types of studies have been admirably executed, they have ignored the fact that, until the 1920s, Canada was primarily a non-urban nation. Indeed, the so-called "drug panics" of the 1920s occurred just as the percentage of Canadians living in cities surpassed that of the rural population.⁷ Canada was still a predominantly rural nation during the early years of drug prohibition. This confluence of conditions raises a number of intriguing research questions: How were drug laws enforced in a rural setting, and was there a difference in the perception of drug users outside of major urban centers? What role did locale, the media,

⁴ Some examples include Neil Boyd, "The Origins of Canadian Narcotics Legislation: The Process of Criminalization in Historical Context," *Dalhousie Law Journal* 8 (1984): 102-36; Shirley Jones Cook, "Canadian Narcotics Legislation, 1908-1923: A Conflict Model Interpretation," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 6 (1969): 36-46; M. Green, "A History of Canadian Narcotics Control: The Formative Years," *University of Toronto Faculty of Law Review* 37 (1979): 42-79. A fine intellectual history of Canada's early drug legislation is contained in Dan Malleck, "It's Baneful Influences Are Too Well Known': Debates over Drug Use in Canada, 1867-1908," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 14 (1997): 267-75.

⁵ Catherine Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession: Illegal Drug Use, Regulation, and Power, 1920-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Catherine Carstairs, "'Hop Heads' and 'Hypes': Drug Use, Regulation and Resistance in Canada, 1920-1961" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2000); Steve Hewitt, "'While Unpleasant It Is a Service to Humanity': The RCMP's War on Drugs in the Interwar Period," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 38, 2 (2004): 80-104.

⁶ One exception is Clayton Mosher's book, *Discrimination and Denial*, which briefly examines rural-urban issues, although not to any great extent. Patricia Roy's *The Oriental Question* does state that "the antidrug campaign spread to the hinterland" and notes a number of interesting episodes from Nanaimo, Cumberland, and Vernon. But she deals with the subject briefly, and her analysis does not extend further north. See also Clayton Mosher, *Discrimination and Denial: Systemic Racism in Ontario's Legal and Criminal Justice Systems, 1892-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 58; and Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-1941* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 52.

⁷ *Urban Growth in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1984), 4.

and the professionalization of policing play in structuring how people thought about drugs and drug users in the 1910s and 1920s?

As "Chinks Pay Heavily for 'Hitting Pipe'" might seem to suggest, 1920 marked the beginning of a brief period of intense drug-crime prosecution in rural and northern British Columbia.⁸ However, the sensationalistic style of the "Chinks Pay Heavily" story, and the concurrent escalation of drug-crime prosecution in rural British Columbia, was somewhat unusual. In the twelve years that passed after the introduction of the Opium Act, 1908, rural and northern British Columbia expressed comparatively little interest in drug crime. Comparatively fewer drug users were prosecuted in rural British Columbia than in the Lower Mainland. Further, early newspaper reports of drug crime in rural and northern regions betray a lack of concern about what was perceived to be a city problem. This perception would change in the early 1920s, when a deliberate attempt was made to spread moral panic and stringent policing practices to the region; legal persecution of rural British Columbia's Chinese communities was the result. However, even at the height of rural drug panics, some people exhibited scepticism about the extent of the problem. Further, though drug-policing was often very destructive in rural British Columbia, it tended to fade away more rapidly than it did in urban British Columbia, as did the moral panics. Concern about Chinese drug use was not shared equally throughout the province: it was exported by middle-class moral reformers and the RCMP from southern cities to the province's rural regions.

In order to understand why and how urban drug-panic and policing spread to rural British Columbia, some background is necessary. Drug

⁸ Defining the term "rural" has proved difficult for historians and social scientists alike. In her introduction to *Beyond the City Limits*, R.W. Sandwell points out that, by a strict definition based on the prevalence of subsistence agriculture, less than 3 percent of British Columbia qualifies as rural. However, as late as the 1950s, more than 50 percent of the province's population lived outside of major urban centres. Sandwell generally defines "rural" as an area of "low population density." In accordance with Sandwell's definition, it is worth noting that the 1921 census records population densities of between 0.24 and 3.41 people per square mile for such districts as Cariboo, Yale, and West Kootenay, while Vancouver Centre's density is 10624.6 people per square mile. See Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1924), 10. For the purposes of this article, "rural" is defined fairly broadly to include those areas and small towns that contained less than seven thousand people or that, in some fashion, self-identified as "rural." For instance, while Cumberland is geographically close to Vancouver and Victoria, the editorial from the *Cumberland Islander* quoted in this article makes it clear that this town identified itself as separate from these urban centres. Meanwhile, "northern" is defined broadly to include areas north of the Okanagan. My interest here is primarily with those who lived outside of the Lower Mainland and its more urban population. See R.W. Sandwell, "Introduction: Finding Rural British Columbia," in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 3-14.

use was legal in Canada prior to 1908. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, a profitable opium importation business had developed in Victoria, where numerous opium refineries operated quite openly.⁹ Drugs were used by many members of Canadian society, from the wealthy and educated (who consumed patent medicines) to immigrant labourers such as the numerous Chinese sojourners in British Columbia's urban and rural communities (who smoked opium). Although white British Columbians thought of opium smoking as the dirty and deplorable cultural practice of objectionable immigrants, it was generally tolerated if confined to the Chinese.¹⁰ As Terry Chapman writes, if the residents of British Columbia were cognizant of smoking opium in the 1860s, it bore no significance in light of the much needed economic "development ... Through an examination of the *Victoria Daily Colonist* published in the 1860s, it is evident that opium and its use was an accepted fact of life for the paper's readers."¹¹

Opium smoking was certainly practised by the large number of sojourning Chinese labourers in British Columbia's rural communities. The overwhelmingly male immigrants from China's Pearl River Delta region brought the habit with them during the gold rushes of the mid-nineteenth century. Opium use in rural British Columbia is recorded indirectly in local newspapers as early as the 1860s.¹² As Lily Chow suggests, the nature of Chinese life in the interior likely contributed to the desire to use drugs. Working menial jobs as labourers, cooks, domestic servants, laundry operators, and occasionally small-business owners, the Chinese in rural British Columbia were often isolated from forms of amusement and escapism popular with whites. Recalling life in the interior, an elderly Chinese man was to say,

"Once you start smoking opium, it is difficult to quit. Also some old folks did not believe in western medicine. When they had pains they would rather smoke opium or sniff morphine to kill the pains. Many

⁹ David Chuenyan Lai, "Chinese Opium Trade and Manufacture in British Columbia, 1858-1908," *Journal of the West* 38, 3 (1999): 21-4.

¹⁰ Terry Chapman, "Drug Usage and the Victoria Daily Colonist: The Opium Smokers of Western Canada," Canadian Society for Legal History, *Proceedings*, ed. Louis A Knafle (Toronto: York University Law Library, 1978), 62-64; G.E. Trasov, "History of the Opium and Narcotic Drug Legislation in Canada," *Criminal Law Quarterly* 4 (1962): 275-6; Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 9. This is also the case in the western United States during this period. See David Courtwright, "Opiate Addiction in the American West, 1850-1920," *Journal of the West* 21, 3 (1982): 23-9.

¹¹ Chapman, "Drug Usage," 63-4.

¹² Lily Chow, *Sojourners in the North* (Prince George, BC: Caitlin Pres, 1996), 42-8, 77-8, 92, 94.

early Chinese were frustrated. They missed their home ... They remained poor and life was miserable. Many of them wanted to forget and they got drunk ...Others took drugs to numb their feelings."¹³

Thus, as much as any other area of the province, rural and northern British Columbia contained a considerable population of Chinese drug users.

Drug use was criminalized in Canada in 1908 following the passage of the Opium Act, which was indirectly the result of the 1907 Vancouver anti-Asiatic riot. In response to the riot, then deputy minister of labour William Lyon Mackenzie King was sent to investigate claims made for compensation and was surprised to receive two claims from opium manufacturerers who had been operating legally in Vancouver for many years. Concerned with the possibility that the Chinese practice was spreading to whites, Mackenzie King began an amateurish investigation into the opium trade in Vancouver and began corresponding with members of the Chinese Anti-Opium league. Two weeks later King submitted his *Report on the Need for the Suppression of the Opium Traffic in Canada*, and in the following weeks the Opium Act passed without debate. This act initially prohibited "the importation, manufacture and sale of opium for other than medicinal purposes." In 1911, the charge of smoking opium was added to the revised Opium and Narcotic Drugs Act (ONDA). The new law made smoking opium an offence that carried a maximum penalty of a fifty-dollar fine and one month in prison.¹⁴

Although some scholars have argued that anti-drug legislation was part of a specific reaction against Chinese labourers in British Columbia, and therefore cut across class lines, Dan Malleck has persuasively argued that this perspective is largely inaccurate. The history of drug prohibition in Canada ultimately reveals that such legislation was more the product of middle-class anxiety and reform movements than of any overwhelming concern of the Canadian people as a whole. Indeed, Malleck identifies two major groups that were particularly concerned about the use of narcotics in the early twentieth century: doctors and middle-class reformers, among whom members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (wctu) were the earliest and most vocal decriers of the dangers of drug addiction. These groups regularly linked narcotic addiction, medical or otherwise, with enslavement of the will and enfeeblement of the body, making drug use a problem of national health. This led to calls for strong anti-narcotic measures. For these

¹³ Interview quoted in Chow, *Soujourners*, 125.

