

# The Character of the British Columbia Frontier

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Chief among the concerns of historians studying the founding of new societies has been the concept of the frontier, and in the writing of the history of Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, among others, the frontier has been a substantial theme.<sup>1</sup> "Frontier" itself has been variously defined — from the outer fringe of metropolitan influence, to the actual geographical area of control, to a zone to be occupied, to a border between states.<sup>2</sup> Usually such definitions tend to be Eurocentric and agrarian, describing the process of the founding of the new society in question in terms of the expanding society's change in new conditions, its occupations of lands suitable for agriculture, and its evolving legal systems. Often such historical inquiry neglects two essential ingredients: the contact of cultures and races within the zone of influence and the geographical features of the zone itself. By doing so, such studies frequently do violence to the important result of how the aboriginal society already occupying the land and exploiting its resources responded and changed in the face of new circumstances. And such research neglects the role of environment in the historical process.

Our study of the formative years of British Columbia history must, however, concern itself with the frontier, though an enlarged, more en-

<sup>1</sup> For reviews on the literature on Canadian frontiers, see J. M. S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXV, 1 (March 1954), 1-21, and Michael Cross, *The Frontier Thesis and the Canadas: the Debate on the Impact of the Canadian Environment* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 1-7 and pp. 186-88.

<sup>2</sup> The typology provided by the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner as given in his "Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) and his *Significance of Sections in American History* (New York, 1932) has long been discredited by American historians. Nonetheless, American frontier experiences still invite comparative studies with adjacent Canadian territories and other former British Empire countries. See the guidelines offered by Paul Sharp, "Three Frontiers: Some Comparative Studies of Canadian, American, and Australian Settlement," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXIV (November 1955), 369-77. The best interpretive work on comparative frontiers is Robin W. Winks, *The Myth of the American Frontier: Its Relevance to America, Canada and Australia* (Leicester: The Sir George Watson Lectures, 1971). These suggestive inquiries invite further empirical research.

compassing perspective is required than hitherto offered by historians of British Columbia.<sup>3</sup> Such an inquiry cannot be hagiographical in nature but must analyse the institutions and forces whereby British Columbia changed from Indian territory to fur trade realm, then to colony and finally to province all within a brief span of forty years. During the years 1846 to 1871 an imperial tide lapped the shores of the Northwest Coast and in doing so changed the character of human occupation, and it brought with it at the flood new political, legal and social institutions whose legacies are still apparent. This process forms a "frontier" and for the purposes of this paper "frontier" will be taken to mean the zone of influence of imperial administration emanating from London and from the colonial capitals of Victoria and New Westminster. Also for the purposes of this essay "frontier process" will be taken to mean the methods by which Europeans extended their jurisdiction, occupied land, managed a resource base, developed an Indian policy, and established sites for the exploitation of the sea coast and the interior land mass. The first section of this essay examines environmental determinants, the second explores British and American influences, and the third provides a summary of the character of the British Columbia frontier and its legacies.

## I

From the earliest European contact with the Northwest Coast, explorers understood that the nature of the environment would determine the type of human occupation in that locale. The European reconnaissance of British Columbia in the late eighteenth century revealed that the environment was generally devoid of level land suitable for agriculture. Rather they found a mountainous terrain bordering the Pacific, a land whose scale was impressive, whose physical landscape was varied. Rugged offshore islands, inshore channels and inlets, coastal mountains and lowlands, river deltas, interior plateaus and narrow river valleys testified to the lack of level land at low elevation. Yet the sea and land provided resources for exploitation — sea otter and beaver, salmon, timber and spars — and from the very beginning of European contact with this portion of the Northwest Coast the exporting of primary resources formed the central feature of white-Indian trade relations. Moreover, the potential resource wealth of the region brought international rivalry among Russia, Spain,

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the narrow constitutional approach provided by W. N. Sage in "The Gold Colony of British Columbia," *Canadian Historical Review*, II (1921), 340-59.

