

“THE WONDROUS STORY AND TRADITIONS OF THE COUNTRY”:

The Native Sons of British Columbia and the Role of Myth in the Formation of an Urban Middle Class^t

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IN HIS REPORT TO THE 1930 Grand Post of the Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Factor J.P. Hampton Bole, a New Westminster lawyer, discussed his conception of the role and future of the uniquely British Columbian secret society. “During the past year,” Bole told his brethren, “the fact has been brought home to me that our movement is of far greater importance than a casual observer might think. It recalls to my mind the lessons of history; of the brotherhoods of old that were founded like our own on service to the community rather than personal advantage. Little bands or guilds in the Old Countries that grew into great organizations. We too can do that. We are on the right road.”² Bole’s predictions regarding the destiny of his organization may have been unduly optimistic, but they touched upon several elements of the mythology of the Native Sons. Bole spoke reverently of the “lessons of history,” invoking the organization’s unwavering faith in the didactic potential of the past. In his interpretation of the objects of “the brotherhoods of old,” Bole articulated the antimodernist contention that past generations had exhibited a level of virtue, a belief in “service to the community,” worthy of emulation in the present. In its public activities and pronouncements, the Native Sons of British Columbia extolled public service as a legacy of the province’s pioneers. However, in comparing the Native Sons to “guilds in the Old Countries,” Bole inadvertently suggested that the society had another objective that was not immediately apparent. Like a mediaeval guild, the Native Sons

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² City of Victoria Archives (hereafter vica), Native Sons of British Columbia Post 1 Fonds, PR 87, 29-B-6, file 6, Grand Post, Minutes, 25-26 April 1930.

sought first and foremost to bolster the economic position and social status of its membership, and its mythic version of British Columbia's past was a means to that end. The "greater importance" of the Native Sons of British Columbia lay in a field of activity Bole and his brethren would never have acknowledged publicly, the formation of a regionalist middle-class identity.

Despite its history of activity covering most of the twentieth century and its significant contribution to the preservation of popular historical sites, the Native Sons of British Columbia has been largely forgotten.³ On the rare occasions that it is mentioned, it is usually to draw attention to its racial insensitivity; the society's vociferous opposition to Asian immigration, for example, has earned it occasional references in the standard histories of the topic.⁴ Only two historians have treated the organization itself in any depth and both concentrate on the racial dimension of its activities and mythology. Robert Leece argues that the Native Sons' heroic image of British Columbia entailed the construction of Aboriginal peoples as the "Other," while Chad Reimer suggests that the society was an extremist organization founded primarily upon racialist principles.⁵ This view has also occasionally entered popular discussion. In the winter of 2002, a controversy erupted at Simon Fraser University regarding a painting of Alexander Mackenzie's arrival on the Pacific coast, commissioned by the Native Sons in 1922 as part of a series by John Innes depicting British Columbia history. First Nations students argued that the painting did not accurately reflect the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Mackenzie's expedition and called upon the university to "give back the Eurocentric fantasy history displayed in the paintings to the 'Native Sons of BC,' to whatever king loon wants to claim them. No recognition is better than false recognition."⁶

There is no question that there was a racial dimension to the activities and ideology of the Native Sons. This paper contends, however, that the

³ Fort Langley, the Nanaimo Bastion, and the Craigflower School are among the better-known sites preserved through the efforts of the Native Sons. There are also monuments erected by the society at Nootka Sound, at Cowichan Bay, and at Ross Bay Cemetery in Victoria.

⁴ Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 159, 185; W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 141; Patricia Roy, *Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), passim.

⁵ Robert Leece, "Making BC History: The Native Sons of British Columbia," *British Columbia Historical News* 29, 1 (1995-56): 30-3; Chadwick T. Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History: Historical Writing and Institutions, 1784-1958" (PhD diss., York University, 1995), 203-7.

⁶ Rick Ouellet, "First Things First," *Peak* (Simon Fraser University, Burnaby), 4 November 2002.

Native Sons had an appeal and a historical significance that extended beyond its anti-Asian vitriol and stereotyped depictions of Aboriginal peoples. Based on statistical analyses of the society’s surviving membership records, I argue that the Native Sons appealed most strongly to one particular constituency – namely, the class of skilled labourers, white-collar employees, small businessmen, and minor professionals that Robert A.J. McDonald has described as “the moderately well-to-do.”⁷ The society’s secretive fraternal character, hitherto ignored by scholars, fostered a ritualized and filiopietistic version of British Columbia’s past that contributed to class cohesion and provincial patriotism.⁸ Through their public activities the Native Sons sought to popularize a conception of the province’s history that equated the legacy of the pioneers with the values of the lower middle class. This motivation is evident in the writings of Bruce McKelvie, a popular historian and one of the society’s most prominent members, and in the annual presentation of a good citizen medal.⁹ Moreover, the members of the Native Sons contended that their descent from the pioneers conferred them with the authority to speak on political issues, including Asian exclusion and British Columbia’s place in Confederation. Fiercely critical of perceived external threats to their members’ prosperity, the Native Sons’ pronouncements on political issues suggest the emergence of a regional consciousness

⁷ Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), chap. 7. While no one has yet examined the role of the Native Sons in class formation, Cassidy Rose Ellis comments on the class composition and social cohesion of the Native Sons’ sister society, the Native Daughters of British Columbia. See Cassidy Rose Ellis, “Preserving the ‘Glory of the Past’: The Native Daughters of British Columbia and the Construction of Pioneer History in the Hastings Mill Museum” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2002), 111-12, 21-6.

⁸ Leece and Reimer make only passing reference to the Native Sons’ social and benevolent goals. Their downplaying of the organization’s fraternal character is symptomatic of a broader reluctance in North American historiography to take fraternalism seriously. Mary Ann Clawson has argued, however, that the selection of the fraternal model of organization is significant because the networks of mutual confidence it fosters have the potential to “facilitate cooperative activity.” See Leece, “Making BC History,” 30; Reimer, “The Making of British Columbia History,” 197; Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 5, 7-8.

⁹ The author of numerous books, both fictional and historical, on British Columbia’s past, Bruce Alistair McKelvie (1889-1960) was an active member of the Native Sons throughout his lifetime, serving several terms as grand factor and grand historian. His long membership and service to the order justify my use of his writings as indicative of Native Sons ideology. Moreover, on his death McKelvie was interred according to the rites of the society, suggesting that his membership in the Native Sons of British Columbia was tantamount to a religious affiliation. See City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter cVA), Native Sons of British Columbia Fonds, Add. mss 463, vol. 3, file 3, Grand Post, Minutes, 7-8 April 1961; Nancy Lou Patterson, “Open Secrets: Fifteen Masonic and Orange Lodge Gravemarkers in Waterloo and Wellington Counties, Ontario, 1862-1982,” *Material History Bulletin* 23 (1986): 46.

within the urban middle class.¹⁰ The Native Sons' pioneer myth is thus best understood as a vehicle for class formation. An examination of this long-neglected organization offers a new perspective on the origins of BC regional identity.

The first post of the Native Sons of British Columbia was organized in Victoria in 1899. Membership was open to any British Columbia-born male over eighteen years of age; when the organization absorbed the moribund British Columbia Pioneer Society in 1910, "pioneers" became eligible for associate membership.¹¹ With regard to its other qualifications, such as the stipulations that members be of good moral character and that they believe in the existence of a "supreme being," the society was similar to other nineteenth-century fraternal orders. Indeed, the organization was modelled closely after its namesake American lodges. The *Daily Colonist* suggested the model was California's Native Sons of the Golden West, and in later years the Native Sons of British Columbia would claim the Californian organization as its "paternal Post."¹² The nearby Native Sons of Washington may have also served as inspiration.¹³ Like its American counterparts, the Native Sons of British Columbia professed goals both

¹⁰ Scholars have acknowledged the class basis of regional political consciousness in British Columbia, particularly as it relates to the rise of Social Credit. However, their concentration is on petty bourgeois regionalism in the provincial hinterland rather than in the major cities. Stephen Tomblin and Gordon Hak, for example, examine Social Credit's ideology and appeal as it relates to the interior and the north. Leonard Kuffert does acknowledge the urban and technocratic roots of Social Credit as well as its later antimodernist tendencies, which were in some respects similar to those of the Native Sons. See Stephen G. Tomblin, "W.A.C. Bennett and Province-Building in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 85 (1990): 45-61; Gordon H. Hak, "Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough in British Columbia," *Canadian Historical Review* 85, 2 (2004): 277-96; Leonard B. Kuffert, "'Reckoning with the Machine': The British Columbia Social Credit Movement as Social Criticism, 1932-52," *BC Studies* 124 (1999/2000): 9-40.

¹¹ Pioneers were defined as men resident in the province before a particular date, which changed over the course of the organization's history. In 1913 the cut-off was 31 December 1875. By the 1960s, having lived in the province for at least three-quarters of one's life was sufficient for associate membership. See Nanaimo Community Archives (hereafter NCA), Native Sons of British Columbia Grand Post Funds, Grand Post, Minutes, 18 July 1910; Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Constitution and Bylaws of the Native Sons of British Columbia* (New Westminster: Pacific Canadian Publishing Co., 1913), 14; VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 4, Membership Appeal, c. 1965.

¹² "Native Sons Organize," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 9 March 1899; CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 3, file 1, Grand Post, Minutes, 3-4 April 1959.

¹³ Native Sons of Washington, Grand Camp, *Code of the Native Sons of Washington* (Port Townsend: The Call, 1899); Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History," 196n8. Among the other namesake organizations active in the Pacific west during the late nineteenth century were the Native Sons of Oregon and the Pacific Coast Association of the Native Sons of Vermont. See *Oregon Native Son* 1, 1 (1899); Pacific Coast Association of the Native Sons of Vermont, *Constitution and By-Laws* (San Francisco: Women's Cooperative Printing Office, c. 1879).

commemorative (the perpetuation "in the minds of all native sons the memories of 'Pioneer Days'") and pragmatic (the improvement of "the conditions of its members by encouragement in business").¹⁴ Posts were quickly established in Vancouver, Nanaimo, and New Westminster, and a grand post was organized in 1901 to coordinate the organization's activities and to expand its network of subordinate posts.

In this latter pursuit the Native Sons were most successful in urban areas. Between 1899 and 1960 the society established thirteen posts, concentrated in the densely populated districts of southeastern Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland (see Table 1). They succeeded in establishing only one post (Kamloops Post 10) east of the Coast Mountains and only one in the northern half of the province (Sir Alexander Mackenzie Post 8 in Bella Coola).¹⁵ The Kamloops and Bella Coola posts, as well as rural posts within the Georgia Basin, disappeared within a couple of years of their establishment, and even more stable posts could not hope to match the influence of the original four. Of the thirty-two men who served as grand factor, the society's highest officer between 1901 and 1945, only one, Ladysmith grocer A.E. Jones, was not a member of a Victoria, Vancouver, Nanaimo, or New Westminster post. The Native Sons was keenly aware of its urban focus. In 1929 the grand secretary sought the assistance of the membership in supplying the names of potential contacts in communities such as Nelson, Williams Lake, and Pender Harbour with a view to establishing new posts, and at the 1957 grand post annual meeting, the district deputy for Vancouver Island expressed hope that a post might be established at Comox or Campbell River.¹⁶ The grand post sought to extend its rural presence in 1960 with a resolution to establish "chapters," in affiliation with larger posts, in communities that could not field the fifteen members necessary to support a post.¹⁷ This measure does not appear to have met with any success, and the Native Sons remained an urban organization until its demise in the early 1990s.¹⁸

¹⁴ Native Sons of British Columbia, *Constitution and Bylaws* (Victoria: Greenwood, Smith and Randolph, 1899), 1; Native Sons of the Golden West, Grand Parlor, "nsgw History," online at www.nsgw.org/history.htm, viewed 11 January 2006; Native Sons of Washington, Grand Camp, *Code of the Native Sons of Washington*, 1.