¹⁴ Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession*, 17; Trasov, "History," 277-280.

middle-class moral reformers, who belonged to what Marian Valverde has dubbed the “social purity” movement, narcotic addiction, along with intemperance and prostitution, represented a clear danger to the health of the Canadian nation.¹⁵

While much of the initial concern over drugs emerged from fears about medical addiction, Chinese opium smokers ultimately bore the brunt of legislative efforts to curb narcotics use. The social purity movement latched on to Chinese opium smoking as the most serious threat. Indeed, the decline in middle-class usage by the beginning of the twentieth century made drug use among the Chinese and the working class an inviting target for legislation.¹⁶ However, though British Columbians had tolerated opium smoking when it was confined to Chinese immigrants, fears that the practice was spreading to “respectable” whites aroused the ire of reform-minded legislators. In his *Report on the Need for the Suppression of the Opium Traffic in Canada*, King, himself a well-known moral reformer, makes numerous references to this possibility. He expressed concern that “almost as much opium was sold to white people as to Chinese, and that the habit of opium smoking was making headway, not only among white men and boys, but also among women and girls.”¹⁷ Yet it was not only the threat posed to the future mothers of the nation that made opium such a terrible menace. In his correspondence with the Chinese Anti-Opium League, King made clear his belief that opium “does so much to destroy not only the lives of individuals, *but the manhood of a nation.*”¹⁸ This statement perhaps best encapsulates the social-purity attitude towards opium and, ultimately, the reason for the drug’s criminalization. The Chinese Empire, long held in high regard by the West, was, by the twentieth century, thought to be in decline. This decline was often explained as a result of decadence, which was perceived to lead to moral corruption and feminization. Opium smoking was one such form of decadence.¹⁹ King’s statement reveals not only a belief in these popular notions of Chinese decline but also a fear that such a decline might be possible in Canada and the British Empire, should opium smoking be permitted to continue.

¹⁵ Malleck, 264-76; Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1835-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 1-26.

¹⁶ Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession*, 18.

¹⁷ W.L. Mackenzie King, *Report by W.L. Mackenzie King, C.M.G., on the Need for the Suppression of the Opium Traffic in Canada* (Ottawa: Sessional Paper 36b, 1908), 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6. Emphasis added.

¹⁹ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 4-5; Valverde, *Age of Light*, 110-11.

Following the horrors of the First World War, the anxiety felt by Canadian moral reformers over the threat posed by opium smoking re-emerged with a greatly increased sense of urgency. Social purity-influenced reforms increased dramatically following the war, and they took on an increasingly xenophobic and puritanical air.²⁰ Indeed, as Mariana Valverde has suggested, "the Great War caused a quantum leap in ... concern about conserving human life."²¹ At the same time, Jonathan Vance has argued that, to ensure that the war had not been fought in vain, reformers used the memory of the dead to campaign for greater social change.²² This combination of anxiety and desire for change would lead to, among other things, a resurgent concern over the growth of drug use in Canada.

Perhaps the perfect example of increasing postwar alarm is the anti-drug literature of Edmonton magistrate Emily Murphy. Murphy, the first female magistrate in the British Empire, was a strong proponent of increasing penalties for drug offenders. In the spring of 1920, she published a series of articles in *Macleans*' magazine warning Canadians of the danger of the drug traffic. In 1922, she turned these articles into a book, *The Black Candle*, wherein she warned that opium was part of an "international conspiracy of yellow and black drug pushers whose ultimate goal is the domination of the bright-browed races of the world."²³ Echoing Murphy's fears, a number of other Canadian periodicals began to publish what Carstairs has termed "narratives of narcoticism" – stories of young, usually white, boys and girls falling victim to the usually Chinese "nefarious dope trafficker."²⁴ These "drug panics" led to a significant stiffening of Canadian drug laws. Before the 1920s, drug users tended to receive only fines; after 1920, they faced much heavier fines, jail time, and deportation.²⁵

Overlapping this intensification of drug panic was a shift in emphasis; moral reformers now concentrated on rural Canada. As Karen Dubinsky has demonstrated, following the First World War moral reformers placed increasing importance on the rural countryside as the backbone of the Canadian nation; they emphasized protecting the rural countryside

²⁰ Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 35-62.

²¹ Valverde, *Age of Light*, 24.

²² Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 198-256.

²³ Emily Murphy, *The Black Candle* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1922), 32.

²⁴ Catherine Carstairs, "Innocent Addicts, Dope Fiends and Nefarious Traffickers: Illegal Drug Use in 1920s English Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 33, 3(1998): 145-62.

²⁵ Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession*, 18.

from degradation and defilement.²⁶ One manifestation of this amplified desire to protect rural Canada was a series of “narratives of narcoticism” that specifically warned rural residents of the dangers of drugs.²⁷ In many ways, the First World War acted as a catalyst to spread fear of drugs to rural Canada.

Finally, postwar Canada was policed differently than was prewar Canada. Beginning in 1920, the Royal North-West Mounted Police (RNWMP) and the Dominion Police merged and became the RCMP. However, the survival of this new national police force was uncertain. During the war, provincial police had successfully taken over much of the policing duties performed by the RNWMP. This being the case, the RCMP experienced what Steven Hewitt has dubbed a “crisis of legitimacy.”²⁸ Fortunately for the RCMP, the crisis was solved in 1921, when the Department of Health, in charge of enforcing the ONDA, asked the national force to take up the task of prosecuting drug offenders. As Hewitt puts it, this new directive gave the RCMP “the opportunity to demonstrate its relevance through involvement in a moral battle,” and that allowed the organization to ward off attacks by hostile members of Parliament. In its quest to legitimate itself, the RCMP vigorously prosecuted Chinese drug users and dramatically increased its policing powers.²⁹ These overlapping layers of social, political, and institutional trends encouraged the spread of an urban, middle-class preoccupation with drugs to rural British Columbia.

Data from the *Annual Report of Statistics of Criminal and Other Offences* for the years between 1912 and 1930 indicate some intriguing differences between more urban and more rural areas of British Columbia.³⁰ The *Report* divided the province into eight judicial regions: Atlin, Cariboo, Kootenay, Nanaimo, Vancouver, Victoria, Westminster, and Yale. As Graph 1 indicates, the regions of Vancouver and Victoria showed much higher absolute numbers of convictions under the ONDA than did other areas of the province.

Furthermore, the Vancouver and Victoria districts show somewhat erratic, but consistently high, conviction rates during the period under

²⁶ Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 150-2; Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 169.

²⁷ Carstairs, “Innocent Addicts,” 149.

²⁸ Hewitt, “While Unpleasant,” 81-3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 83-100.

³⁰ The data for the following statistics are from Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Report of Statistics of Criminal and Other Offences* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1912-31).

examination, whereas the other areas of the province show a significant increase in arrests between 1918 and 1923. This data would indicate that interest in prosecuting drug crime was relatively steady in Vancouver and Victoria between 1912 and 1930, while drug laws enjoyed a brief surge in popularity in rural regions between 1918 and 1923.

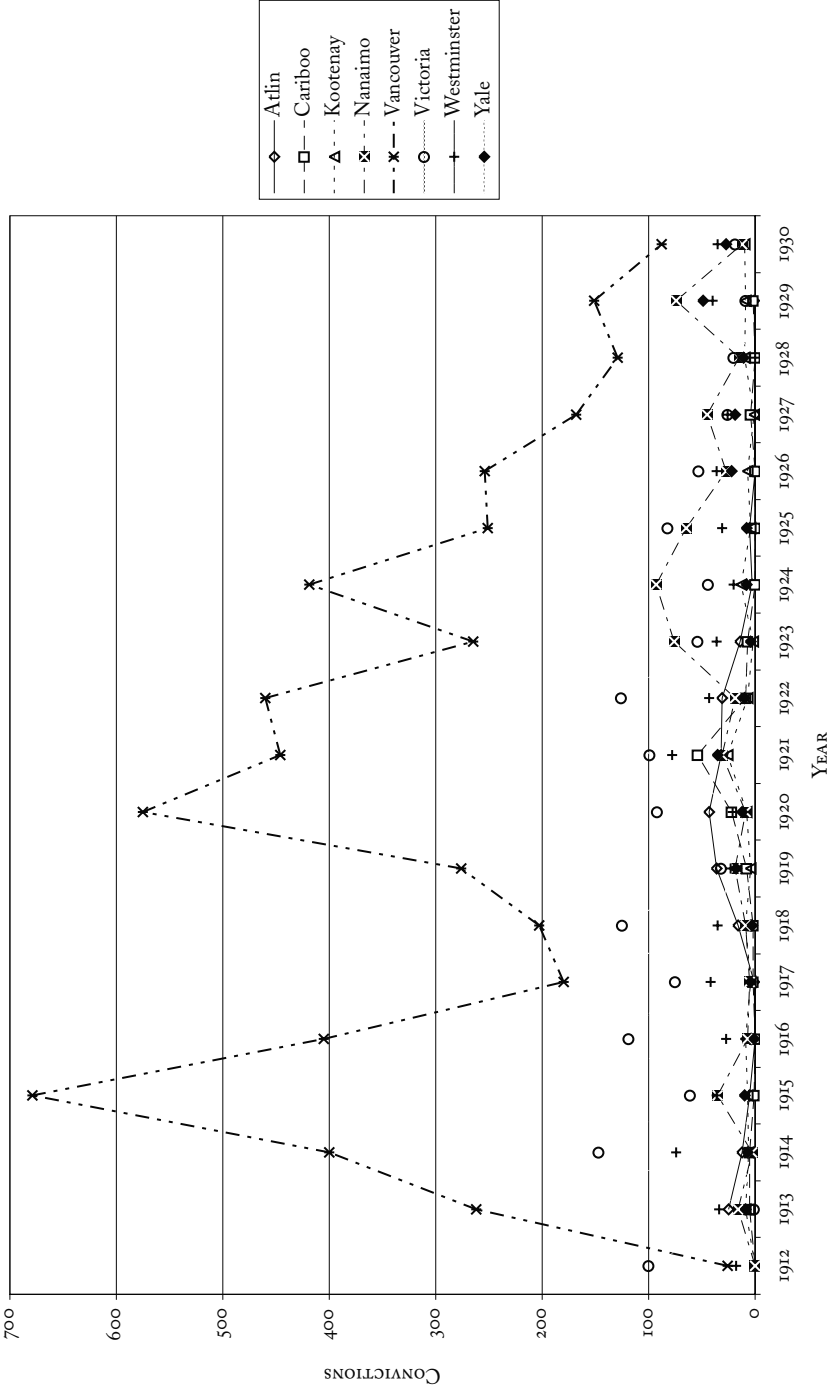
Further, a comparison between ONDA convictions and convictions for drunkenness reveals a pronounced urban/rural divide over drug crime. Graph 2 shows the total number of ONDA convictions in the urban districts of Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo compared with the total number of convictions for all other areas of the province. While at least 50 per cent of the province's population resided in rural areas during most of this period, the more urban areas often show a conviction rate up to six times higher than that of rural areas. (For instance, for the year 1914, Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo had 550 ONDA convictions, while the total for the rest of the province was 104.) By contrast, Graph 3 shows that convictions for drunkenness were much more consistent across the urban/rural divide.