Britain and the United States, and by 1846 the present boundaries of British Columbia had been largely determined in this first rush for spoils.<sup>4</sup>

The British Columbia frontier properly dates from 1846 for it was in that year that British sovereignty over the region was determined by Anglo-American treaty, presumptuously without any compliance on the part of the Indians who now found that they had new political institutions with which to deal. That treaty had, the British government hoped, secured a great fur-trading preserve north of the boundary for the Hudson's Bay Company. The Oregon Boundary dispute had underscored the conflict between fur trade and settlement on the Pacific slope: its resolution had left the Americans with lands more suitable for agricultural settlement, and it gave the British the rich fur preserve of the north.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the dispute resulted in the retreat of the Hudson's Bay Company and its agricultural subsidiary, the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company, north from its Oregon holdings; and in the process the Company developed new sites of occupation and its agricultural subsidiary farmed some of the best lands available in Vancouver Island, then virtually the sole lands known to be suitable for settlement. Other lands might be available, but in some areas such as Cowichan the Indians were known to be hostile<sup>6</sup> and in others the availability of scarce land suitable for tillage was not discovered until the Vancouver Island Exploration Expedition of 1864. Perhaps in the end it was the mountainous, non-agrarian character of the British Columbia frontier that saved the area from American squatter settlement. Now the Hudson's Bay Company's dominance of the Pacific slope had to be confined within new political boundaries.<sup>7</sup>

Within this area the Hudson's Bay Company had already established a commercial network of posts, trails and shipping routes. In 1843 Fort Victoria had been built as the focal point of Company seaborne commerce, and subsequently Forts Rupert and Nanaimo had been established

<sup>4</sup> R. W. Van Alstyne, "International Rivalries in the Pacific Northwest," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XLVI (1945), 185-218.

<sup>5</sup> The outcome of the dispute also gave both nations access to ports in the lower straits area separating Vancouver Island and the mainland and freedom of navigation there. Norman Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific* (New York, 1955).

<sup>6</sup> Eden Colville to Sir John Pelly, 15 October 1849, in E. E. Rich (ed.), *London Correspondence Inward from Eden Colville, 1849-1852* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, vol. XIX, 1956), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Not that the Company could not trade in American territory, but the United States government undertook to indemnify the Company for loss of their property in Oregon, and American politicians were anxious that the removal of the Company be effected as soon as possible. John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1868* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), ch. 13.

to mine and market steamer coal. Forts Hope and Yale had been built to provide new transportation links north of the forty-ninth parallel.<sup>8</sup> Fort Langley acquired new importance on the lower Fraser while Port Simpson at the entrance to Portland Inlet became the focal point for northern trade extending to the Queen Charlotte Islands, Alaska and the continental interior.

The patterns of resource exploitation, of corporate dominance, and of cluster settlement in and around forts had begun to appear long before miners searched tributaries of the Fraser River in 1858 for gold. The gold seekers, too, had to face environmental realities; the weather and climate were different than in some areas of California they had mined previously. Though on the lower reaches of the Fraser miners could use the "rocker" or "cradle," on the upper Fraser they were obliged to tunnel into the pay-channel lying below the creekbed. In the dry diggings they engaged in sluicing, using quicksilver brought from California. But again, the environment determined that gold extraction would necessitate expensive hydraulic equipment and substantial financial outlay. These features influenced the early demise of the individual miners' rush of 1858-9 and the rise of companies such as the Van Winkle Company that prospered into the 1870s.<sup>9</sup> And not least among the geographical influences was the isolation of the area from California, the eastern seaboard of North America, Europe and Asia — an isolation that determined costs of transportation, slowness of communication, modes of travel, and, for the early settlers, political and social perspectives. Not least, it influenced the character of official response, whether from the imperial or colonial capitals, when a threat to sovereignty within or on the border of British territory seemed real or when "troubles" with Indians in British or adjacent territories threatened the peaceful repose of the settler communities.

Environmental determinants also meant that governments had to put a premium on encouraging means of transportation. Coastal and river navigation had to be made safer by surveys and markers. River channels had to be widened and cleared of debris. New wagon roads beyond the headwaters of sternwheeler navigation had to be built and these required

<sup>8</sup> The new routes through the Similkameen Country were developed, in part to provide security for Company brigades so that they would not have to travel through the Cayuse Territory where an Indian War was in progress in the late 1840s. Gloria Griffin Cline, *Peter Skene Ogden and the Hudson's Bay Company* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> H. A. Innis and A. R. M. Lower, eds., *Select Documents in Canadian Economic History, 1783-1885* (Toronto, 1933), pp. 771-77, 780-90, and W. J. Trimble, *The Mining Advance into the Inland Empire* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1914).

large government outlays that in some cases had to be recovered by a tolls system. And new way stations and administrative systems for a growing colonial bureaucracy had to be built to serve a governmental network that now, in the early 1860s, encompassed the Cariboo within its zone of influence.