¹⁵ CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 2, file 5, Grand Post, Minutes, 30-31 March 1951; City of Victoria Archives (hereafter VICA), Native Sons of British Columbia Post 1 Fonds, PR 87, 29-B-7, file 5, Grand Post, Minutes, 7-8 May 1926.

¹⁶ VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 7b, Grand Secretary to H.D. McDonald, Recording Secretary, Post 1, 18 September 1929; CVA, Add. MSS. 463, vol. 3, file 1, Grand Post, Minutes, 26-27 April 1957.

¹⁷ CVA, Add. MSS. 463, vol.3, file 1, Grand Post, Minutes, 22-23 April 1960.

¹⁸ The leaders of the Native Sons were cognizant of their declining numbers and appeal by the late 1950s, but they offered no explanation. Most likely the decline of the Native Sons was

TABLE 1
*Subordinate posts of the Native Sons
 of British Columbia (NSBC), 1899-2000*

POST	LOCATION	ESTABLISHED	INACTIVE (APPROX)
Post 1	Victoria	1899	1990
Post 2	Vancouver	1900	1981
Post 3	Nanaimo	1900	1977
Post 4	New Westminster	1909	2000*
Post 5	Ladner	1914	Unknown
Post 6	Victoria	1915	1919
Post 7	Ladysmith	1924	Unknown
Post 8	Bella Coola	1926	1930
Post 9	Langley	1927**	1963
Post 10	Duncan	1947***	Unknown
Post 11	Vancouver	1936	1938
Post 12	Kamloops	1947	1951
Post 14	Saltspring Island	1957	1960

* Ken Graham, described by the *Langley Advance* as the last surviving member of the Native Sons of British Columbia, was a guest of honour at Fort Langley's Douglas Day banquet in 2000. Graham also sat as representative of Native Sons Post 4 on the City of New Westminster Museum and Archives Advisory Sub-Committee, a seat that still exists but is currently vacant. ("First Lady Banquet Hit," *Langley Advance*, 21 November 2000; New Westminster Corporation, "2006 Committees, Board and Commissions," online at http://www.newwestcity.ca/cityhall/Leg_Info/committees.htm, viewed 10 February 2006.)

** Reorganized in 1954.

*** Reorganized in 1947 after an unspecified period of dormancy.

symptomatic of the general decline of fraternalism after the Second World War. Clifford Putney attributes the decline of fraternal organizations in the United States to the rise of men's service clubs, which served the needs and aspirations of businessmen more effectively than did the "otherworldly" fraternal orders of the Victorian era. The Native Sons, a relic of Victorian fraternalism (insofar as it embraced secret rituals) that also fulfilled some of the outward-looking functions of a service club, may have been a victim of this trend. See cvA, Add. mss. 463, vol. 3, file 1, Grand Post, Minutes, 3-4 April 1959; Clifford Putney, "Service over Secrecy: How Lodge-Style Fraternalism Yielded Popularity to Men's Service Clubs," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27, 1 (1993): 179-90.

Surviving membership records allow for some generalization about the composition of the Native Sons. Within a year of its organization, Victoria Post 1 compiled a directory of its members, presumably intended to encourage the brethren to patronize each other's businesses.¹⁹ As it was published so soon before the 1901 census, linking the Post 1 List of Members, Their Vocations and Business Addresses with the census returns provides an intriguing profile of the society's original members, and comparison with a random sample of one hundred native-born adult males drawn from the 1901 Victoria census shows the extent to which the Native Sons reflected its target population.²⁰ Recognizing that the List of Members only reflects the composition of the society at its inception, I also draw systematic samples of 100 from accepted membership applications to Victoria Post 1 and Vancouver Post 2 to determine whether the patterns observed among the earliest Native Sons members remained typical of the organization later in its history. Membership applications survive for Victoria Post 1 for the period 1914 through 1952, and for Vancouver Post 2 for 1917 through 1938.²¹ While relevant census returns have not yet been released for these years, the membership applications include the applicants' occupations and places and dates of birth and, therefore, allow for some generalization concerning the origins, age, and class composition of the association's membership. Together the Post 1 List of Members and Post 1 and 2 membership applications demonstrate that class is the best predictor of Native Sons membership.

The 1900 List of Members suggests that men drawn from middle-class occupational categories dominated the Native Sons at its establishment. The members of Post 1 and the individuals in the 1901 random census sample were classified into seven categories using a slightly modified version of the scheme devised by George and Herbert Emery for their study of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (Table 2).²² Three middle-class occupational groups – clerks, shopkeepers and salesmen,

¹⁹ Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 1, *List of Members, Their Vocations and Business Addresses*. (Victoria: Native Sons of British Columbia, 1900).

²⁰ A searchable database of the 1901 census of Victoria, available online at www.vihistory.ca, greatly facilitated this part of the research. For justification of the sample size, see Pat Hudson, *History by Numbers: An Introduction to Quantitative Approaches* (London: Arnold, 2000), 171.

²¹ VICA, PR 87, 29-B-8, file 7, Membership Applications, 1914-52; CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol.13, files 1-4, Membership Applications, 1917-38.

²² George Emery and J.C. Herbert Emery, *A Young Man's Benefit: The Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Sickness Insurance in the United States and Canada, 1860-1929* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 34.

TABLE 2

Occupational classification, NSBC Victoria Post 1, 1900

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	NSBC VICTORIA POST 1		1901 VICTORIA CENSUS SAMPLE*	
		%		%
Skilled Labourer	72	26	27	31
Shopkeeper/Salesman	21	8	1	1
Clerk	90	33	19	22
Professional	39	14	18	21
Unskilled labourer	33	12	16	19
Merchant/manufacturer	14	5	2	2
Employee (undesigned)	7	3	3	3
Total	276	101	86	100

* Random sample of 100 British Columbia-born adult males (fourteen cases with no occupation listed have been omitted), drawn from 1901 census of Victoria City.

and merchants and manufacturers – were overrepresented among members of Post 1, while labourers, both skilled and unskilled, and professionals were underrepresented.²³ The five occupations best represented among members of Post 1, together accounting for one-third of the total membership, were “Clerks” and “Salesmen” (21 each), “Barristers and Solicitors” (18), “Government Service” (17), and “Bookkeepers” (16).²⁴ Native-born miners, hunters, and sailors appear in the 1901 Victoria census sample but are absent from the List of Members. Farmers from Victoria’s agricultural environs accounted for less than 3 percent of the membership. When wages earned over the twelve months prior to the census are used as a second proxy variable for class, the middle-class character of the Native Sons is revealed even more strikingly. Census wage data are not unproblematic; however, as the data for the Native Sons and the data for the sample population are drawn from the same census returns, the trend they suggest is accurate even if the absolute values are unreliable.²⁵ Among British Columbia-born adult males in Victoria, the mean wage income in the twelve months preceding the

²³ A chi-square test indicates that the variation between the two distributions is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

²⁴ Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 1, *List of Members*, n.p.

²⁵ For a discussion of the shortcomings of 1901 census wage data, see Eric W. Sager, “National Data on Working-Class Earnings: The 1901 Census of Canada,” *Historical Methods* 33, 4 (2000): 235–41.

TABLE 3
Cost of membership in British Columbia fraternal lodges, 1900

LODGE	INIT. FEE*	FEE/MONTH	COST, 1ST YR.	% OF NSBC
NSBC	\$2.00	\$0.25	\$5.00	100
Sons of England	\$3.50**	\$1.00	\$15.50	310
Knights of Pythias	\$5.00	\$1.00	\$17.00	340
Freemasons	\$25.00	\$0.50	\$31.00	620

* Because they offered health insurance schemes, the Knights of Pythias and the Sons of England charged different initiation fees based on the age of the initiate. The Freemasons charged higher initiation fees for advanced degrees. The initiation fees presented here are the lowest possible fees, usually for an initiate between twenty and thirty years of age seeking admission to the lowest degree.

** Includes \$0.50 for a mandatory medical examination.

1901 census was \$781 (median: \$660). Among Native Sons, however, the mean was \$901 (median: \$750). Thus, in addition to being drawn from middle-class occupational groups, members of the Native Sons were more affluent than was the pool of potential members.

In spite of its members' relative affluence, membership in the Native Sons was more affordable than was membership in other fraternal lodges in late nineteenth-century British Columbia, indicating that the high cost of lodge dues does not explain its predominantly middle-class membership. The first-year cost of membership (initiation fee and twelve-months' worth of dues) in Victoria Post 1 was less than one-third the first-year cost of membership in the Sons of England or the Knights of Pythias, and less than one-sixth the first-year cost of membership in the province's oldest Masonic lodge, Victoria-Columbia Lodge 1 (Table 3).²⁶ Moreover, if the cost of fraternal lodge membership was generally prohibitive for members of the working class, one would expect to see occupational distributions similar to that of the Native Sons in other fraternal organizations. Statistics are not readily available for other Victoria or BC fraternal lodges, so one must look further afield for points of comparison. The occupational distribution of Victoria Native Sons differs significantly from that observed among the 2,615 Toronto

²⁶ Sons of England Benevolent Society, Pride of the Island Lodge No. 131, *Bylaws* (Victoria: J.A. Cohen, 1891), 5; Knights of Pythias, Royal Lodge No. 6, *Bylaws* (New Westminster: Morey and Co., 1902), 6-7; Freemasons, Victoria-Columbia Lodge No. 1, *Bylaws* (Victoria: Colonist, 1895), 21; Native Sons of British Columbia, *Constitution and Bylaws* (Victoria: Greenwood, Smith and Randolph, 1899), 13.

TABLE 4

*Occupational classification**NSBC Victoria Post 1 and Toronto Odd Fellows (IOOF)*

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	NSBC VICTORIA POST 1 1900		TORONTO IOOF 1911*	
	No.	%	No.	%
	Skilled labourer	72	26	1253
Shopkeeper	21	8	411	16
Clerk	90	33	388	15
Professional	39	14	233	9
Unskilled labourer	33	12	136	5
Manufacturer	14	5	98	4
Employee	7	3	96	4
Total	276	101	2615	101

* Emery and Emery, *A Young Man's Benefit*, 34.