In one year, 1922, the urban districts had only two more drunkenness convictions than did the rural areas (491 versus 489). Though using these judicial districts to divide the province into rural and urban areas is admittedly imperfect, it does strongly suggest a substantial difference between the enforcement and perception of drug laws in these two areas.

While the statistical records of the *Report of Statistics of Criminal and Other Offences* are useful for establishing a broad sense of drug prosecution in British Columbia, police court record books provide a much more detailed picture of a city's criminal trends. Unfortunately, the records for rural British Columbia are extremely fragmentary. For instance, the police court records of Prince George and Prince Rupert cannot be found in the British Columbia Provincial Archives. However, the records that can be found establish some interesting patterns of prosecution over time. The police court records of Williams Lake, 150 Mile House, and Quesnel contain only a handful of drug convictions for the entire period from 1911 to 1930. For example, the police court record books for Quesnel contain only two drug convictions between the years 1911 and 1925 – the first in 1913, the second in 1917.³¹ The records of Williams Lake show large numbers of Chinese men being arrested for gambling offences in 1914, and only a single drug conviction for the

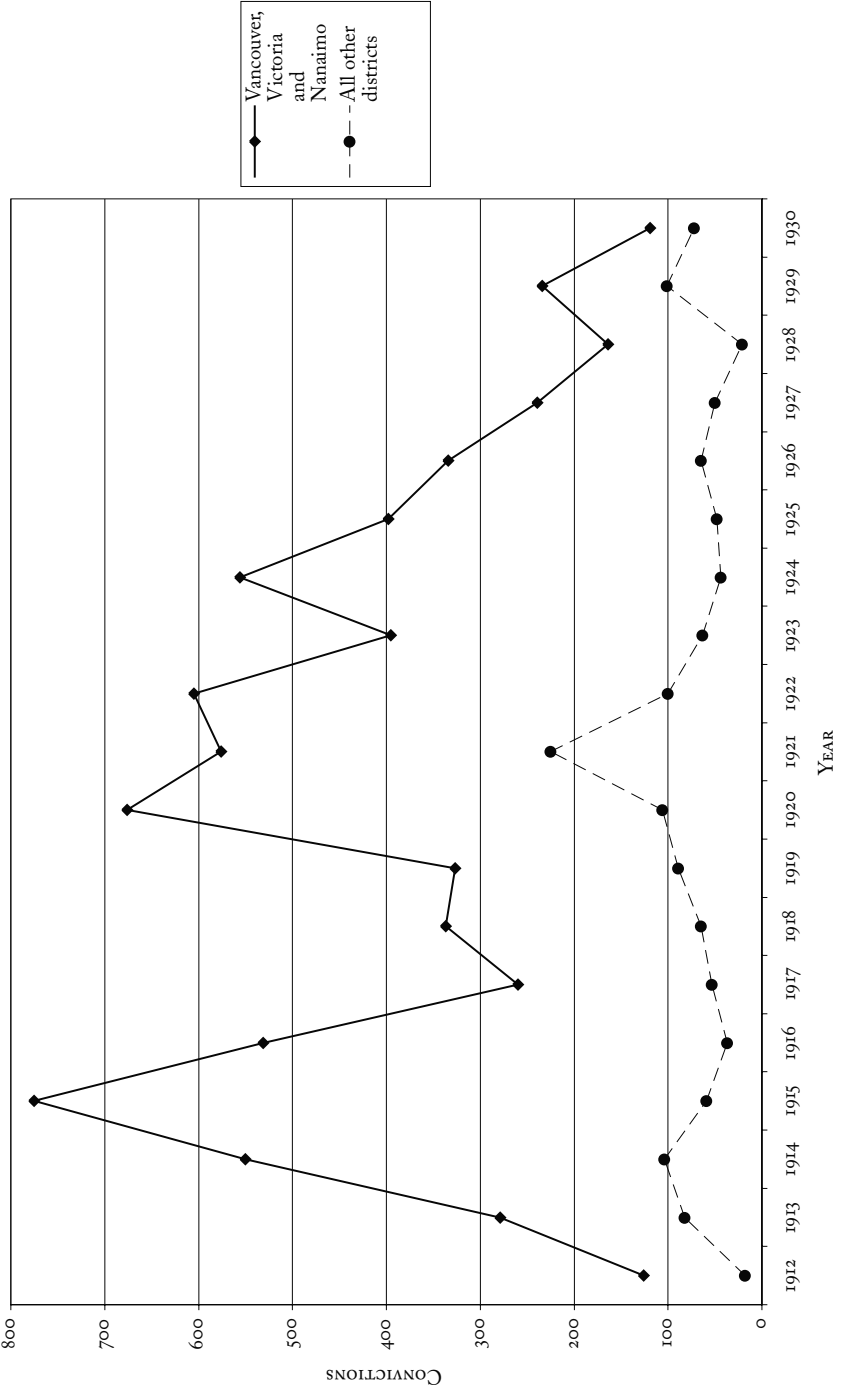
³¹ British Columbia, Police Court (Quesnel), vols. 1 and 2 (1911-25), GR-0041, British Columbia Provincial Archives (hereafter BCPA). This box also contains records for 150 Mile House.

GRAPH 1
Convictions Under the Opium and Narcotic Drugs Act (ONDA) 1912-1930 by Judicial Region



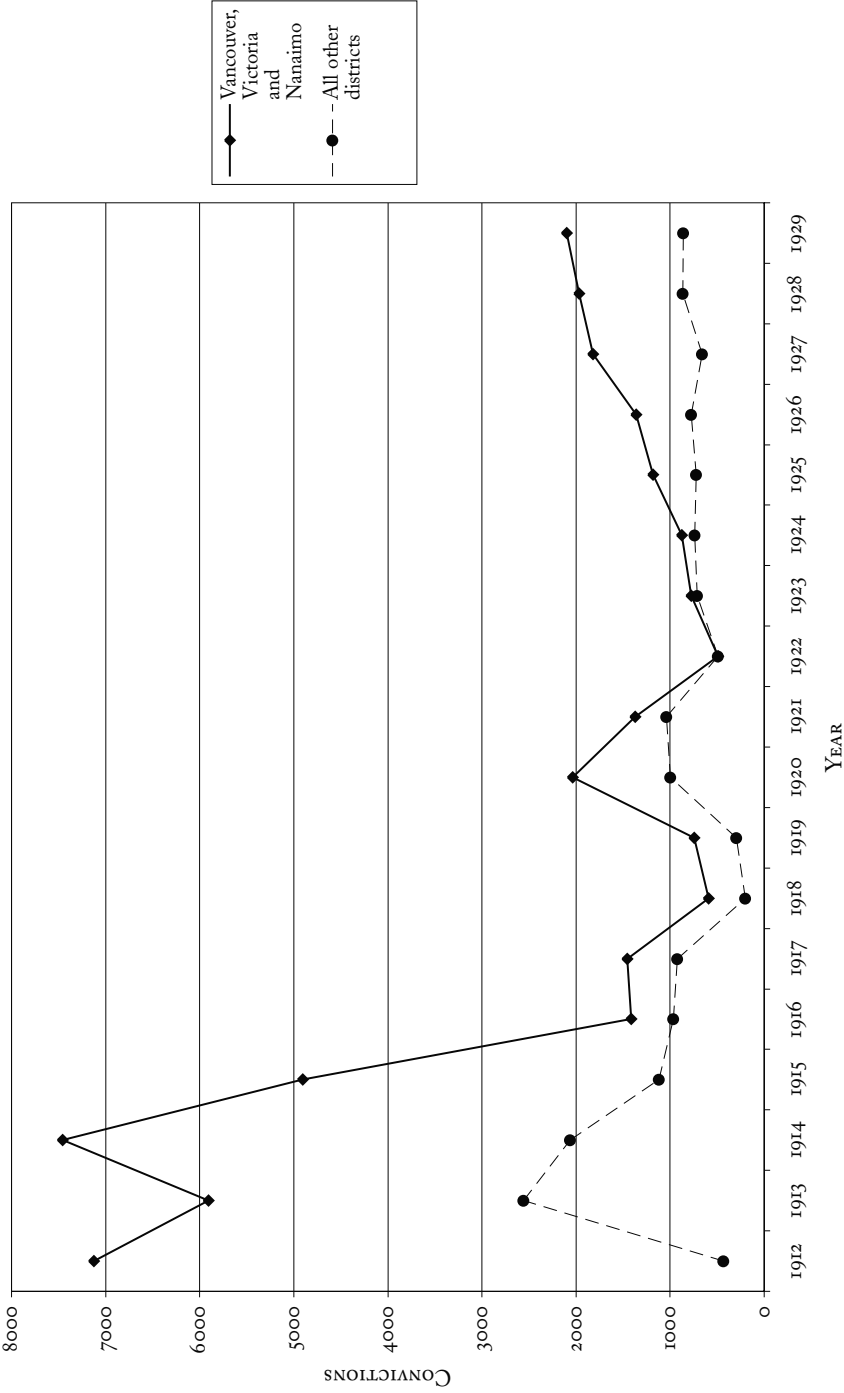
Source, Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Report of Statistics of Criminal and Other Offences, 1912-30*.

GRAPH 2
Convictions Under ONDA 1912-1930 - Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo compared with All Other Districts



Source, Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Report of Statistics of Criminal and Other Offences, 1912-30*.

GRAPH 3
Convictions for Drunkenness 1912-1929 - Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo compared with All Other Districts



Source, Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Report of Statistics of Criminal and Other Offences, 1912-29*.

period from 1911 to 1928.³² More instructive, perhaps, are the provincial police court records of Princeton and Ashcroft. These record books show a remarkable eruption in drug crime prosecutions between 1918 and 1923, preceded by only a handful of convictions. In Princeton, the jump was followed by a dearth of convictions from 1923 to 1928, while the records for Ashcroft end at 1922.³³ Although such records and statistics are far from exhaustive, they do appear to support the argument that rural drug users received less attention from law enforcement before the First World War than they did after.

Of course, statistics seldom tell the whole story. A closer look at how drug laws were perceived and enforced on the ground will better illuminate the differences between urban and rural settings. The introduction of the Opium Act in 1908 and the ONDA in 1911 was greeted with little attention or concern by the media of rural British Columbia. Most newspapers did not cover the introduction of these laws at all, and the only one that did betrayed a lack of concern.³⁴ The *Kamloops Inland Sentinel* responded to the new regulations with an article entitled “Will Introduce Bill”:

The government, acting on the report of Mackenzie King, with respect to the growing evils of the opium trade in Canada, will introduce a bill in the commons to prohibit the manufacture, importation and sale of opium in Canada ... Mr. King’s investigation at Vancouver showed the use of opium among both Chinese and whites had reached alarming proportions, and the government at once decided to do everything possible to stop the demoralizing traffic.³⁵

While the words of the *Inland Sentinel* may have alarmed rural residents about the “growing evils of the opium trade” in Canada, nothing about the article related the trade to a local setting. “Will Introduce Bill” may have caused concern, but its message was far removed from that in “Chinks Pay Heavily for ‘Hitting Pipe.’”

³² British Columbia Police Court (Williams Lake), vols. 1 and 2 (1911-28), GR-0025, BCPA.

³³ British Columbia Police Court (Ashcroft), vols. 1-4 (1911-22), GR-0033, BCPA; British Columbia Provincial Court (Princeton), vols. 1 and 2 (1910-28), GR-3179, BCPA.

³⁴ Newspapers searched for this study include the *Fort George Herald* (1910-16), the *Fort George Tribune* (1909-15), the *Prince George Leader* (1921-23), the *Prince George Citizen* (1916-present), the *Prince Rupert Evening Empire* (1908-47), the *Prince Rupert Daily News (PRDN)* (1911-present), the *Kelowna Courier and Okanagan Orchardist* (1906-38), the *Kamloops Inland Sentinel* (1880-1916), the *Merritt Herald* (1920-97), the *Quesnel Cariboo Observer* (1908-2000), the *Smithers Interior News* (1910-98) and the *Ashcroft Journal* (1899-1934).

³⁵ *Kamloops Inland Sentinel*, 7 July 1908, 7.

The coverage of an early drug arrest in Prince Rupert also hints at rural conceptions of drug crime. On 19 April 1911, local police raided the home of Gypsy Hamilton, who was found to be smoking “the forbidden ‘pipe.’”³⁶ The *Prince Rupert Daily News* mentioned the incident in its report on the monthly Police Commission, stating: “There was something quite *metropolitan* about Chief Vickers’ report for the month of April The report ... makes mention of the theft of \$400 from a shack on Eighth Avenue, and of the opium case decision which was given out today.”³⁷ This comment suggests not only that drug crime was thought to be unusual in Prince Rupert but also that it was thought to be a particularly “metropolitan” offence. A similar sentiment is reflected in an article from an April 1911 issue of the *Fort George Herald*. Discussing with great alarm the existence of Chinese gambling in Fort George, the author mentions opium only in passing:

Chinese lotteries are prohibited by law. They are played behind the scenes in the Chinese colonies that infest our big cities. The man who wants to take a chance must know where to go. He will have to pick his way through narrow alleys, reeking of the humid atmosphere of congested Oriental life, in an air laden with the strange scents of their drugs, the fumes of opium, and the incense [sic] of the praying tapers that smolder by the lintel in their narrow doorways.³⁸

Here, opium use is merely background to the greater crime of gambling. The drug use that occurs in this passage is neither criminal, nor linked to any subject: it simply exists as a distasteful component of Chinese life. At the same time, this practice is not related to a local setting but, instead, to the “big cities.” This reinforces the conclusion that rural communities considered drug use to be an urban problem of trifling local importance. Rural newspapers would remain silent about drug use until 1918.

The reaction of urban newspapers to the Opium Act and drug offenders was, by contrast, urgent and sensationalistic. Prior to the new law’s introduction, lurid articles appeared in Lower Mainland newspapers denouncing opium use. “Vile Opium Dens in Terminal City,” a typical example from 1908, promised “shocking revelations” about the “pernicious evil” of opium and “girls in abject slavery to Chinese.” The *Victoria Daily Colonist* reported on the submission of King’s drug report

³⁶ “Were Caught Hitting the Pipe: Story of Midnight Raid,” *Prince Rupert Evening Empire*, 20 April 1911, 1.

³⁷ “Police Must Have Suitable Headquarters,” *PRDN*, 2 May 1911, 1. Emphasis added.

³⁸ *Fort George Herald*, 19 April 1911, 1.

that same year, adding, "We think that Mr. King's views on the subject will meet with general approval, and that if there is anything necessary to be done by the legislature of British Columbia, it may be counted on with certainty." When the first charge was brought in Victoria under the new law in October, the *Colonist* knew exactly how it felt about the accused, who was described as "an almond-eyed proprietor of the lowest opium den in Chinatown, from which two white women were rescued." Following the passage of the Opium Act, Victoria city police and the Victoria City Council asked for extensions of the law that would outlaw opium dens and grant the police greater powers of search and seizure.³⁹ While indeed these early urban articles were not as numerous as were those that would come during the drug panics of the 1920s, the contrast with the less sensationalistic reporting of the rural media is striking. Clearly, the new drug laws were considered locally relevant to an urban populace, whereas rural newspapers, when they mentioned the new laws at all, thought of them as "metropolitan."

As a final example of rural attitudes towards drug users, a case from Prince George is instructive. On the morning of 15 August 1918, Chow Lee, a Chinese merchant at Prince George, boarded an eastbound train carrying two cases. Lee was "intending to visit compatriots and friends in the numerous lumber camps to the east . . . but an alert and keen-scented member of the provincial police immediately put the finish to Chow's journey when he searched [his cases] and revealed . . . liquids [sic]."⁴⁰ Lee was discovered to be carrying a great quantity of alcohol, which he presumably intended to distribute to those "compatriots and friends." Upon searching Lee's premises, the police officer found an additional supply of "joy water," along with "a quantity of opium, pipes, and other hop instruments." Lee appeared to be in considerable trouble. However, the entire episode was treated by the *Prince George Citizen* with an air of humour and triviality. The title of the article that announced Lee's run-in with the law was "Chow Lee, Joy Dispenser." According to the *Citizen* writers, Lee was merely attempting to "inject a little joy into an otherwise humdrum life."⁴¹ For newspaper readers, Lee's arrest was neither alarming nor cause for concern but, rather, an amusing account of a Chinese immigrant's run-in with the law. This episode contrasts sharply with articles from big city newspapers, reprinted in the *Prince George Citizen*, which discussed drug use at length. For instance, the

³⁹ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 25 June 1908, 11; *Ibid.*, 6 July 1908, 4; *Ibid.*, 2 October 1908, 14; *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 December 1908, 5.

⁴⁰ "Chow Lee, Joy Dispenser," *Prince George Citizen*, 16 August 1918, 1.

⁴¹ *Prince George Citizen*, 20 August 1918, 6.

1919 *Citizen* article “Victims Drug Habit” discussed in lurid detail the drug situation in Toronto.⁴² This dichotomy between urban and rural reportage and police activity strongly suggests that, prior to 1919, rural residents did not consider drug use to be a serious problem in small-town British Columbia.

The end of the Great War saw an increase in popular concern for preserving human life and moral character; as a result, attitudes towards drug users in Canada began to harden. In the spring of 1920, *Maclean’s* published Emily Murphy’s series of articles about the drug situation in Canada. Simultaneously, the *Vancouver Sun* initiated an anti-drug campaign in its pages that specifically targeted the city’s Chinese population. Editorials in the *Sun* linked an enormous dope menace with the Chinese and called for the destruction of Chinatown, stating: “If the only way to save our children is to abolish Chinatown, then Chinatown must and will go, and go quickly.”⁴³ As Graph 1 indicates, the immediate post-First World War period saw rural authorities crack down on known drug users. In Prince Rupert, this change in attitudes manifested itself in a brief eruption of drug convictions. Towards the end of 1919, a number of local Chinese were convicted for drug possession. The Police Commission report for 1919 spoke of an “alarming increase in opium and drug cases.” According to the *Prince Rupert Daily News*, “the worst offenders here are the Chinese. There were 42 drug and opium cases here during the past year which brought 40 convictions.” These numbers stood in stark contrast to the previous year, which had seen only one case.⁴⁴ Similarly, the police court records for Ashcroft show a resurgence of drug crime prosecution in 1918 and 1919.⁴⁵ By December of 1920, the *Prince George Citizen* would publish “Chinks Pay Heavily for ‘Hitting Pipe,’” suggesting that prosecutions for drug crimes in that city were on the increase. Clearly, there was an emergent concern over the presence of drugs in rural British Columbia, and judicial and media attitudes towards drug users became more intolerant.

At the same time, the use of raids and targeted searches against known drug users became more frequent. On the evening of 8 January 1920, Ban Kwong Lee, a Chinese resident of Prince Rupert, looked out his window and observed two police officers approaching his home. Alarmed at their

⁴² *Ibid.*, 9 April 1919, 1; *PRDN*, 5 September 1919, 1.

⁴³ *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 18 March 1920, 1, as cited in Catherine Carstairs, “Deporting ‘Ah Sin’ to Save the White Race: Moral Panic, Racialization, and the Extension of Canadian Drug Laws in the 1920s,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 16 (1999): 73.

⁴⁴ *PRDN*, 15 January 1920, 5.