Odd Fellows classified by Emery and Emery (Table 4).²⁷ This result must be interpreted with caution as the variation may be attributable to localized economic circumstances. That said, the differences are noteworthy: skilled labourers were underrepresented among Native Sons while professionals and clerks were overrepresented (in the case of clerks by a factor of 2.2). Fraternal lodges such as the Odd Fellows offered sickness insurance coverage, which may have made them more attractive to workers than was the Native Sons, in which, as we shall see, the benefits of membership were less tangible. Nevertheless, the Native Sons appealed primarily to the middle class in spite of relatively low membership fees that might have encouraged workers to join.

Concentrations of Native Sons in specific workplaces suggests that occupational connections played an important role in determining who applied for membership. For example, six employees of the Victoria Post Office, about one-third of its total workforce, were members of the Native Sons in 1900.²⁸ The List of Members includes three employees of the provincial Land Registry and three employees of the Customs Department, further emphasizing the popularity of the

²⁷ Emery and Emery, *A Young Man's Benefit*, 34. A chi-square test indicates that the variation observed is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

²⁸ Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 1, *List of Members*; Canada, Department of the Secretary of State, *Civil List of Canada, 1899* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1900), 122.

organization among Victoria civil servants. Later in its history, Post 1 would recommend to the City of Victoria that preference be given to the native-born in hiring municipal employees, suggesting a continued interest in the public service.²⁹ Family ties appear also to have been determinants of membership. Victoria's English-born postmaster, Noah Shakespeare, was ineligible for membership, but his son, jeweller William Shakespeare, was a member of Post 1. Both James Douglas Helmcken and Harry Dallas Helmcken, the sons of the well-known physician and politician John Sebastian Helmcken, were members of the society, and James's son Ainslie was initiated in 1920 while a student-at-law. William Elias Huxtable was an infant when his father, stationery salesman James Elias Huxtable, was initiated, and at the age of twenty the younger Huxtable also joined Post 1. By 1925 William Huxtable was employed at the Victoria Customs House, a position possibly obtained through Native Sons connections.³⁰

The Victoria members of Native Sons were not only middle class, they were also well established in the city. They were older than Victoria's average native-born adult male, having a mean age of 28.72 (median = 29) compared with a mean age of 26.89 (median = 25) in the sample. Native Sons were significantly more likely to report an urban place of birth, and Victoria itself was the place of birth of 85 percent of those members of Post 1 for whom a civil birth registration is available.³¹ Native Sons were slightly more likely to be married or widowed than were their counterparts in the population at large, and they were considerably more likely to be heads of their own households.³² In spite of their relative maturity, members of the society were also slightly more likely to be recorded as sons of household heads, suggesting that the organization may have provided networking opportunities for young men from middle-class homes. Finally, members of the society were less likely to be boarders or lodgers (5 percent) than were BC-born adult males generally (8 percent). The typical Native Son in 1900 was relatively affluent, mature, sedentary, and may have applied for membership in the post at the suggestion of a co-worker or family member. Young migrants from the provincial hinterland, probably the most likely male residents of Victoria to be unmarried, unemployed, and boarding or

²⁹ VICA, PR 87, 28-B-5, file 3, Post 1 Minutes, 15 February 1928.

³⁰ *The British Columbia and Yukon Directory* (Vancouver: Sun Directories, 1925).

³¹ Civil birth registrations exist for about one-third of the 286 members of Post 1.

³² Thirty-eight percent of the Native Sons were recorded as household heads in the census, compared to 24 percent of individuals in the sample.

TABLE 5
*Occupations of accepted membership applicants,
 NSBC Victoria Post 1, 1914-52*

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	NSBC VICTORIA POST 1 LIST OF MEMBERS... 1900	NSBC VICTORIA POST 1, SYSTEMATIC SAMPLE OF INITIATES, 1914-52	
	%	No.	%
Skilled labourer	26	20	20
Shopkeeper/salesman	8	10	10
Clerk	33	24	24
Professional	14	23	23
Unskilled labourer	12	6	6
Merchant/manufacturer	5	5	5
Employee	3	7	7
Other*	0	5	5
Total	101	100	100

* Retired, unemployed, none given.

lodging rather than living in their own homes or with their immediate families, did not join Post 1 of the Native Sons of British Columbia.

If anything the middle-class composition of the Native Sons intensified as the organization matured. Persistence during the first decade of activity was high: of the ninety-five members who in 1908 subscribed a total of \$2,030 towards the construction of a Native Sons hall, almost 60 percent had been members in 1900, and most of these were from the middle class.³³ New members perpetuated the middle-class character. Clerks, professionals, and skilled workers account for 70 percent of members initiated into Post 1 between 1914 and 1952 (Table 5). The proportion of professionals increased from 14 percent of members in 1900 to 23 percent of later initiates, while the number of unskilled workers declined precipitously, from 12 percent of members in 1900 to 6 percent of subsequent initiates. The average age of later initiates (mean = 29.74; median = 25) is comparable to that of the 1900 membership. Moreover, in spite of increasing settlement and the improvement of transportation networks in the provincial hinterland, the post continued to draw most of its new members from among Victoria natives. Eighty-two percent of new initiates were born in Victoria,

³³ VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 2, Native Sons Hall Subscription Lists, 4 May 1908; Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 1, *List of Members*.

TABLE 6
*Occupations of accepted membership applicants,
 NSBC Vancouver Post 2, 1917-38*

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	NSBC VICTORIA POST 1	NSBC VANCOUVER POST 2	
	LIST OF MEMBERS...	SYSTEMATIC SAMPLE OF	
	1900	INITIATES 1917-38	
	%	No.	%
Skilled labourer	26	21	21
Shopkeeper/salesman	8	14	14
Clerk	33	19	19
Professional*	14	38	38
Unskilled labourer	12	4	4
Merchant/manufacturer	5	0	0
Employee	3	4	4
Total	101	100	100

* I have included eleven university students in this category, assuming, as Axelrod suggests, that they were professionals in the making. See Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 160-5.

demonstrating that membership still appealed first and foremost to men who were well established in the city.

Within the only other Native Sons post for which membership records survive, the moderately well-to-do also predominated. Among initiates to Vancouver Post 2 between 1917 and 1938, professionals, skilled labourers, and clerks made up 68 percent – comparable to their proportion of initiates in Post 1. Compared to Post 1, professionals and shopkeepers and salesmen in Post 2 were overrepresented among Vancouver Native Sons, while the two posts had in common a small proportion of unskilled labourers (Table 6). There was more diversity in birthplaces among Post 2 members, but nearly three-quarters of initiates were born in Vancouver, Victoria, and New Westminster – the province’s three largest cities. Their average age at initiation (mean = 28.17; median = 27) is comparable to that observed in Victoria. Like the founders of their order, Vancouver’s Native Sons were urban men from the lower middle class.

Class is a better predictor of Native Sons membership than either religion or ethnicity. The requirement, borrowed directly from the deistic traditions of Freemasonry, that members believe “in the existence of a Supreme Being” was broad enough that Post 1 drew its members

from most of the major Victoria denominations. In some cases the close correspondence between the religious composition of Post 1 and that of the sample is cause for surprise. In spite of the Roman Catholic hierarchy's opposition to Masonic-style secret societies, Roman Catholics were present among the members of Post 1 in close to the same proportion as is seen in the sample.³⁴ The *Victoria Daily Colonist* observed that "although secret in nature the constitution [of the Native Sons] has been so framed that no one will be precluded from joining on religious grounds."³⁵ This suggests a conscious effort on the part of the association's founders to ensure that its rituals did not offend the religious sensibilities of Roman Catholic initiates. The 1900 membership also included five Jewish members. Three of these, the Sylvester brothers, worked together at their father's feed store on Cormorant Street, while a fourth, their cousin Samuel Davies Schultz, was a lawyer and later Canada's first Jewish judge.³⁶ The Jewish membership thus attests to the primacy of occupational and family status over religious and ethnic origin in determining Native Sons membership. In terms of national origin, the society was also remarkably representative, including not only men of British descent but also British Columbians of French-Canadian, American, Italian, German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Scandinavian ancestry. Native Sons membership was not the exclusive preserve of Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

It is interesting in light of historians' treatment of the Native Sons that, although the membership was overwhelmingly white, from its very inception the organization admitted non-white British Columbians into its ranks. Its constitution included no racial proscriptions until 1925, when the membership qualifications were amended to exclude people of Asian descent.³⁷ The 1900 *Victoria Post List of Members* includes at least one African-Canadian member (biscuit maker Garrett Smith), and a number of members were listed in the census as racially Aboriginal.³⁸

³⁴ Freemasonry was forbidden to Roman Catholics as early as 1738, and in 1894 the prohibition was extended to other secret societies, including the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, and the Sons of Temperance. See "Societies, Secret," in Charles Hebermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, D. D., and John J. Wynne, S. J., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14. (New York: Appleton, 1907), 71-4.

³⁵ "Native Sons Organize," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 9 March 1899. In spite of these efforts, at least one long-time Native Son resigned his membership because of the conflict between the organization's secrecy and his religious convictions. See VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 7c, Paul Grau to Post 1, n.d. (c. 1930).

³⁶ Cyril Edel Leonoff, *Pioneers, Pedlars, and Prayer Shawls: The Jewish Communities in British Columbia and the Yukon* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1978), 16-7.

³⁷ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 7-8 May 1925.

³⁸ Smith was still a member in 1908 and put three dollars towards the construction of a Native Sons hall (VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 2, Subscription Lists, 4 May 1908).

Dr. James Douglas Helmcken, elected grand factor in 1901, had as much Cree ancestry as did Métis leader Louis Riel, though it is unlikely that he celebrated this fact.³⁹ Contrary to Reimer's assertion that the society's claim of Aboriginal members is "impossible to verify," several prominent Aboriginal leaders did join the Native Sons in its later years of activity. These included Elwood Modeste, chief of the Cowichan Indian Band; Frank Assu, a member of the prominent Assu family of Cape Mudge; and Reverend Peter Kelly, a Haida activist and United Church minister. Kelly was not only a member of the organization but also served as chief factor of Nanaimo Post 3.⁴⁰

Membership in the Native Sons was consistent with Assu and Kelly's approaches to Aboriginal-newcomer relations. Both men were leaders of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia and favoured the political acculturation of the province's Aboriginal peoples. Acculturation, however, did not mean assimilation; in Assu and Kelly's view, Aboriginal peoples could maintain a distinctive cultural identity while they participated as equals in the "modern" economic and political structures established by white settlers.⁴¹ The two men's lives epitomized this compromise. Kelly's hybrid identity as Haida nobleman and Christian clergyman was a major theme of his life.⁴² The Assu family had a long record of engaging white society on its own terms for the betterment of their people. For Frank Assu's brother Harry, this engagement included membership in a Campbell River Masonic lodge.⁴³ In his study of Freemasonry in nineteenth-century Hawai'i, Frank Karpel argues that the order's lodges served as sites of "pragmatic interaction" between the indigenous elite, including the Hawaiian royal family, and the increasingly influential European and American merchant communities. Similarly, Michelle Hamilton has suggested that a desire for political recognition among white Canadians motivated the Iroquoian Six Nations to affiliate with the Ontario Historical Society.⁴⁴

³⁹ The problem of identity among mixed-blood descendants of Victoria's fur trade elite is discussed in Sylvia Van Kirk, "Tracing the Fortunes of Five Founding Families of Victoria," *BC Studies* 115/16 (1997/98): 148-79.