⁴⁵ British Columbia Police Court (Ashcroft), vols. 1-4 (1911-22), GR-0033, BCPA.

presence, Lee barricaded his door and refused to answer. The police broke a panel in the door in order to enter and found Lee, along with four other Chinese men and three unnamed white men. A search of the building revealed five packets of cocaine. Despite the presence of the white men, the headline announcing the arrests read "More Chinese Drug Fiends Arrested." Only the Chinese were charged. The white men were released on the condition that they serve as witnesses for the prosecution. Although the four Chinese escaped imprisonment owing to a technicality, this episode clearly demonstrates an increase in police vigilance.⁴⁶

The years following the end of the First World War saw the beginning of a major change in the way Canada's new drug laws were perceived and enforced in rural British Columbia. However, it is important to note some unique characteristics of this early period. While rural residents may have been concerned about the existence of drug users within their communities, additional evidence strongly suggests that drugs were not yet considered to be a rampant social menace. Further, patterns of enforcement and sentencing indicate that in rural British Columbia the stereotype of the Chinese drug user had not yet taken firm hold. Thus, the period from 1919 to 1921 was one of inconsistent attitudes towards drug users in rural communities. This incomplete transition can be seen in a number of examples.

On 31 October 1919, Kam Sing of Prince Rupert was given a six-month sentence for opium possession. During the trial, Sing's defence attorney asserted that "the only plea he could make for him was that he was a hopeless drug fiend and that leniency might be shown. Magistrate McMordie thought that six months on the farm with medical attention and a little honest work would perhaps be good medicine for Kam Sing."⁴⁷ McMordie's statement reveals a belief that Sing's drug addiction was the result of an individual moral failure and that this problem could be rectified by physical labour. In McMordie's estimation, drug addiction was the problem of the individual rather than the community at large.

In another incident, seven Chinese men in Prince Rupert were shown judicial leniency when they were arrested for being in an opium den.

⁴⁶ *PRDN* 9 January 1920, 1; *Ibid.*, 12 January 1920, 6. See also *PRDN* 3 February 1919, 1; *Ibid.*, 2 October 1919, 1; *Ibid.*, 30 October 1919, 1; *Ibid.*, 19 November 1919, 1; *Ibid.*, 21 November 1919, 1. Rural police also began to use more sophisticated policing techniques, including sting operations and raids. See the arrests of Toy On and Lum, *PRDN*, 23 February 1920, 1; *Ibid.*, 28 November 1919, 1; *Ibid.*, 11 March 1920, 1; *Ibid.*, 25 March 1920, 6; *Ibid.*, 10 November 1920, 1.

⁴⁷ *PRDN*, 31 October 1919, 1.

According to the *Daily News*, “the magistrate was inclined to believe that it was really hard for Orientals to get lodging where opium is not being smoked.”⁴⁸ This contrasts sharply with the case of Mah Sun, a Chinese man arrested for opium possession in Prince George in 1922. At Sun’s trial, neither of the two arresting officers was able to positively say that the drugs found on his premises belonged to him; Sun maintained that they were the property of two Chinese gang members who had rented his rooms. While the judge agreed that the dope did not belong to Sun, he still sentenced him to pay a \$500 fine, or spend six months in jail.⁴⁹ The contrast between these two cases suggests that, before the 1920s, Chinese drug users could still receive judicial leniency.

Despite these moments of level-headedness, feelings towards Chinese opium users were becoming more rigid and stereotypical. The conflicting and changing nature of rural attitudes towards drug users is perhaps best captured by an incident that occurred in Prince Rupert towards the end of 1919. Following the brief surge in convictions of Chinese individuals for drug offences in 1919, Alderman Perry of the Prince Rupert City Council proposed that a census be made of the local Chinese population “with a view to finding out undesirables.”⁵⁰ The census of persistent drug offenders, who were referred to by the *Prince Rupert Daily News* as “bad Chinese,”⁵¹ prompted a letter to the council from Kobian Yih, Chinese Consul for British Columbia. Yih felt that such a census would discriminate against his countrymen. Perry’s response to this criticism is instructive:

I still stand behind my suggestion ... and I further suggest that when the census is taken that it be sent to Hon. Kobiang Yih to show him what class of countrymen he has in Prince Rupert. I meant no discrimination but I maintain that this city has a right to take a census of conditions prevailing, whether it please the Chinese or any other authority. The Chinese in this town are a poor bunch and there are some that should be deported. I would be prepared to pick out some fit subjects for deportation. To find out the lawbreakers will not hurt the law-abiding ones.⁵²

A number of conclusions can be drawn from Perry’s statement and the census episode. First, the stereotype of the Chinese drug user was

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 November 1919, 1; *Ibid.*, 21 November 1919, 1.

⁴⁹ *Rex v. Mah Sun*, file 322/22, GR-2791, box 1, BCPA.

⁵⁰ *PRDN*, 9 December 1919, 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30 December 1919, 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9 December 1919, 5.

becoming more visible and well known by the end of 1919. It is true that Perry made a number of comments indicating that he did not believe that all Chinese were potential drug users. However, the census proposal itself, and much of Perry's language, strongly imply his belief that the Chinese were the source of the city's drug situation. Second, Perry betrays a belief that drug use, while a serious concern, was limited in scope and size. The assumption behind the suggested census was that drug users were easy to identify and small in number; by simply "deporting a few undesirables," the situation would be rectified. This notion indicates that, though rural residents may have been concerned about drug use, they did not yet consider it an extensive social problem. Finally, it is important to note that there were voices of dissent surrounding the Chinese census. Alderman Casey, another member of the Prince Rupert City Council, and the city solicitor, resigned to protest the possible discrimination that the city's Chinese population might encounter.⁵³

This evidence ultimately suggests that, in rural British Columbia, attitudes towards drug use following the war were hardening, and perceptions of drug users were becoming more belligerent and stereotypical. The generalized reform movement of the 1920s caused increased concern about the presence of drugs in rural communities, and it resulted in a brief wave of prosecutions. However, this period, when old ideas still prevailed, was transitional. Drug users were still thought to be a danger only to themselves and not to the entire community, and it was possible for drug offenders to receive leniency from the courts. Finally, drug use continued to be thought of as a containable problem of limited size rather than as a rampant epidemic. While indeed many of the anti-drug developments of 1919-20 were moderate, they did foreshadow the avalanche of change that was about to occur.

A major transformation that occurred in 1921 radically altered the enforcement of drug laws across the country and brought a dramatic increase in drug prosecutions to rural British Columbia. In late 1920, the Department of Health requested that the RCMP vigorously enforce the ONDA. As Steve Hewitt has demonstrated, the struggling national police force took to this task with a vengeance, dramatically increasing prosecution rates.⁵⁴ Because they were a national force, often newly arrived in their jurisdictions, the RCMP may have lacked a familiarity

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30 December 1919, 3. The census proposal passed on 30 December 1919, but the city solicitor strongly refused to enforce it.

⁵⁴ Hewitt, "While Unpleasant," 80-104.

with their surroundings and the small local communities they were to police. In Prince George, twenty-five RNWMP (soon to become RCMP) officers had arrived in 1919, whereas in Prince Rupert, the RCMP arrived in 1921.⁵⁵

Coinciding with the RCMP's new directive was the second wave of Vancouver's anti-drug campaign, which lasted longer and was larger in scale than the first. The campaign, initiated in March 1921 by the *Vancouver Sun*, climaxed when a meeting of Vancouverites sent a petition to Ottawa demanding harsher penalties for drug offenders, including deportation of convicted aliens. Many of the changes made in the 1923 revisions to the ONDA were at the request of Vancouver anti-drug advocates.⁵⁶ The presence of the RCMP and the second Vancouver campaign led to greater prosecution of rural Chinese and to calls from rural newspapers to expunge drug users from their communities.

The significance of the RCMP's new mandate emerged quickly in the newspapers of rural British Columbia. On 7 January 1921, the RCMP arrested Ton John for having opium and heroin in his possession. In its coverage of the trial, the *Prince George Citizen* wrote of the recent changes in policing: "The R.C.M.P, of late, acting on direct instructions from Ottawa, have taken a lively interest in stamping out the growing drug habits."⁵⁷ From this point forward, the RCMP would lead drug prosecutions in Prince George. The *Prince George Citizen* captured the tone of this new wave of prosecutions in an article entitled "Opium Smoker Draws Fine and Imprisonment: Horrible Example of the Opium Habit Dealt with in Police Court":

On Wednesday there appeared in the police court a Chinaman named Ching Lee, charged with smoking opium, on evidence brought by the R.C.M.P. The accused appeared in the court in a dazed confusion from the effects of the drug.

The prosecution, which was in the hands of Staff Sergeant McLeod of the Mounted Police, asked for a heavy penalty as the accused was a confirmed addict of the drug, and indisputable evidence supported the charge.⁵⁸

The article illustrates two important themes that would recur in RCMP drug prosecutions. First, the focus of policing had clearly shifted from the distributor to the user; the justification given for inflicting pun-

⁵⁵ *Prince George Citizen*, 20 August 1919, 2; *Ibid.*, 8 October 1919, 1; *PRDN*, 24 August 1921, 3.

⁵⁶ Carstairs, "Deporting 'Ah Sin,'" 73-5.