⁴⁰ Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History," 206. CVA, Add. mss. 463, vol. 2, file 7, Grand Post, Minutes, 10-11 April 1953; vol. 3, file 1, Grand Post, Minutes, 3-4 April 1959; VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 7b, Victor B. Harrison to H.B. McDonald, Recording Secretary, Post 1, 24 October 1930.

⁴¹ Philip Drucker, *The Native Brotherhoods: Modern Intertribal Organizations on the Northwest Coast* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1958), 4-5.

⁴² Alan Morley, *Roar of the Breakers: A Biography of Peter Kelly* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967).

⁴³ Harry Assu and Joy Inglis, *Assu of Cape Mudge: Recollections of a Coastal Indian Chief* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990), xiii-xiv.

⁴⁴ Frank J. Karpel, "Mystic Ties of Brotherhood: Freemasonry, Ritual and Hawaiian Royalty in the Nineteenth Century," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, 3 (2000): 364; Michelle A. Hamilton,

Assu and Kelly's membership in the Native Sons may have served a similar purpose: by entering into bonds of symbolic brotherhood with influential members of the white community, Aboriginal leaders sought to further their own interests. The stance that, as an organization, the Native Sons took on Aboriginal education suggests that this was an effective strategy. Having been apprised of the situation by "Brother Warren, an Indian member of Post 1," the Native Sons lobbied the provincial government to ensure the admission of Aboriginal students to provincial high schools – a key demand of Assu and Kelly's Native Brotherhood.⁴⁵ The society also supported the political advancement of Aboriginal leaders; the Grand Post recommended that Kelly be appointed to represent "his Indian brothers" in the Senate, two years before Prime Minister John Diefenbaker intimated that Kelly might be offered a seat in the Red Chamber.⁴⁶

In their relations with and conceptions of Aboriginal peoples, the Native Sons epitomized the contradiction between assimilation and preservation recently discussed by Paige Raibmon. While the society lobbied for Aboriginal citizenship and acculturation, its members were also keenly interested in Aboriginal authenticity and espoused the assumptions of the salvage anthropologists regarding the inevitable extinction of Aboriginal cultures.⁴⁷ For its first annual ball in 1910, the Native Sons decorated a New Westminster hall with various Aboriginal artefacts, and in the 1920s they used their influence to lobby the federal government for statutory protection for archaeological sites and UBC for archaeological and ethnographic research on Aboriginal peoples.⁴⁸ At the 1923 Grand Post, Grand Historian Bruce McKelvie reported that he was in the process of collecting both "stories from old-timers" and "Indian legends," which, he believed, "in time to come will be of even greater value than at present." He also collected Tsimshian and Haida baskets,

"Contested Histories: Museums, Collectors, and Iroquoian Peoples in Ontario, 1797-1910" (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2004), 219-21.

⁴⁵ CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 2, file 8, Grand Post, Minutes, 15-16 April 1955; vol. 3, file 1, Grand Post Minutes, 22-23 April 1960; Drucker, *The Native Brotherhoods*, 143. The Native Sons also considered providing bursaries to Aboriginal students to attend public high schools. See CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 2, file 5, Grand Post, Minutes, 15-16 April 1950.

⁴⁶ CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 2, file 9, Grand Post, Executive Minutes, 4 June 1955; "Dr. Kelly May Go to Senate," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 13 September 1957; Morley, *Roar of the Breakers*, 156. For reasons unknown the offer of a senatorship for Kelly never materialized.

⁴⁷ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

⁴⁸ *British Columbia* (New Westminster), 1 February 1910; NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 3, Correspondence Series, Victor B. Harrison, Chief Factor and Historian, Post 3, to Commissioner, Canadian National Parks, 26 November 1924; University of British Columbia Archives, Senate, Minutes, 18 March 1926.

presumably for the order's museum, or "vault," and took casts and photographs of petroglyphs and pictographs.⁴⁹ In 1953 the society expressed its approval of the Cowichan opera "Tzinquaw" and considered subsidizing the publication of a collection of Indian legends adapted for children.⁵⁰ Aboriginal members occasionally played along; Kelly performed a dual role as Protestant celebrant and authentic Indian when he pronounced the Chinook Jargon grace at the 1957 Grand Post banquet. Perhaps, as Raibmon has suggested of earlier First Nations leaders, Kelly believed that "playing Indian" would increase his ability to further the interests of his people within the Euro-Canadian community.⁵¹ Conversely, Kelly's mild performance of his Aboriginality was acceptable to the Native Sons because, as a clergyman, he demonstrated the success of acculturation and did not challenge the dominant colonial order.

While its historians worked to salvage what was left of a dying civilization, the Native Sons concerned themselves first and foremost with shaping the character of an ascendant one. The Aboriginal fact did not figure prominently in their conception of British Columbia history. In McKelvie's historical writings, First Nations peoples appeared principally as foils to the triumphant march of European civilization.⁵² In his fiction he praised the efforts of church and state to eradicate Aboriginal religious customs; his choice of a mixed-blood man who renounces Christianity and civilization as the villain of his novel *Huldowget* suggests that he rejected the possibility of the hybrid culture the Native Brotherhood promoted.⁵³ The Native Sons' glorification of the pioneer was certainly consistent with the "frontier cultural complex" identified, in a contemporary context, by Elizabeth Furniss. Like the frontier discourse that is the subject of Furniss's work, the Native Sons' secret initiation rituals featured "Wild and often hostile Natives" among "the Mighty Forces of Nature," which the founders of the province had valiantly overcome. The ritual also presented British Columbia at contact as "Nature's Golden Store of Golden Wealth, hitherto untouched by the hand of man."⁵⁴ Dispossession of Aboriginal peoples was implicit

⁴⁹ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 11-12 May 1923.

⁵⁰ CVA, Add. MSS. 463, vol. 2, file 7, Grand Post, Minutes, 10-11 April 1953.

⁵¹ Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 8133, 11. This motivation may also account for Kelly's role in a "Potlatch" organized in Courtenay for Princess Margaret during British Columbia's 1958 centennial celebrations. See Morley, *Roar of the Breakers*, 158.

⁵² Bruce McKelvie, *Pageant of BC: Glimpses into the Romantic Development of Canada's Far Western Province* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 93-4, 99-100, 102-3, 123-5.

⁵³ Bruce McKelvie, *Huldowget: A Story of the North Pacific Coast* (Toronto: Dent, 1926), v-vii, 30-2.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 16-22; Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand

in the Native Sons's narrative as an inevitable corollary to the advance of colonial rule. However, it was very much a secondary theme. Unlike the rural British Columbians in Furniss's work, for whom First Nations still present competition for access to land and resources, the Native Sons did not look to history to justify the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. From their urban vantage point that dispossession was a fait accompli and required no explicit justification. Instead, the Native Sons looked to the pioneer golden age for the foundations of their values and prosperity, and they ritualized the pioneer myth to create a sense of fraternity among the members of their class.

One scholar of Canadian fraternalism has argued that the Victorian middle class "seized the fraternal form as an instrument to organize consent and extend the legitimacy of its worldview."⁵⁵ While the Native Sons were organized at the twilight of the Victorian era, they tend to fit this pattern as the emphasis the fraternal tradition placed on fictive kinship and mutual assistance suited their concomitant goals of preserving pioneer tradition and creating class cohesion. Moreover, the Native Sons' uniquely British Columbian adaptations of Masonic rituals and vocabulary transformed the exclusive lodge structure into a metaphor for the antimodernist and regionalist discontent that informed the society's public activities. Drawing upon the province's history as a Hudson's Bay Company department, the Native Sons transformed the familiar model of a network of local Masonic lodges subordinate to a "Grand Lodge" into subordinate posts and a "Grand Post," while the Masonic "Worshipful Master" became, in his Native Sons incarnation, the post's "Chief Factor." This alteration was equally applicable to the supernatural world: the Freemasons' "great architect of the universe," presiding over "the lodge on high," became the Native Sons' "Great Chief Factor of the Universe" in "the Post that lies beyond."⁵⁶ Moreover, a committee struck by Nanaimo Post 3 to design regalia for the society

Post, *Ritual of the Native Sons of British Columbia* (New Westminster: Native Sons of British Columbia, 1962), 26. All citations from the Native Sons ritual are taken from the 1962 version as this was the version most readily available to me. The 1962 charge to the initiate is identical to the charge in the earliest surviving ritual (1914), and the allegorical figures and floor work of the 1962 initiation ritual were first adopted in the 1928 revision. See Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual: Native Sons of British Columbia* (Victoria: Victoria Printing and Publishing Co., 1914); *Ritual of the Native Sons of British Columbia* (New Westminster: Native Sons of British Columbia, 1928).

⁵⁵ Christopher J. Anstead, "Fraternalism in Victorian Ontario: Secret Societies and Cultural Hegemony" (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 1992), 1.

⁵⁶ VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 7a, Proposal for Burial Ritual, 1927. This proposal was adopted by the Grand Post as presented and was still in use in 1962. See Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 29.

proposed a traditional Masonic apron bearing, instead of the compass and square, “the coat of arms of the Hudson [sic] Bay Company.”⁵⁷

The Native Sons went beyond titles and symbolism in its efforts to make ritual experience historically authentic. At the 1907 meeting of the Grand Post in Vancouver, the delegates from Nanaimo Post 3 – a post that had for some years experienced difficulty in securing and retaining members – could proudly boast that their brethren were “more interested in the Post since buying the Bastion and using it for meetings.”⁵⁸ The Nanaimo Bastion was British Columbia’s oldest surviving Hudson’s Bay Company structure, and its value as a curiosity ultimately led to its adoption as the trademark of the organization. In 1922 it featured prominently on the society’s new emblem, and the 1936 Bylaws designated the Bastion as the official depository of such relics and historical documents as the order’s grand historian might collect.⁵⁹ So important was the Bastion to Native Sons’ mythology that, in 1962, a bitter conflict erupted between the Grand Post and the octogenarian chief factor of Nanaimo Post 3, J.E.L. Muir, over the latter’s proposal to sell the Bastion to the City of Nanaimo.⁶⁰ Pro- and anti-Muir factions within the Nanaimo Post elected rival executives and, as Muir’s supporters inside the Bastion withstood a siege by twenty irate members of the Native Daughters and a pebble-wielding minister of recreation and conservation, the Grand Post appealed, unsuccessfully, to the provincial Supreme Court to prevent the alienation of the landmark.⁶¹ For the Grand Post, the Bastion served as a testament to the Native Sons’ descent from the province’s founding fathers and as the physical embodiment of the society’s exclusivity; its officers worried that the sale of the Bastion would result in a “tremendous loss not only of prestige but also in the matter of Lodge pins, stationery and Past Chief [Factor] and Past Grand [Factor] jewels,” emblazoned with the Bastion logo.⁶² Similarly, Post

⁵⁷ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 3, Minutes, 18 October 1902.

⁵⁸ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 24 July 1903, 31 July 1906, 22 July 1907.

⁵⁹ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Constitution and Bylaws* (New Westminster: Jackson Printing Co., 1936), II.

⁶⁰ CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 12, file 14, correspondence re: Societies Act, 1962-63. The Nanaimo Post hoped that the proceeds from the sale of the Bastion, which had fallen into disrepair, would pay for the construction of a purpose-built Native Sons Hall. See CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 12, file 14, John Hinksman to William E. Greenwood, 14 July 1962.

⁶¹ “Natives’ Fort Defies Siege,” *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 20 September 1962; NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Affidavit, British Columbia Supreme Court, 15 November 1963.

⁶² CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 12, file 14, Lawrence Westendale to William E. Greenwood, 24 September 1962.

9 vigorously resisted efforts by the Department of Northern Affairs to evict them from their Hudson's Bay Company building at Fort Langley and to seize their collection of historical relics.⁶³ To the leadership of the Native Sons, the use of original Hudson's Bay Company forts as meeting halls contributed to the authenticity and, by extension, to the appeal of the ritual experience membership offered. The chief factorship of an authentic fur trade fort may have appealed to a middle-class man's sense of masculinity as much as did the various chivalric titles of other fraternal orders.⁶⁴ Association with the Hudson's Bay Company may also have had political significance. Doug Owram argues that the rehabilitation of the Hudson's Bay Company by Prairie historians coincided with the first rumblings of Prairie regionalism. The company, long reviled in eastern Canada, became the west's peculiar institution.⁶⁵ Given the Native Sons's regionalist political pronouncements, the Hudson's Bay Company fort was a symbol not only of the exclusivity of the order but also of the distinctiveness of BC history.

Other adaptations of Masonic rituals further underlined the distinctiveness of the Native Sons and their native land. The initiation rituals, conducted by torchlight, included moral lessons from allegorical figures from the province's past, including sailors, miners, and fur traders, as well as from native woodland creatures such as squirrels, beavers, and panthers.⁶⁶ The association closely modelled its burial service on that of the Freemasons, with one significant difference. At the conclusion of a Masonic funeral, the members of the lodge drop sprigs of acacia into the grave of their dead brother.⁶⁷ In Masonic lore, the evergreen acacia is a symbol of the immortality of the soul and possesses numerous mystical qualities emanating from its purported use in the construction of the Ark of the Covenant.⁶⁸ In the Native Sons service, however, this particular esoteric symbol was removed from its Masonic context and imbued with a new, patriotic significance. Rather than acacia, the Native Sons' ritual prescribed "Douglas Fir, or other native evergreen," with no

⁶³ CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol.12, file 1, "Native Sons Fight Seizure of Relics," *British Columbian*, New Westminster, 17 May 1957.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Wright's discussion of the Knights Templar in Donald A. Wright, "W.D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord: Antimodernism and English-Canadian Imperialism, 1880s-1918," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, 2 (1997): 144.

⁶⁵ Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 207-8.

⁶⁶ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 22-4.

⁶⁷ Freemasons, United Service Lodge No. 24, *By-laws* (Victoria: J.A. Cohen, 1894), 28.

⁶⁸ "Acacia," in *An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences*, ed. Albert Gallatin Mackey, vol. 1 (Chicago: Masonic History Co., 1924), 7-9.

mention in the service of the evergreen as a symbol of life everlasting.⁶⁹ One of the organization's American namesakes, the Native Sons of Washington, took the evergreen as the symbol of their organization, undoubtedly recalling Washington's nickname "the Evergreen State." Unlike that of the Native Sons of British Columbia, however, the Native Sons of Washington funeral ritual preserved the Masonic significance of the evergreen as "the emblem of immortality."⁷⁰ The Native Sons of British Columbia ascribed significance to the evergreen based not on its intrinsic qualities but on its native origins. The society's interest in native trees went beyond ritual as the society was actively involved in efforts to establish a school of forestry in Victoria and to plant BC trees at the grave of George Vancouver and in Canadian Expeditionary Force cemeteries in Europe.⁷¹ For some years, members also distributed sprigs of Douglas fir to the public on Douglas Day, 19 November, until informed that the tree was named for the botanist David Douglas and not for the colonial governor. In 1930 the Grand Post resolved that "any native evergreen" could be distributed in lieu of Douglas fir, as in the burial ritual.⁷²

Symbolic brotherhood was not based solely on shared ritualistic experience but also on the networks of mutual obligation the society encouraged through its commitment to social and employment assistance. Shortly after it was organized, Victoria Post 1 established a sick benefit, and on several occasions the Grand Post considered establishing more extensive insurance and benefit schemes.⁷³ Emery and Emery have demonstrated that access to insurance underlay the appeal of membership in the Oddfellows, and presumably this is true of other fraternal lodges.⁷⁴ However, formal benefits schemes were peripheral activities for the Native Sons; plans to expand the Post 1 sick benefit came to naught, and the benefit was discontinued in 1930, possibly because the onset of the Depression threatened its viability.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 29-30.

⁷⁰ Native Sons of Washington, Grand Camp, *Code of the Native Sons of Washington* (Port Townsend: The Call, 1899), 24.

⁷¹ British Columbia Archives, British Columbia, Lands Branch, GR 1441, reel B3232, file 4198, item 152, "Explanatory Statement by Post No.1 Native Sons of British Columbia," c.1930; "Captain Vancouver to Rest Beneath Our Spruce and Fir," *Root and Branch* 2, 3 (1923): 7; VICA, PR 87, 28-E-9, file 3, Post 1 Minutes, 23 October 1935; NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 11-12 May 1923. I am indebted to David Brownstein of the UBC Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability for the first two references.

⁷² VICA, PR 87, 29-B-6, file 6, Grand Post, Minutes, 25-26 April 1930.

⁷³ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 21 July 1902, 22 July 1907.

⁷⁴ Emery and Emery, *A Young Man's Benefit*, 4.

⁷⁵ VICA, PR 87, 28-B-5, file 3, Post 1, Minutes, 17 February 1930.

Instead, the commitment to mutual helpfulness was satisfied through assisting brethren in finding employment and encouraging members to support each other's businesses.⁷⁶ This less formal assistance explains the increase in membership applications to Posts 1 and 2 immediately after the First World War; for returning soldiers, membership in the Native Sons offered an opportunity to make connections that might lead to stable postwar employment.⁷⁷

The Native Sons' commitment to employment assistance was founded on an idealized conception of the province's early history, a golden age in which the pioneers set an "example ... in Mutual helpfulness."⁷⁸ Inherent in this conception of the past was a belief in the moral deficiency of the present, which led the society to transform the province's first white inhabitants into antimodernist heroes. Like the Nova Scotia "Folk" or David Ross McCord's Knights Templar, BC pioneers became moral exemplars, and within their bastions the descendants of the pioneers defended their forefathers' values against the onslaught of modernity.⁷⁹ Michael Dawson has identified a significant element of antimodernist cultural selection in the BC tourism industry, but the case of the Native Sons suggests that antimodernism in the province was a deeper phenomenon than is indicated by the false fronts, or tweed curtains, erected to attract American tourist dollars.⁸⁰ The Native Sons did approve of the development of the province's natural and historical resources for tourist purposes. McKelvie saw tourism and road construction as an integral part of a depression-era "better deal" for Vancouver Island, and he used the Native Sons as a means of furthering his recommendations.⁸¹ The society also proposed a national park at Leech River and resolved to preserve forests within view of roads frequented by visitors.⁸² However, the Native Sons also strenuously opposed the most cynical excesses of the tourism promoters. When the Victoria Chamber of Commerce suggested

⁷⁶ *Vancouver Native* 2 (1926): 2; NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 9 March 1919; Post 3, Minutes, 18 April 1904.

⁷⁷ VICA, PR 87, 29-B-8, file 7, Membership Applications, 1914-52; CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 13, files 1-4, Membership Applications, 1917-38.

⁷⁸ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 27. Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 82-3, argues that the appeal of fraternal organizations lay in their preservation of premodern economic relationships.

⁷⁹ Wright, "W.D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord," 144; Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

⁸⁰ Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 69-78.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 89-90; VICA, PR 87, 28-E-9, file 3, Post 1, Minutes, 26 February 1936; 29-C-2, file 1, "Memorandum re: Construction of Road to Long Beach Vancouver Island," c. 1937.

⁸² VICA, PR 87, 28-B-5, file 3, Post 1, Minutes, 16 June 1927, 14 December 1927, 15 April 1928.

that Vancouver Island be renamed, presumably to prevent confusion among tourists, the Native Sons denounced the proposal as ahistorical "vandalism" and spearheaded a letter-writing campaign to oppose it.⁸³ There were limits to the commodification of history and tradition.

This is not to say that the antimodernism of the Native Sons was disinterested. Grand Factor McKelvie's claim that "by reason of our birth we have special responsibilities resting upon us, but we have no special privileges," was disingenuous as the responsibilities he emphasized, "of setting an example in proper conduct and observance of the laws" and "of preserving the traditions of the past," entailed the privilege of defining "proper conduct" and "tradition."⁸⁴ In this way the pioneer myth became a charter of the respectable urban middle class. Like other Canadian antimodernists, the Native Sons did not reject modernity in its entirety.⁸⁵ Indeed, their conception of the pioneer and the restoration projects they undertook often emphasized "his" role as the precursor of economic, political, and cultural development. As that development progressed, however, it was important that the moral legacy of the pioneers not be forgotten. In the initiation ritual the allegorical figure "Yesterday" related how the pioneers "had to cross the turbulent river Industry, and follow the steep and narrow path of Honesty," to gain admittance to the House of Opportunity, while the allegorical figure "Tomorrow" made the same virtues, along with "service to Mankind," the preconditions of his beneficence.⁸⁶ Above and beyond his duties to his brethren, the Native Son also took on the task of imparting pioneer values to the broader community and of ensuring that the virtuous example of his "progenitors" was emulated in the formation of public policy.⁸⁷ Their descent from the pioneers invested the Native Sons with authority to speak on a number of issues, from good citizenship to Asian immigration to dominion-provincial relations, and in speaking on these issues, the Native Sons advanced the interests of their class.

McKelvie's writings articulated the Native Sons' view that the pioneers were not amoral and apolitical agents of history but embodiments of a mystical "spirit of British Columbia." As he emphasized during

⁸³ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 3, Correspondence Series, 1922-51; J.B. Freer, Secretary, Post 3, to Secretary, Victoria Chamber of Commerce, 10 July 1924; Recording Secretary, Post 2, to Freer, 20 August 1924; C.S. Wood, City Clerk, Courtenay, to Freer, 20 August 1924; R. Douglas, Secretary, Geographic Board of Canada, to Freer, 15 September 1924.

⁸⁴ "The Native Sons of BC State Their Real Objectives," *Province* (Vancouver), 13 March 1927.

⁸⁵ Wright, "W.D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord," 135.

⁸⁶ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 23-4.