⁵⁷ *Prince George Citizen*, 7 January 1921, 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1921, 1.

ishment on Lee was not that he was a distributor of the drug but, rather, that he was a user. Second, an RCMP officer led the tough prosecution. As Steve Hewitt observes, Mounties often prosecuted their own drug cases, and, particularly in smaller centres, the accused rarely sought legal representation, perhaps because of the language barrier or costs involved. Without legal aid, mounting a successful defence against a Mountie prosecutor was nearly impossible, putting rural defendants at a considerable disadvantage.⁵⁹

A more disturbing example of RCMP prosecutions in Prince George is the case of Lum Chong. Following a search of Chong's bedroom in the back of a building near the Prince George railway station, Sergeant C.H. Rayner of the RCMP and Constable P.C. McMillian of the city police arrested him on 15 March 1921 and charged him with cocaine possession. As McMillian searched a coat that was hanging on the wall, he discovered three packets containing what appeared to be cocaine. The case was tried on 18 April 1921 before local magistrate C.B. Daniell by Sergeant McLeod of the RCMP. While the case appeared to be open-and-shut, the trial revealed a number of broken links in the evidence chain. First, according to both Chong and McMillian, the door to the bedroom did not lock and was often used by a number of other men who lived in the same building. Indeed, McMillian acknowledged that there had been four unnamed men in the room just prior to the search. Under cross-examination, Rayner was unable to say for sure that the packets belonged to Chong. However, Chong's defence lawyer did not capitalize on any of these inconsistencies. Through an interpreter, Chong emphatically denied that the packets belonged to him: "I don't know anything about cocaine at all. Never had cocaine in my room. Never sold any or used any myself." Chong asserted that his room was often used by people he did not know, and he fingered the local Chinese Freemasons as possible suspects. Finally, Chong stated that he had not understood McMillian when the latter asked him if the coat was his. Yet, despite the fact that both the prosecution and the defence seemed to agree that the drugs could not be positively linked to the defendant, Chong was convicted and sentenced to pay \$350 or spend four months in prison.⁶⁰ The Lum Chong case conforms to most of the major themes present in the post-1920 drug cases. Despite serious flaws in the evidence, the presence of an RCMP prosecutor secured a conviction. In addition, much

⁵⁹ Hewitt, "While Unpleasant," 93-4.

⁶⁰ *R v. Lum Chong*, file 133/21, GR-2788, box 1, BCPA.

like the Ching Lee case, Chong received a harsh sentence for simple possession.

At the same time, the newspapers of rural British Columbia began to sound more and more like those of the Vancouver anti-dope campaign. An editorial in the *Prince Rupert Daily News* indicates the degree to which urban anti-drug rhetoric had been incorporated into rural beliefs about drug use:

If there is one person more contemptible than any other in this world it is the man or woman who peddles dope of any kind ... Drugs such as morphine, opium or cocaine ... kill physically and morally. The dope fiend is a lost man ... To create a taste for such a drug is worse than criminal ... We hang a man who kills another, but the man who starts another on the drug route to shame and death is given a comparatively light punishment ... If the lash is ever legalized it seems it should be for the man or woman who is caught supplying another with the drugs. Were it not for these messengers of the devil there would be a few drugs addicts, yet today they may be counted by the thousands. They are found in every grade of society.⁶¹

The language of this editorial strongly resembles that of both Emily Murphy and Vancouver's more prominent anti-dope newspapers. In addition to endorsing harsher legislation, it also conveys the same outlook on drug users. Drug use was more than a simple vice: it was somehow evil, and its practitioners were "messengers of the devil." This perspective contrasts sharply with the view espoused two years earlier, which held that drug users were pitiful victims. Finally, the *Prince Rupert Daily News* had adopted the view that drugs were a problem that was out of control. The influence of the Vancouver campaigns seems fairly certain. Five months earlier, the Prince Rupert City Council received a draft of the petition that the Vancouver anti-dope advocates were planning to send to Ottawa. The city council heartily endorsed the proposal, going so far as to send a telegram to the minister of justice informing him of their approval.⁶²

It would seem clear, then, that the Vancouver anti-dope campaign and the new role of the RCMP altered the perception and enforcement of Canada's new drug laws in rural and northern British Columbia. The net effect of these changes was greater awareness and prosecution of Chinese drug users. Furthermore, these trends were not limited to

⁶¹ *PRDN*, 27 September 1921, 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 17 May 1921, 2.

Prince George and Prince Rupert. Evidence exists of RCMP anti-drug activity in numerous other rural and northern areas of the province.⁶³ Northern British Columbia had, thanks to newspapers and the RCMP, partially adopted the fears of urban Canada.

However, a number of factors suggest that rural British Columbians still considered drugs to be a minor local problem. Most of the more lurid and sensational stories about drug arrests still came from major cities.⁶⁴ Few rural newspapers investigated the extent of the 'nefarious traffic' within their own communities. When a single rural newspaper did this, it found that the reality did not live up to the hype. On 8 February 1922, an article entitled "Drug Situation in this City is Outlined by Chief of Police: Few Users Here" appeared in the *Prince Rupert Daily News*:

Although there are a few dope fiends in the city that the police know of, there are not as many as there were last year and there is little trafficking in drugs here, according to Chief of Police W.H. Vickers. Most of the known drug users and suspected peddlers have left the city because the city police, with the assistance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on the opium end, have made it very uncomfortable for them.⁶⁵

While the article maintains that there were some Chinese dope dealers in the city, it dismissed the possibility that an organized network of traffickers or a "king peddler" existed. The article also coincided with a general cooling off of drug convictions in Prince Rupert by the end of 1921.⁶⁶ Furthermore, for much of the later half of 1921, discussion of drugs disappeared from the pages of the *Prince Rupert Daily News*. Corresponding to a hiatus in the Vancouver anti-drug campaign,⁶⁷ this parallel suggests that, without encouragement from urban newspapers, drug panics in rural areas tended to evaporate quickly.

⁶³ In April of 1921, RCMP officers at Smithers made a general raid on Chinatown, arresting a number of individuals for drug offences. See *PRDN*, 15 April 1921, 2. In September, the RCMP even arrested six Chinese men on the Queen Charlotte Islands for opium possession. See *PRDN*, 21 September 1921, 5. Records of the Princeton and Ashcroft police courts also show the presence of RCMP officers by 1920. See British Columbia Police Court (Ashcroft), vols. 1-4 (1911-22), GR-0033, BCPA; British Columbia Provincial Court (Princeton), vols. 1 and 2 (1910-28), GR-3179, BCPA.

⁶⁴ See *PRDN*, 20 January 1921, 1; *Ibid.*, 13 April 1921, 1; *Ibid.*, 8 June 1921, 1; *Ibid.*, 25 June 1921, 1; *Ibid.*, 8 October 1921, 2; *Ibid.*, 15 October 1921, 5; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1921, 1; *Prince George Leader*, 15 April 1921, 3; *Prince George Citizen*, 17 May 1921, 3.

⁶⁵ *PRDN*, 8 February 1922, 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Carstairs, "Deporting 'Ah-Sin,'" 75.

Why should this be so? Here, the insights of sociologists William Freudenburg and Robert Emmet Jones are instructive. Freudenburg and Jones, in their study of rapid community growth and criminal behaviour, contend that small communities in which most residents know one another (i.e., communities with a high “density of acquaintanceship”) experienced far less fear of crime than did urban communities and those experiencing rapid growth (i.e., communities with “low densities of acquaintanceship”).⁶⁸ Thus, fear of Chinese drug users would be higher in the large urban centers of Victoria and Vancouver than in the smaller rural communities to the north. Rural communities may have internalized much of the popular discourse about “nefarious Chinese drug fiends,” but this was mainly due to Sinophobia and the occasional moral panic on the part of middle-class newspaper editors. The rhetoric of the anti-drug movement centred on the myth of the “Chinese opium fiend” and the “nefarious Chinese dope dealer.” However, these myths relied on what might be referred to as an ‘imagined community’ of Chinese criminals. Because of the considerable size of the Chinatowns in such urban centres as Vancouver, these myths were able to flourish. In 1921, Vancouver, for instance, had a population of approximately 117,000 people and a Chinatown of approximately 2,100. In the urban imagination, such a community could conceivably contain any number of nefarious characters. However, in small rural communities, Chinatowns also tended to be small. For example, Prince George’s Chinese population was approximately four hundred, in a city that the 1921 census recorded as having a total population of 2,053. Rural Chinatowns were of a much more comprehensible size, leaving little room for imagined villains. Urban myths were ultimately incompatible with the realities of rural social organization.⁶⁹ Moral panic concerning drugs could not be

⁶⁸ William R. Freudenburg, “The Density of Acquaintanceship: An Overlooked Variable in Community Research?” *American Journal of Sociology* 92, 1 (1986): 45; William R. Freudenburg and Robert Emmet Jones, “Criminal Behavior and Rapid Community Growth: Examining the Evidence,” *Rural Sociology* 56, 4 (1991): 624.

⁶⁹ For Vancouver total population, see Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 93. For Vancouver’s Chinatown population, see Kay Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 74. This estimate is based on a 1901 census, but it seems reasonable to assume that the figure in 1921 would have been similar, if not higher. For Prince George’s population, see F.E. Runnals, *A History of Prince George* (Prince George: Fraser-Fort George Museum Society, 1983). For Prince George’s Chinatown population, see *Prince George Citizen*, 15 April 1921, 1. For more on the concept of “imagined communities,” see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991). For more on the notion of “mythic villains,” see Lesley Erickson, “Murdered Women and Mythic Villains: The Criminal Case and the Imaginary Criminal in the Canadian West, 1886-1930,” in *People and Place: Historical Influences on Legal Culture*, ed. Jonathan Swainger

maintained for long because, when rural communities examined their local Chinese populations, they found that there were “few users here.” This, however, was about to change.

On 2 March 1922, coinciding with the re-emergence of the Vancouver anti-drug campaign, the following article, entitled “Invading Small Towns – Drug Peddlers Would Carry Nefarious Traffic,” appeared in the *Ashcroft Journal*:

Because of the publicity which is being given to the campaign against the sale and use of narcotics in the city of Vancouver, some of the drug peddlers are taking cover in the small towns and rural parts of the province, where they are continuing their nefarious trade. Because of this province-wide moral and health problem, the Provincial Division of the Canadian Red Cross Society is sending this warning to be published in every newspaper of the province, in order that not only the officials but all citizens, especially teachers and parents, should be on the alert against the insidious traffic in the drug business.

Dance halls heed special watching.

Watch the stranger in town.

Avoid all “Snow” parties where snuff (cocaine) is given.

Close chaperonage of girls is the greatest safeguard, and the parents should insist on this.