⁸⁷ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 27; Native Sons of British Columbia, *Constitution and Bylaws* (1936), 1.

a 1924 meeting with the province's minister of education, the "trials and troubles and achievements" of the pioneers were the source of the province's distinctive character, and children, as the future custodians of the pioneers' legacy, ought to be "instilled" with an appreciation for the past and a desire to emulate their forebears.⁸⁸ In the preface to the 1958 centennial edition of his collection of historical columns, *Pageant of BC*, he further emphasized the didactic value of history. "It has been said," he wrote, "that 'the inspirational records of the past form the background of citizenship' [and] it is in keeping with this truism that the *Pageant of BC* is offered to the public."⁸⁹ Throughout McKelvie's work, particular pioneers personified particular character traits, both exemplary and contemptible.⁹⁰ Overall, however, British Columbia had cause to be proud of its pioneers. The Native Sons, McKelvie wrote in his capacity as grand factor, "glory in the fact that in no quarter of the world were pioneer days marked by greater observance of the law, and we feel that it is our duty to uphold the precedents of those days."⁹¹

Moral attributes similar to those identified by McKelvie served as the basis for the conception of citizenship proffered by Vancouver Post 2 in its annual presentation of the Good Citizen Medal.⁹² At ceremonies held to honour recipients of the medal, officers of the Native Sons and public figures invariably credited the pioneers with the establishment of a standard of citizenship that, if upheld, ensured the growth and prosperity of the province. "The standards they set will be carried forward," vowed the Reverend E.D. Braden at one such ceremony in 1933, extolling "the men and women of yesterday who so well and surely built the foundations of Vancouver." In the 1949 presentation Premier Byron Johnson, sometime member of Post 1, suggested that the foundations laid by the pioneers would offer "unlimited opportunity for success for our children."⁹³ Others used the presentation of the Good Citizen Medal as an opportunity to express concerns about societal decay.⁹⁴ While optimists and pessimists might disagree about the state of citizenship

⁸⁸ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 9 May 1924.

⁸⁹ McKelvie, *Pageant of BC*, n.p.

⁹⁰ See, for example, McKelvie, *Pageant of BC*, 86-7, 144, 168, 176, 178, 214.

⁹¹ "The Native Sons of BC State Their Real Objectives." *Province* (Vancouver), 13 March 1927.

⁹² Victoria Post 1 also presented a Good Citizen Medal, but the Vancouver post originated the practice and it was most prominent in Vancouver. See VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 8, Chief Factor, Post 1, to Editor, *Canadian Magazine*, Toronto, n.d. (c.1935); CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 2, file 7, Grand Post, Minutes, 10-11 April 1953.

⁹³ "Native Sons of BC Honor Dr. McKechnie," *Vancouver Sun*, 7 August 1933; "Wasting Time Sin, Says Good Citizen," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 November 1949.

⁹⁴ "Eldon Winn Chosen 1951 Good Citizen," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 June 1951.

in their own time, all agreed that good citizenship itself was a legacy of the pioneers. It is also clear that the citizens of Vancouver were receptive to this message: press coverage indicates that Good Citizen Medal presentation ceremonies attracted as many as 10,000 spectators, making recognition of good citizens one of the Native Sons' most visible activities.⁹⁵ Through the presentation of the Good Citizen Medal, the Native Sons defined the pioneers' legacy.

In 1962 the City of Vancouver Archives compiled brief biographical sketches of the forty-one recipients of the medal to date, and these sketches permit some generalization as to the values included in the Native Sons' conception of citizenship. Given the society's middle-class composition, it should come as no surprise that this conception was an amalgam of middle-class social values. Religious activity figured prominently, with nineteen of the forty-one sketches explicitly mentioning religious affiliation or activity. In all but one case the affiliation noted was with a Protestant denomination.⁹⁶ Moreover, broadly defined Protestant values informed much of the Native Sons' conception of citizenship, and these values entailed a division between male and female spheres of activity. While men were recognized for a wide range of activities, including politics, commerce, military service, sport, and patronage of public institutions and the arts, women who devoted themselves to assisting the disadvantaged best embodied the spirit of their pioneer forebears. Ten of the twelve women who received the Good Citizen Medal between 1922 and 1962 were recognized for their charitable work. On accepting her Good Citizen Medal in 1949, Mrs. Norman Ross Porter explained that she "attacks Vancouver social problems with religious fervor because ... wasted time is a sin," explicitly linking charitable activity to the Protestant work ethic.⁹⁷ Compassion for the disadvantaged not only illustrated the Christianity of female Good Citizens but also identified them as metaphorical mothers of the province. On presenting the 1936 Good Citizen Medal to Mrs. John Wesley Ellis, the sister of one of Vancouver's founding fathers, Mayor G.G. McGeer remarked: "I today have the opportunity of honoring the motherhood of early Vancouver."⁹⁸ To the Native Sons the female Good Citizen embodied the maternal spirit of the female pioneers who

⁹⁵ "Native Sons of BC Honor Dr. McKechnie." *Vancouver Sun*, 7 August 1933

⁹⁶ Vancouver, City Archives, *Good Citizen Medal, Vancouver, Canada: Roll of Recipients, 1922-1962* (Vancouver: City Archives, 1962), 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22. The sole exception was Jack Diamond, a prominent businessman and philanthropist and "a devout member of the Jewish faith" (22).

⁹⁷ "Wasting Time Sin, Says Good Citizen," *Vancouver Sun*, 2 November 1949.

⁹⁸ "Vancouver Honors 'Mother' Ellis," *Vancouver Sun*, 27 July 1936.

had domesticated the wilderness their husbands, brothers, and sons had opened to civilization.⁹⁹

As for other fraternal orders, cultivating “sturdy Manliness” was fundamental to the Native Sons’ mission inside and outside its ranks.¹⁰⁰ If female recipients of the Good Citizen Medal epitomized the maternalism and Christian charity of pioneer women, their male counterparts embodied the courage, strength, industry, and good character that, for the Native Sons, typified pioneer manhood. The intended commemorative significance of the Good Citizen Medal illustrates the organization’s desire to explicitly link good citizenship to the progress of the city. In the 1920s and the 1950s, the Native Sons presented the medal on or near 13 June, the anniversary of the 1886 Vancouver fire; indeed, the first recipient of the medal, on 13 June 1922, was John Howe Carlisle, the city’s first fire chief.¹⁰¹ To the Native Sons the fire demonstrated the resilience of Vancouver’s citizenry for, in the aftermath of the disaster, “the courage of the people, their faith, and their industry would admit no defeat.”¹⁰² Carlisle epitomized both courage and religious conviction as the fire chief was also a founder of Vancouver’s Baptist Church.

Active involvement in sport was another indicator of upstanding character. Suggestive as sport was of the “fortitude” the society so admired in the pioneers, the Native Sons, which sponsored youth sports teams, lauded those who made the connection between athleticism and Christian virtue and sought to instil these values in the hearts and minds of young British Columbians.¹⁰³ The medal recipient who most explicitly embodied the marriage of sport and religion was Andrew Black Turner, who, “as superintendent for twenty-two years in the First Presbyterian and First United Church ... excelled in the art of amalgamating the teaching of the Bible with athletics.”¹⁰⁴ “Pioneer educators” such as William Burns, the 1924 Good Citizen and first

⁹⁹ Ellis observes that a complementarity of masculine and feminine spheres also typified the Native Daughters’ conception of history. See Ellis, “Preserving the ‘Glory of the Past,’” 5.

¹⁰⁰ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 27; NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 3, Correspondence Series, V.W. Stewart, Grand Secretary, to All Posts, 8 October 1947; Wright, “W.D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord,” 144; Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), chap. 4.

¹⁰¹ Vancouver, City Archives, *Good Citizen Medal*, 7.

¹⁰² McKelvie, *Pageant of BC*, 246.

¹⁰³ As early as 1910 the grand factor had suggested that the Native Sons sponsor an athletic club; by the 1920s the three largest posts were all involved in sponsoring organized sports for youth and adults. See NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 18 July 1910; Post 3, Minutes, 27 March 1923; VICA, PR 87, 29-B-6, file 6, Grand Post, Minutes, 12-13 June 1936; CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 2, file 5, Grand Post, Minutes, 15-16 April 1950; file 6, Grand Post, Minutes, 18-19 April 1952.

¹⁰⁴ Vancouver, City Archives, *Good Citizen Medal*, 14.

principal of the Vancouver Normal School, represented the same selfless commitment to imparting the tenets of citizenship. The Native Sons’ decision to present Burns’s medal at an inter-high school sports meet, in the presence of Vancouver’s youth, attests to the organization’s faith in the didactic value of recognizing “veteran citizens.”¹⁰⁵

Middle-class values were also evident in the selection of Vancouver businessmen as Good Citizens. Of the twenty-nine men awarded the medal between 1922 and 1962, eleven were recognized for their contributions to the growth of industry and commerce in British Columbia.¹⁰⁶ The 1930 recipient, Nicholas Thompson, who had served as president of the Vancouver Board of Trade and of the British Columbia Chamber of Mines, was “a man whose greatest ambition had been to help forward the industrial life of the city.”¹⁰⁷ The president of the Port Haney Brick Company, Edgar George Baynes, received the 1944 medal. T. Clifford Babcock, chief factor of Post 2, said of Baynes that he was “as deeply rooted in his faith in the destiny of the province as the trees in Stanley Park.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, in recognizing Baynes’s service as a warden of Trinity Church, the Native Sons drew an implicit connection between religious devotion and commercial success, two fundamental bourgeois values. While commercial success was commendable, however, the businessmen who received the medal were not members of the city’s elite. They were actively involved in local booster organizations such as the Vancouver Board of Trade and various neighbourhood chambers of commerce, and their companies (such as the Columbia Paper Company and Gault Brothers dry goods) were local or provincial concerns. The Native Sons chose not to recognize members of the city’s wealthy business class – the railway, lumber, and real estate magnates – thus emphasizing its petty bourgeois focus.

Occasionally, the Native Sons used the presentation of the Good Citizen Medal to comment on current events, as was the case with the presentation of the 1933 medal to Dr. Robert McKechnie, UBC’s chancellor and longest-serving governor. Committed as it was to education, the Native Sons had expressed interest in the welfare of the provincial university as early as 1921.¹⁰⁹ In 1931 and 1932, however, the legislature severely reduced UBC’s

¹⁰⁵ “Honored Today,” *Vancouver Sun*, 23 May 1924; “Native Sons Present Medal to W. Burns,” *Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1924.

¹⁰⁶ Vancouver, City Archives, *Good Citizen Medal*, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 19, 22, 23, 25.

¹⁰⁷ “Good Citizen Highly Honoured,” *Vancouver Sun*, 18 September 1930; Vancouver, City Archives, *Good Citizen Medal*, 9.

¹⁰⁸ Vancouver, City Archives, *Good Citizen Medal*, 16; “Good Citizen Award Given E.G. Baynes,” *Vancouver Sun*, 6 December 1944.

¹⁰⁹ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 13–14 May 1921.

funding and suggested that it might close the university as a cost-saving measure.¹¹⁰ The Native Sons opposed this move, and Grand Factor Hampton Bole argued before the university's Board of Governors that adequate support for higher education was "characteristic of a great and progressive people."¹¹¹ The presentation of the Good Citizen Medal to McKechnie was a calculated statement of opposition to the provincial government's university policy. On receiving his medal McKechnie urged the thousands assembled at Stanley Park "not to let down poorer boys and girls" who might not be able to attend university if the government did not adequately fund UBC's operations.¹¹²

McKechnie appealed to his audience to think of the poor, but as Paul Axelrod argues, Canadian universities in the 1930s served primarily to advance the interests and authority of the new professional middle class.¹¹³ Reimer applies Axelrod's thesis to UBC, observing that, during the decade, two-thirds of the students attending the provincial university came from urban, middle-class backgrounds.¹¹⁴ As both were vehicles of class formation, the Native Sons and the provincial university enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. The Native Sons actively promoted the celebration of Douglas Day on campus, and membership applications for Vancouver Post 2 suggest that membership in the society aroused significant interest among UBC students, possibly because it offered an opportunity to make social connections that might prove valuable after graduation.¹¹⁵ Lobbying on behalf of the university was consistent with the interests of the Native Sons' middle-class membership.

The case of McKechnie demonstrates that the Native Sons saw in pioneer citizenship a set of values that ought to inform public policy as well as individual actions. The myths of the pioneer citizen and of a pioneer golden age are evident in the various political activities of the society. Nanaimo Post 3's discussion of "the advisability of having action taken to have all Native Sons on the voting lists both municipal

¹¹⁰ For a concise account of the challenges facing the University of British Columbia during the Depression, see F. Henry Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Publications Centre, 1964), 192-6.

¹¹¹ "Saving the University," *Ubysey* (University of British Columbia student paper, Vancouver), 9 February 1932.

¹¹² "Native Sons of BC Honor Dr. McKechnie." *Vancouver Sun*, 7 August 1933.

¹¹³ Paul Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class: Student Life in English Canada during the Thirties* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 149-65.

¹¹⁴ Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History," 257.

¹¹⁵ "Native Sons Hold Douglas Day," *Ubysey* (University of British Columbia student paper, Vancouver), 16 November 1926. Students accounted for 11 percent of accepted membership applications in Vancouver Post 2 during the interwar period. See CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 13, files 1-4, Membership Applications, 1917-38.

and governmental" reflects the importance the Native Sons placed on political action.¹¹⁶ During the society's eight-decade history, several of its members came to hold elected office at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels, including at least two provincial premiers, Simon Fraser Tolmie and Byron Ingemar Johnson, and possibly a third, Sir Richard McBride.¹¹⁷ The society's purported descent from the pioneers justified its pronouncements on a range of political issues, including Asian exclusion and federal-provincial relations. The Native Sons' opposition to Asian immigration was framed by its defence of pioneer citizenship, while its statements on relations with Ottawa emphasized the province's distinctive history and constitutional arrangements. Nevertheless, the class interests of the membership were never far beneath the surface.

The question of Asian immigration first attracted the attention of the Native Sons after the First World War. At the 1921 Grand Post, "the Japanese question was discussed at length and the Secretary was instructed to cable Premier Meighan [sic] in London protesting against further Japanese immigration."¹¹⁸ This resolution was the first of many; the last, at the 1947 Grand Post, objected to the return of dispersed internees to the Pacific coast.¹¹⁹ So impressed was the notoriously racist Vancouver alderman Halford Wilson with the anti-Asian activities of the organization that he applied for membership shortly after addressing the 1936 Grand Post.¹²⁰ The Native Sons justified its position through subtle appeals to the myth of the pioneer citizen. Asians, a 1922 resolution argued, "do not hold Canadian ideals, and ... can not and do not assimilate with Canadians," while a leaflet that the society published and distributed in the late 1930s warned of a race that espoused principles "antagonistic to

¹¹⁶ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 3, Minutes, 2 March 1933.

¹¹⁷ For Tolmie's membership, see Native Sons of British Columbia, *List of Members*; VICA, PR 87, 28-B-5, file 3, Post 1, Minutes, 19 September 1928. Johnson's 1921 membership application is preserved in VICA, PR 87, 29-B-8, file 7, Membership Applications, 1914-52. There are references to McBride's membership in NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 27 July 1915; VICA, PR 87, 29-C-1, file 3, Post 1 Historian's Report, c.1965; Reginald Hayward Fonds, PR 120, 28-G-7, file 8, Native Sons of British Columbia Post 1, Dance Committee Minutes, 20 December 1912. Among the other Native Sons who held elective office were Arthur Wells Gray, grand factor for 1915, concurrently mayor of New Westminster and later provincial minister of lands; Victor B. Harrison, chief factor and historian of Post 3 and concurrently mayor of Nanaimo; John Carl Pendray, member of Post 1 and concurrently mayor of Victoria; Fred Hume, member of Post 2 and mayor of Vancouver; and Howard Green, member of Post 2, MP for Vancouver South and sometime secretary of state for external affairs. While the order was officially non-partisan, most of the politicians within its ranks were Conservatives.

¹¹⁸ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 29 June 1921.

¹¹⁹ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Post 3, J.E.L. Muir to Ian Mackenzie, 20 June 1947.

¹²⁰ VICA, PR 87, 28-E-9, file 3, "Delegate's Report on Social Events at Grand Post Convention in Vancouver, June 12 and 13," 1936.

our own appreciation of a democratic state.”¹²¹ As Patricia Roy has noted, racial inferiority per se was not the principal concern of most opponents of Asian immigration; rather, they were concerned with the perceived evolutionary superiority of a race that could thrive under conditions white Canadians believed to be insufferable. The Native Sons were aware that Japanese immigrants were not inferior, at least not intellectually; McKelvie reminded the 1935 Grand Post executive that “we are not fighting the old illiterate Asiatic of former days, but educated Japanese, backed by college professors and other astute reasoners.”¹²² They were, however, concerned by the spectre of Asian competition in “industrial occupations and commercial and economic spheres,” and here the material interests of the membership were at play. The membership of Vancouver Post 2, which initiated much of the anti-Asian agitation, included a sizeable contingent of shopkeepers and salesmen for whom Asian shops and market gardens posed serious competition, and the society occasionally expressed concern that individual members had lost or might lose their livelihoods to Japanese competition. In 1938 Post 1 wrote to Lemon Gonnason and Co., a Victoria sash and door factory, to protest the replacement of L.R. Anderson, a millwright and member of the Native Sons, with “a Japanese.” R.H. Hiscocks, secretary of the Post, explained that “naturally one of the aims and objects of the organization is to assist when possible Native Born Whites of this Province.” The company wrote back to explain that Anderson had not been dismissed in order to replace him with cheaper Japanese labour but, rather, because “his experience could not by the most remote possibility qualify him to call himself a millwright or even a good millwright helper.” Hiscocks politely thanked Crowe for the explanation and expressed his regret that a white millwright could not be found to replace Anderson.¹²³ The Native Sons’ pronouncements on Asian immigration were not motivated by fears of biological racial degeneration but by concern that competition with a more efficient race might undermine the economic prosperity of its membership.

Just as a commitment to the legacy of the pioneers justified the Native Sons’ self-interested views on immigration, so its conception of British

¹²¹ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 12 May 1922; Native Sons of British Columbia, *Argument Advanced by Native Sons of British Columbia in Opposition to Granting of Oriental Franchise* (New Westminster: Jackson Printing Co., c. 1937), n.p.

¹²² Patricia Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Executive Minutes, 25 November 1935.

¹²³ VICA, PR 87, 29-C-2, file 1, R.H. Hiscocks, Secretary, Post 1, to Lemon Gonnason and Co., 4 April 1938; H.F. Crowe, Lemon Gonnason and Co., to Hiscocks, 5 April 1938; Hiscocks to Crowe, 7 April 1938.

Columbia’s glorious past influenced its relations with the Dominion government. While its published “Aims and Objects” obliged the Native Sons “to advance the interest and promote the welfare of British Columbia, Canada and the Empire” and “to develop an appreciation for Canadian art, Canadian literature, and Canadian consciousness,” allegiance to Canada was absent from the initiation pledge.¹²⁴ The initiation ritual’s characterization of British Columbia as a “Land of Promise” set aside by Providence for the pioneers recalls the archetypal myth of territory, the flight of the Israelites from Egypt in the Book of Exodus.¹²⁵ Further sacralizing the soil, the Grand Post ruled in 1906 that, while members could reside outside the province, initiation rituals could only be performed in British Columbia.¹²⁶ The province, and to a lesser extent the British Empire, overshadowed the nation as objects of patriotic devotion. This was the major difference between the Native Sons of British Columbia and its namesake, the Native Sons of Canada. Founded in Victoria in 1921, the Native Sons of Canada shared with the older organization an interest in historical commemorations and Asian exclusion, and the two fraternities collaborated in these areas.¹²⁷ Both organizations drew their memberships from the same class, though the Native Sons of Canada were predominantly migrants from Ontario.¹²⁸ However, the Native Sons of British Columbia were annoyed when the Native Sons of Canada received credit for their achievements, or when the provincial organization was criticized for positions taken by the larger national organization, with which it had no formal association.¹²⁹ In 1923 the Native Sons of British Columbia went so far as to threaten to sue the Native Sons of Canada, claiming priority over the name.

¹²⁴ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Constitution and Bylaws*, 1936, p. 1; Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 25.

¹²⁵ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Ritual*, 26. This Exodic allusion, only implicit in the rituals of the Native Sons of British Columbia, is explicit in the rituals for the installation of officers of the Native Sons of Washington. The orator of the Native Sons of Washington, analogous to the historian of the Native Sons of British Columbia, is compared to Jethro, who served as the memory of the Israelites during their sojourn in the wilderness (Native Sons of Washington, Grand Camp, *Code of the Native Sons of Washington*, 18).

¹²⁶ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 31 July 1906. On “the sacralization of territory” in national mythology, see George Schöpflin, “The Function of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths,” in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London: Hurst, 1997), 28–9.

¹²⁷ VICA, PR 87, 28-B-5, file 3, Post 1, Minutes, 16 September 1929, 17 March 1930; 29-B-6, file 6, Grand Post, Minutes, 25–26 April 1930; 29-C-1, file 7a, District Deputy, Post 1, to Grand Factor, 3 May 1927.

¹²⁸ Mary Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s: Seven Studies” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1974), 270.

¹²⁹ VICA, PR 87, 29-B-6, file 5, Grand Post, Minutes, 26–27 April 1929; 29-C-1, file 8, Chief Factor, Post 1, to Editor, *Canadian Magazine*, Toronto, n.d. (c.1935).