The habit begins by the snuffing of cocaine, which causes a feeling of exhilaration. After three or four doses the user cannot sleep, and must then resort to morphine.⁷⁰

A significant departure from the previous drug literature that had been published in rural newspapers, this article clearly related the drug traffic to a local and rural setting, going so far as to suggest that urban drug dealers were literally invading rural Canada. Perhaps most important, the article is vague about the specific nature of the threat. There is no estimation of the number of dealers or their precise whereabouts, thus creating in the mind of the reader a persistent, faceless, and ever-present threat. Circulated to “every newspaper of the province,”⁷¹ the Red Cross

and Constance Backhouse (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 95-119. Prince Rupert's population in 1921 was 6,393. See Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Sixth Census of Canada*, 3. The size of Prince Rupert's Chinatown is unknown, but it would seem reasonable to speculate that it could have been as high as 1,000.

⁷⁰ *Ashcroft Journal*, 3 March 1922, 1.

⁷¹ The following newspapers carried a reprint of the Red Cross notice: *The Kelowna Courier and Okanagan Orchardist*, 2 March 1922, 3; *Merritt Herald*, 24 February 1922, 1; *Quesnel Cariboo Observer*, 4 March 1922, 1; *Smithers Interior News*, 1 March 1922, 6; *Ashcroft Journal*, 3 March 1922, 1. While no Prince George newspaper ran the Red Cross article, it had clearly not fallen

notice and its hypothetical drug dealer represent a clear example of an attempt to export urban moral panic to rural and northern British Columbia. At the same time, towns such as Vernon and Penticton were visited by speakers who lectured on the dangers that the “drug menace” posed to rural British Columbia. For instance, Vernon citizens and authorities were encouraged to be on “alert lest the tenacles [sic] of the traffic spread out and encircle the valley.”⁷²

Gauging the impact of the rural anti-drug campaign is difficult, but an intriguing incident in Kelowna following the publication of the Red Cross notice offers a glimpse of changing rural attitudes towards drug users. In the same issue of the *Kelowna Courier* in which the Red Cross notice appeared, it was also reported that a local “Chinaman” had been turned in to the authorities by his tailor for having a small quantity of opium. The charge was thrown out after the prosecution failed to establish that the drugs belonged to the defendant.⁷³ The incident provoked an interesting response. The next issue of the paper contained a letter-to-the-editor from the would-be vigilante:

I notice in the “Kelowna Courier” of Thursday last, a report concerning a Chinaman who was brought up on a charge of being in possession of opium. Myself being the one ... who gave the information to the police on which he was arrested, I feel that your report may lead some people to think that it was a “frame up” to catch the first Chinaman who came along. I wish to state that such was not the case. I gave information as a duty becoming anyone interested in stamping out the dope business in all its branches. Opium is opium and, as far as responsibility goes, I think most men are responsible for what they carry in their pockets ... *Lucky for the Chinaman that he was in Kelowna instead of Vancouver.*⁷⁴

This letter suggests two things: first, that it was widely known that Chinese drug users were less likely to be convicted outside of the Lower Mainland, and second, that at least one Kelowna citizen felt this was unacceptable. The timing of this incident, coming so soon

upon deaf ears. Four weeks later, the *Prince George Leader* ran a column that detailed the Vancouver World campaign, suggesting that Prince George newspapers were equally affected by this attempt to spread moral panic. See *Prince George Leader*, 7 April 1922, 2.

⁷² “Vernon Citizens Decide to Wage War on Drug Traffic throughout the Okanagan,” *Vernon News*, 9 February 1922, 1. See also, “Rev. Hugh Dobson on the Drug Evil,” *Vernon News*, 16 February 1922, 1; “Figures Startled Audience,” *Penticton Herald*, 1 April 1922, 1, 4.

⁷³ “Local and Personal,” *Kelowna Courier and Okanagan Orchardist*, 4 March 1922, 4.

⁷⁴ “A Recent Court Case,” *Kelowna Courier and Okanagan Orchardist*, 9 March 1922, 7. Emphasis added.

after the publication of the Red Cross notice, indicates that the rural anti-drug campaign was having some success. An editorial in the *Cumberland Islander* provides a similar snapshot of the rural anti-drug campaign's impact. According to the author, "Although this district [Cumberland] hardly suffers from the drug menace, we can offer the fullest sympathy with the larger cities that are afflicted with the most damnable evil that ever slimed a community ... It may be said that we, of this town, are free from the drug evil, but who knows? Are we sure that there are no drugs sold here? Let us hope not."⁷⁵ For rural British Columbia's newspapers, the distinction between urban and rural crime was beginning to break down.

The Red Cross notice was taken very seriously in Prince Rupert, leading the Prince Rupert Trades and Labour Council to endorse the Vancouver anti-drug campaign in the *Prince Rupert Daily News*:

The action of the Trades and Labour Council in going on record in favor of better conditions in regard to the illicit disposal of drugs is wholly to be commended. They will receive the backing of every person who has the welfare of the community at heart. The drug habit is much more widespread than is generally suspected. *It was knowledge of this that caused the Canadian Red Cross society to send out a warning recently to all newspapers in the country urging that efforts be made to counteract the movement.*⁷⁶

The result of this extensive coverage was moral panic in Prince Rupert. On 24 March 1922, the *Prince Rupert Daily News* published what can only be described as its 'drug issue.' In an exposé strikingly reminiscent of Emily Murphy's, the *Prince Rupert Daily News* warned about the dangerous drug situation in the city, which, only months earlier, had been described as minor.

'It has been reported to me by a young lady that at a recent dance in this city dope was passed around,' declared Police Commissioner S.D. Macdonald last evening in the course of a discussion at the regular meeting of the police commission which culminated in the decision of the board to make a special campaign towards the combating of the drug evil in the city. 'If such a thing has started it is time the police department was getting busy. Young people were sniffing the "snow,"

⁷⁵ "The Damnable Dope Traffic," *Cumberland Islander*, 4 February 1922, 4.

⁷⁶ "Trades and Labour Council and Drugs," *PRDN*, 2 March 1922, 2. Emphasis added.

that is, taking the first step towards becoming users of cocaine and morphine.⁷⁷

Macdonald asserted that drug dealers were invading from the south and that greater police activity would be necessary since these dealers were often “well dressed characters” and, thus, not easily caught. Extended police powers were necessary as “the flower of boyhood and girlhood has been affected in Vancouver, and we want no lepers here.” The article ends with a Prince Rupert-bred ‘narrative of narcoticism’:

Commissioner Macdonald told one particularly sorrowful case which had come to his attention in the city. A boy from Vancouver had been in the hospital and his arms were virtually covered with “pock” marks due to the injections of drug. The physician had told him better take a certain treatment or else jump in the bay. The youth had said he would rather jump in the bay.⁷⁸

The same issue also contained an editorial congratulating the Prince Rupert police commission “on its decision to use every possible endeavor to eradicate the drug traffic from Prince Rupert.” The editorial concluded that “people are being roused everywhere to the necessity for action and Prince Rupert must do its share of the national housecleaning.”⁷⁹

The response to this stimulation of fear was an increased demand to prosecute drug offenders. In May the police commissioner of Prince Rupert requested that the police department develop a plan to “combat the drug evil.”⁸⁰ Coinciding with this call for action was an increase in convictions. Crime statistics published by the *Prince Rupert Daily News* for 1922 noted that, in a year that had shown a general decrease in crime since 1921, convictions under the ONDA had actually increased to thirty-two “due to the assistance of the R.C.M.P., who were waging a campaign against the drug fiends.”⁸¹ Indeed, the RCMP were having great success prosecuting Chinese residents following the publication of the Red Cross article.⁸²

Though the number of convictions increased considerably, perhaps even more significant was the increase in raids. The general increase in

⁷⁷ *PRDN*, 24 March 1922, 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “All Will Join in Suppressing Drug Traffic,” *PRDN*, 24 March 1922, 2.

⁸⁰ *PRDN*, 30 May 1922, 7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4 January 1922, 2.

⁸² *PRDN*, 28 March 1922, 1; *Ibid.*, 15 May 1922, 4; *Ibid.*, 26 May 1922, 1; *Ibid.*, 4 July 1922, 4; *Ibid.*, 7 July 1922, 1; *Ibid.*, 27 July 1922, 1. See also the mini-panic incited by the visit of Victoria police commissioner W.E. Staneland (*PRDN*, 5 October 1922, 1; *Ibid.*, 6 October 1922, 2; *Ibid.*, 22 November 1922, 4).

RCMP drug raids across the country was also evident in Prince Rupert.⁸³ One month after the Red Cross campaign commenced, the *Prince Rupert Daily News* reported that, in April, ten drug raids had been conducted in the city's Chinatown⁸⁴ – an average of one every three days. At the same time, Vancouver anti-drug advocates resumed calls to deport aliens convicted of drug offences, a move clearly aimed at the Chinese. During this period the British Columbia Provincial Police (BCPP) reported a growing nervousness in the province's Chinese communities.⁸⁵ The situation in Prince Rupert makes this quite understandable.

Newspaper coverage of Prince George during the rural drug panic of the 1920s is not as detailed as is that in Prince Rupert, but Prince George court records do furnish some interesting narratives. Taken together, two exemplary cases suggest that drug prosecution in rural British Columbia had become increasingly reckless. On 28 March 1922, Yee Yock, who had two years earlier been the subject of the article "Chinks Pay Heavily for 'Hitting Pipe,'" was arrested for cocaine possession at his laundry on Fourth Avenue by members of the RCMP, the BCPP, and the city police. Although this might seem to be a case of a known troublemaker getting his just desserts, at Yock's trial a witness named Lum Ling, a self-confessed former drug addict, claimed that the drugs were his. Ling had stored them in a bedroom he had shared with the defendant for months.⁸⁶ This fact apparently did not raise any doubt in the mind of trial judge H.E.A. Robertson, who stated "that he could not place credence in the Chinese testimony." According to Robertson, because "the legislature had seen fit ... to introduce a strong law aimed at the elimination of the drug evil ... he felt it his duty to inflict a severe penalty and would act accordingly."⁸⁷ Yock was sentenced to two years imprisonment. Reporting on the conviction, the *Prince George Citizen* stated, "Yock will swing a wicked flat iron in the penitentiary laundry for the best part of two years and cogitate over the strangeness of the white man's law that is so particular about peddling 'happy dust' to drug addicts."⁸⁸

⁸³ Carstairs, "Hop Heads and Hypes," 77.