One suspects this was not simply a means of avoiding confusion, as the Native Sons of Canada's opposition to the continuance of the imperial connection was at odds with the Native Sons of British Columbia's opposition to "any organization which seeks to weaken the bonds of empire."¹³⁰ For their part, the Native Sons of Canada condemned other filiopietistic organizations as "divisive and backward-looking."¹³¹

While the Native Sons of Canada anticipated an autonomous future for a united Canada, a fixation on British Columbia's pre-Confederation past pervaded the historical activities of the Native Sons of British Columbia.¹³² The fur trade and colonial period provided the subject matter for all six of John Innes's heroic paintings and for ninety-two of 106 historical columns collected in McKelvie's *Pageant of BC*. The columns collected in *Pageant of BC* were unabashedly sympathetic to the "Family-Company Compact" and dismissive of the eastern Canadian reformers. McKelvie's assessment of James Douglas verged on the panegyric: the governor was pious, obedient, sympathetic, courageous, and "devoted to learning."¹³³ Conversely, the grand historian had little time for Amor de Cosmos, the outspoken proponent of responsible government and Confederation, whom he described as a "fire-eating editor" whose crafty nature stood in contrast to the stern dignity of the governor.¹³⁴ McKelvie ridiculed those who "expected a utopian state would result from the administrative change" brought about by the end of Hudson's Bay Company, proprietary rule in 1859, and he named John Foster McCreight, the province's first premier and a steadfast opponent of responsible government, as the sole voice of reason in the venal post-Confederation legislature.¹³⁵

McKelvie's focus on colonial history had definite political undertones. In the years before Confederation, he suggested, upstanding pioneer statesmen had governed British Columbia, and in federating with

¹³⁰ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 11-12 May 1923; Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Constitution and Bylaws*, 1936, p. 1.

¹³¹ Cited in Vipond, "National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s," 274.

¹³² Historians have identified similar concentrations on pre-Confederation history in the regionalist historiographies of Manitoba and the Maritime provinces. See Owrham, *Promise of Eden*, chap. 9; McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, 265; M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), chap. 6.

¹³³ McKelvie, *Pageant of BC*, 98-9.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 205-9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 238. McCreight's opposition to responsible government is well documented. See S.W. Jackman, *Portraits of the Premiers* (Sidney: Gray's Publishing, 1969), 9; Patricia M. Johnson, "John Foster McCreight," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 12 (1948): 91; Tina Loo, "John Foster McCreight," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 681.

Canada the province sacrificed a benevolent, if at times authoritarian, regime in favour of government by self-aggrandizers. The situation had not changed by 1937, when the Grand Post made its submission to the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations. Though the submission was signed by Grand Factor A.G. Brine, McKelvie was the author and the submission outlined a contradictory view of the relationship between British Columbia and Ottawa.¹³⁶ Expressing concern at the venality of the provincial legislatures, the Native Sons submitted that the Fathers of Confederation had intended the provinces to serve as “glorified county councils,” not as sovereign governments.¹³⁷ Like several other prominent Native Sons, McKelvie was an avowed Conservative and no doubt had in mind the megaprojects and “better terms” rhetoric of Liberal premier Duff Pattullo when he lamented the rise of fiscal mismanagement and sectional jealousies that Ottawa’s laissez faire attitude to provincial governments had precipitated.¹³⁸ However, in his interpretation of British Columbia’s constitutional relationship with the rest of Canada, McKelvie invoked the very sectionalism that he criticized in provincial politicians. The Native Sons’ submission argued that the British North America Act might apply to other provinces but that British Columbia’s relationship with the Dominion was “separate and distinct” because the province’s Terms of Union had “the force and effect of a treaty.”¹³⁹ Without the consent of British Columbia, Parliament could neither amend the Terms of Union nor “incorporate them within any revision of the British North America Act.”¹⁴⁰ This version of the compact theory of Confederation became a cornerstone of the Native Sons’ ideology, in which British Columbia’s distinctiveness, inherent in its history and celebrated in the Native Sons’ secret rituals, was also recognized in the province’s unique constitutional arrangements.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ VICA, PR 87, 29-C-2, file 1, A.G. Brine to Bruce McKelvie, 20 December 1937.

¹³⁷ Canada, Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, *Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations: Submission by the Grand Post of the Native Sons of British Columbia* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, 1937), 4-5.

¹³⁸ McKelvie runs unsuccessfully in Victoria on the Conservative ticket in the 1937 provincial election and in a federal by-election the same year. See “‘Pinkie’ McKelvie, Writer, Dies at 70,” *Vancouver Sun*, 19 April 1960.

¹³⁹ Canada, Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, *Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*, 1.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴¹ CVA, Add. MSS 463, vol. 2, file 5, Grand Post, Minutes, 15-16 April 1950; McKelvie, *Pageant of BC*, 234. While most scholars have rejected the theory of Confederation as a compact between sovereign provinces, they acknowledge that the terms admitting British Columbia and Prince Edward Island had treaty-like qualities. For more on the compact theory debate, see Norman McLean Rogers, “The Compact Theory of Confederation,” *Papers and Proceedings of the*

These constitutional arrangements imposed obligations on Ottawa and gave British Columbia recourse in the event that those obligations were neglected. The Native Sons complained on several occasions that federal policy impeded British Columbia's economic progress in a manner inconsistent with the Terms of Union. In 1922 the Grand Post protested the renewal of the Crow's Nest Pass Agreement on freight rates on the grounds that the renewal would "militate against the proper development of the Province."¹⁴² Discriminatory freight rates, they argued, demonstrated that "the Parliament of Canada has not carried out the intent of the Act of Confederation by which this Province joined the Dominion."¹⁴³ The nature of the Terms of Unions suggested a remedy – namely, arbitration by the third signatory to the "treaty," the Imperial government. On the basis of Lord Carnarvon's mediated settlement to an 1874 railway dispute, the Native Sons' submission to the Rowell-Sirois Commission called upon Ottawa to subsidize provincial highway construction projects.¹⁴⁴ However, the treaty-like character of the Terms of Union also suggested another option. In 1922 the Grand Post suggested that the failure of the federal government to support the development of the Ports of Vancouver and Victoria was "endangering the possibility of a continuance of the Unity of the Dominion of Canada."¹⁴⁵ If the letter and the spirit of the Terms of Union were not upheld, abrogation of those terms and secession from Confederation might prove British Columbia's last resort.

This bellicose regional consciousness appealed to the membership of the Native Sons because they saw the interests of their class as coterminous with the interests of the province. Preferential subsidies for Atlantic port development and freight rate schedules that favoured

Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association 3 (1931): 224–30; Ramsay Cook, *Provincial Autonomy, Minority Rights and the Compact Theory, 1867–1921* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969); Paul Romney, *Getting It Wrong: How Canadians Forgot Their Past and Imperilled Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

¹⁴² NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 12 May 1922.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Canada. Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, *Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*, 3. The Carnarvon Terms stipulated that the Dominion government construct a wagon road and telegraph line to British Columbia in addition to the transcontinental railway. The Native Sons argued that the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway did not void this obligation and that, as compensation for its failure to fulfill the terms of Carnarvon's settlement, the federal government should retroactively subsidize recent provincial highway construction. No such claim was made in the provincial government's own presentation to the commission. See British Columbia, *British Columbia in the Canadian Confederation: A Submission Presented to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations by the Government of the Province of British Columbia* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1937).

¹⁴⁵ NCA, Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, Minutes, 12 May 1922.

the Prairie provinces undermined the economic development of the province and, by extension, the prosperity of its bourgeoisie. As the presentation of Good Citizen Medals to local businessmen illustrated, dedication to commercial development was part of the pioneer creed, and the Dominion government’s discriminatory economic policies frustrated the Native Son’s efforts to emulate the industriousness of his forefathers.¹⁴⁶ In political regionalism the Native Sons found an articulation of its membership’s class interests.

Benedict Anderson has introduced the concept of pilgrimage routes as a means of understanding the origins of creole nationalism – a useful, and as yet underutilized, tool for understanding the emergence of provincial and regional discontent in Canada generally and in British Columbia in particular. According to Anderson the geographical boundaries imposed on colonies by imperial administrators limited the upward mobility of creole colonists and thus encouraged identification with others whose pilgrimages followed the same path – that is, from the hinterland to a colonial metropolis but rarely beyond.¹⁴⁷ Provincial boundaries did not exclude the very rich from national prominence, but they did circumscribe the pilgrimages of the moderately well-to-do. In his speech in defence of UBC’s funding at the 1933 Good Citizen Medal presentation ceremony, Robert McKechnie inadvertently articulated the distinction between the wealthy and middling classes that I believe had precipitated the emergence of the Native Sons. “A rich man,” McKechnie observed, “can afford to send his sons to Oxford or Cambridge, to Yale or Toronto. It is the poor man who has to take advantage of what lies at his door.”¹⁴⁸ British Columbia’s elite, the railway and lumber barons of Shaughnessy Heights, might aspire to national, continental, or even imperial influence. Background, education, and business connections tended to give British Columbia’s very rich an outlook that was not limited by the mountains and the ocean. Indeed, McDonald has suggested that Vancouver’s elite business class was “Canadianized” by 1910, and the nationalist Canadian Club of Vancouver recruited extensively within the upper class, with more than half its 1907 membership warranting inclusion in the Vancouver Social Register and Clubs Directory.¹⁴⁹ A respectable man of moderate

¹⁴⁶ Native Sons of British Columbia, Grand Post, *Constitution and Bylaws* (1936), 1.

¹⁴⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London/New York: Verso, 1991), 54-8. By “creole” Anderson means persons of metropolitan ancestry born in the colonies, irrespective of race.

¹⁴⁸ “Native Sons of BC Honor Dr. McKechnie,” *Vancouver Sun* 7 August 1933.

¹⁴⁹ Canadian Club of Vancouver, *Canadian Club of Vancouver: Inaugural Addresses, Constitution, and Roll of Members* (Vancouver: Canadian Club of Vancouver, 1907), 24-7; *Vancouver Social Register and Club Directory* (Vancouver: Welch and Gibbs, 1914); Robert A.J. McDonald,

means, by contrast, while certainly not poor, was excluded from the economic and political centres of power in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal and, consequently, he took advantage of what lay at his door. An organization like the Native Sons was a means to this end. In the history of its province, this class found its foundational myth – a myth of the hard-working, morally upstanding pioneer, carving out a living in a country made exceptional by its natural history and human experience. Under the authority this myth conferred, an emerging urban middle class in Vancouver, Victoria, and other centres created local networks of mutual support and sought to extend the influence of a creole middle class over the social, political, and cultural life of their “native land.”

The role of the Native Sons of British Columbia in the history of British Columbia is, therefore, best understood in terms of class and status formation. For the respectable small businessmen, skilled workers, white collar employees, and minor professionals who comprised the majority of its members, the Native Sons provided a vehicle for social and political activity distinct from those available to the working and wealthy classes. Through adaptation of Masonic tradition, the Native Sons ritualized the lives of the pioneers and mythologized the province’s distinctive natural and human history. The social and ritual aspects of the Native Sons’ activities were intended to foster a sense of belonging among urban middle-class men of a variety of religious, ethnic, and even racial backgrounds. The society used its idealized conception of provincial history to further the social interests of the middling class: as descendants of the pioneers, the Native Sons enjoyed both the authority and the responsibility to determine and to preserve ostensibly premodern standards of conduct. Through the presentation of the Good Citizen Medal, the association used the myth of the pioneer to propagate quintessentially petty bourgeois social values, which it believed were threatened by the onslaught of modernity. In politics, the Native Sons developed a regionalist outlook consistent with the economic and political interests of its membership. Both within and outside its posts, the Native Sons of British Columbia used the myth of the pioneer, “the wondrous story and traditions of the country,” to craft a middle-class identity that was self-consciously British Columbian.

“Victoria, Vancouver and the Evolution of British Columbia’s Economic System, 1886-1914,” in *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, ed. Alan F.J. Artibise (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1981), 46.