⁸⁴ *PRDN*, 11 May 1922, 5.

⁸⁵ Lynee Stonier-Newmann, *Policing a Pioneer Province: The BC Provincial Police, 1858-1950* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1991), 142.

⁸⁶ *Prince George Citizen*, 5 May 1922, 6. Yock corroborated the story at trial. Provisions of the ONDA introduced in 1921 provided that, in order for a person to be found not guilty of possession, it had to be proven that the drugs found were there without their knowledge or consent.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Prince George Citizen*, 12 May 1922, 8.

While it may have been difficult for the *Prince George Citizen* to summon up much sympathy for the plight of Yee Yock, the case of Chow Lee offered the local newspaper a much greater opportunity for compassion. Lee had lived in British Columbia since 1896 (except for brief periods spent in Alberta), working as a cook in Barkerville, Revelstoke, and Nelson. In 1911, he had returned briefly to China to wed, and by 1915, he had assembled enough capital to open the Chow Lee Grocery Store in Prince George.⁸⁹ Lee was arrested in May 1923 during a general raid of Chinatown. Officers had discovered five pounds of opium in the backroom of his store as well as a small quantity in his home. Because the seizure was so large, Lee was charged with trafficking instead of simple possession.⁹⁰ Lee pled guilty at his trial, but with a caveat. While he admitted that the small amount of opium found in his home was his own, he maintained that the much larger quantity found in his storeroom belonged to two other Chinese who had rented the room as sleeping quarters. Lee's defence lawyer maintained that, because there was reasonable doubt as to whether the large quantity of opium belonged to Lee, and since he had had no previous criminal record, he should receive a lenient sentence.⁹¹ This argument did not convince Magistrate Daniel, who said that

he was sorry for the accused in the position in which he found himself. [sic] As to the suggestion that he did not know of the presence of the large quantity of opium, the fact remained [that] it had been found on his premises. It was suggested [that] he [had] permitted two Chinamen to occupy a portion of the premises as sleeping quarters, but having done so, it was necessary for him to see that they did not permit opium to be stored there. He had to take notice of the fact that not only Canada, but all the rest of this world, was doing its best to stamp out the use of and traffic in narcotic drugs.⁹²

Lee was fined \$750 and sentenced to six months in prison. At the time of his arrest, he was forty-seven years old and had seven children.⁹³ Changes made in the ONDA in 1923 stipulated that Lee would face deportation at the end of his sentence. In order to prevent being separated

⁸⁹ *Rex v. Chow Lee - Chew Suey Get*, file 24/23, GR-2239, box 1, BCPA. A curious reader might wonder whether this was the same Chow Lee who was arrested for opium possession in 1917. This seems unlikely, since the Prince George newspapers were unable to find any previous criminal record for the Lee of 1923.

⁹⁰ *Prince George Citizen*, 22 March 1923, 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 29 March 1923, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Rex v. Chow Lee - Chew Suey Get*.

from his family, Lee withheld payment of his fine so that he could stay in prison and fight the deportation order. Eventually his conviction was quashed, but not before he had spent over a year in prison.⁹⁴ For Yock and Lee, the broader Canadian campaign to "stamp out the use of and traffic in narcotic drugs" was offered as justification for prosecutions that had evidentiary flaws. Both cases indicate that moral pressure from urban Canada could translate into excessively harsh prosecution of drug crime in rural regions.

The Yock and Lee cases are examples of law enforcement in rural British Columbia at its most stringent. However, the moral panic that was exported from the Lower Mainland dissipated very quickly, and drug use became just another type of crime for both citizens and police officers. Prosecution rates in Prince Rupert fell off dramatically. According to the *Prince Rupert Daily News*, "cases under the Opium and Drug Act showed a marked decrease during the year [1923] in the use of drugs. While in the year 1922 there were no less than 33 charges under the heading, for the past year there had been only 8."⁹⁵ In Prince George, drugs disappeared from the pages of the *Prince George Citizen* after 1924. Similarly, drugs disappeared from other rural newspapers. However, as late as 1927, newspapers in Vancouver could still become excited about drug crime.⁹⁶

While some have linked the end of the drug panic with the passage of the 1923 Asiatic Exclusion Act, there is perhaps a simpler explanation for why drug arrests fell off so dramatically. In August 1923, RCMP drug squad operations were suspended after allegations surfaced that some officers in British Columbia had accepted bribes and, in some cases, had even engaged in drug trafficking themselves.⁹⁷ In 1924, much of the RCMP presence was withdrawn from the province.⁹⁸ Although the BCPP stated that they considered it their duty to enforce Dominion statutes such as the ONDA, their own arrest statistics suggest that, outside the Lower Mainland, drug crime was not a priority. Between 1924 and 1929, drug crime constituted between 3 percent and 10 percent of the BCPP's arrests in the Lower Mainland. Conversely, outside the Lower

⁹⁴ *Prince George Citizen*, 1 May 1924, 3.

⁹⁵ *PRDN*, 10 January 1924, 5.

⁹⁶ See, for example, the *Vancouver Sun*'s lurid coverage of the arrest and trial of Lim Jim, a prominent member of the city's Chinese community. *Vancouver Sun*, 19 October 1927, 1; *Ibid.*, 20 October 1927, 1.

⁹⁷ Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession*, 96.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Swainger, "Police Culture in British Columbia and 'Ordinary Duty' in the Peace River Country, 1910-39," in *People and Place: Historical Influences on Legal Culture*, ed. Jonathan Swainger and Constance Backhouse (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 202.

Mainland, drug crime never constituted more than 1.6 percent of BCPP arrests.⁹⁹ Carstairs has argued that the drop in arrests across the country between 1924 and 1929 can be explained by an overall decline in drug use.¹⁰⁰ While this is probably true for the country as a whole, the sharp drop in convictions in rural British Columbia suggests that conditions were considerably different outside of major cities. Following the general downswing in drug prosecutions in rural British Columbia beginning in 1924, an episode that occurred in Kelowna in 1929 demonstrates the degree to which drug law enforcement had become less urgent than it was at the beginning of the decade.

In May 1929, the British Columbia attorney general appointed a commission to investigate the city police of Kelowna. BCPP constable Paul Corrigan accused members of the Kelowna City Police of accepting graft from local Chinese so that they might carry on prostitution, gambling, and narcotic trafficking unhindered. The entire episode had begun a year earlier, when Corrigan accused Police Chief Thomas of warning a local drug peddler, Annie Wong She, of an impending BCPP raid. Ultimately, councilor T.G. Norris asserted that Thomas “had been friendly with the Chinese, encouraged gambling and the continuance in the narcotic trade, and had failed to protect the public morals.”¹⁰¹

As the commission unfolded, the charges against Chief Thomas and the city police continued to mount. RCMP officers alleged that Kelowna had become the centre for narcotics distribution in the interior of the province, with shipments of drugs going to Princeton, Keremeos, Midway, Nelson, and logging camps near Summerland. Furthermore, the RCMP accused Thomas of not cooperating with the provincial and national police, and of obstructing drug raids in the city as early as 1926. One officer testified that he had heard Thomas tell local Chinese businessmen that he would “keep the red coats out of Kelowna.” In one particularly telling incident, Kelowna city magistrate E. Weddell recalled an arrest that Chief Thomas had made of two Chinese opium smokers and contrasted it to the numerous documented incidences in which Thomas had permitted opium smoking among Chinese he knew

⁹⁹ *Report of the Superintendent of Provincial Police for the Year Ended December 31st, 1924-29* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925-30). The arrest statistics for each year were reported for each division of the province and labelled A-E. A and E divisions contained Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland region, while B, C, and D divisions contained the rest of the province. The ONDA arrests for each division were divided by the total arrests for that division to determine the percentage of total arrests for which drug crime accounted. The comment concerning the enforcement of Dominion statutes is contained in the report for the year 1924, xii.

¹⁰⁰ Carstairs, *Jailed For Possession*, 35-65.

¹⁰¹ “Police Inquiry Makes Slow Progress,” *Kelowna Courier and Okanagan Orchardist*, 9 May 1929, 1.

in the community. According to Weddell, "Thomas had informed [him] that they [the two Chinese Thomas arrested] were strangers and not acceptable."¹⁰² It appears that, in Thomas's mind, opium smoking by a Chinese he knew personally *was* acceptable. Whereas seven years earlier drug use was thought to have been "invading small towns," by 1929 Kelowna city police were being accused of encouraging the drug traffic in rural British Columbia.

With the coming of the Great Depression in 1929, the character of Canada's drug-using population changed. As Carstairs observes, the Chinese population of Canada was extremely hard hit by the Depression, which left little disposable income to be spent on drugs. At the same time, the substantial number of Chinese drug users who were deported (761 by 1932), and the increasing age of the Chinese population, meant that fewer and fewer Chinese drug users remained. The drug panics of the 1920s certainly had a strong impact on the lives of Chinese individuals living in Canada: by 1932, 4,900 had been convicted under the ONDA.¹⁰³ However, this study suggests that these moral panics were more prevalent and longer-lasting in urban British Columbia than the were in rural British Columbia, where key features of ethnic and social organization had previously prevented widespread concern. Fear exported into rural and small-town British Columbia translated into heightened media attention of drug use and harsh justice for drug users. Simultaneously, the presence of the RCMP ensured that rural drug panics, for the brief period of their duration, affected sizeable numbers of rural drug users. However, with the suspension of RCMP drug activities in 1923, and the concurrent cooling off of moral panic, drug use again entered the grey area of acceptable disorder in rural British Columbia.

This study ultimately suggests both the feasibility and value of ground-level studies of crime in small communities. It also suggests that it would be helpful if such studies were done from a historical perspective. Further, it indicates that the preoccupations and practices of the emergent urban Canada of the 1910s and 1920s were not necessarily shared by people in rural Canada, who still formed a sizeable part of the population. As scholars continue to explore the urban-rural theme in BC history, they would do well to remember that the different influences of metropolitan and hinterland settings could have a profound effect on race relations, law enforcement, and notions of criminality.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession*, 44-47.