By this time also the "heartland" of the region was the Georgia Strait area with its administrative and political leadership extending over a network of rivers and roads into the cordillera.<sup>10</sup> The Cariboo rush of the 1860s and the growth of lumbering on Vancouver Island extended commercial links inland and on the seaboard, and until the Canadian Pacific Railway reached Pacific tidewater and the Panama Canal shortened links with the Atlantic Victoria remained the focus of the region. Vancouver City, important in the diversification of economic activities, was a latter-day corruption on this frontier. A functional unity based around the Fraser — Britain's Columbia, if you will — already existed by 1871.

## II

Tempting as it might be to argue that the character of the British Columbia frontier was shaped by environmental realities, such a conclusion would exclude any study of the type of persons who came to British Columbia in its formative years and the form of government and authority emerging as a result of their migration. No sooner had the British government acquired sovereignty to Vancouver Island and continental territory north of the 49th parallel than it set about to establish means of countering the frontier tendencies of Americans.<sup>11</sup> Vancouver Island was established as a colony proper in 1849 to counter the threat of American squatter settlement, and the Hudson's Bay Company was assigned the task of developing a colony under strict regulations. Such a policy intended, at once, to encourage British immigration and to safeguard the interests of the Indians. The Colonial Office exhibited naivety on both counts, but it is important to note here that from the very beginning of settlement, the patterns of land occupation were government-directed.<sup>12</sup> Land by pre-emption was not available at first. Indian land title was

<sup>10</sup> J. Lewis Robinson and Walter G. Hardwick, *British Columbia: One Hundred Years of Geographical Change* (Vancouver, 1973), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> W. P. Morrell, *Colonial Policy in the Age of Peel and Russell* (Oxford, 1930), pp. 444-46.

<sup>12</sup> Land alienation was partially based on the theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, whereby land was fixed at the "sufficient price" of £1 per acre. Land prices later were reduced in efforts to encourage colonization.

alienated only in a few cases. The result was a different type of society than that emerging in adjacent American territory.<sup>13</sup>

The second phase of government desires to protect British territory from American interest occurred only a few years later, in 1850 and 1851, when Victoria's political jurisdiction was extended to the Queen Charlotte Islands. London elevated the territory into a colonial territory administered by the Governor of Vancouver Island as a separate Lieutenant-Governorship, and the reason for this was that London intended to protect sovereignty there from "marauders without title."<sup>14</sup> In an age of American filibustering, Britain could take no chances. Gunboats were sent and signs erected in the islands, but the gold of the islands that had attracted five or six American ships out of San Francisco proved insufficient for economical exploitation and the environment proved unattractive to settlers. Nonetheless, an additional territory had been added to the formal British Empire's jurisdiction.

Two similar extensions of the imperial frontier subsequently occurred: first in New Caledonia with the establishment of the Colony of British Columbia in 1858, the second in the Stikine Territory in 1862 when a reorganization of British Columbia's boundaries allowed for the extension of imperial jurisdiction north to 60° North latitude (except to the Alaskan panhandle) and west to include the Queen Charlotte Islands.<sup>15</sup> The union of the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia in 1866 was a natural successor to the administrative growth and consolidation that had gone on since 1849. In short, the means of formal control had been extended within a territory already British in sovereignty, and in every case the government's actions were motivated by a desire to preempt American squatter settlement and to protect the interests of the Crown.

Yet at the very same time, what Professor John S. Galbraith has rightly called "the imperial factor" — the Hudson's Bay Company — was fighting a rearguard action change.<sup>16</sup> The Company gave little encouragement to settlement on Vancouver Island. It sought to monopolize gold

<sup>13</sup> The bailiff system attempted to introduce established society and deferential relationships into the Vancouver Island colony. Partially successful (though in a very small way), it tended to encourage the idea of a landed gentry in the Victoria area.

<sup>14</sup> James Douglas to Earl Grey, 29 January 1852, C.O. 305/3, Public Record Office, London; Lord Malmesbury to Admiralty, 23 June 1852, Admiralty Correspondence, I, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria.

<sup>15</sup> W. E. Ireland, "Evolution of the Boundaries of British Columbia," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, III (October 1939), 263-82.

<sup>16</sup> Galbraith, *Hudson's Bay Company*, *passim*.

extraction from the Queen Charlotte Islands. It endeavoured to control means of transportation to the Fraser gold districts. It acted in a similar way during the Stikine rush of 1862. In each case it sought to exploit the resources of British Columbia in its own way as best it could, and it did so in an age when metropolitan and colonial critics of monopoly and of chartered companies — in other words, advocates of free trade — were making themselves heard in London. Indeed, from the very beginning of colonization on Vancouver Island, critics of the restrictive nature of Company control (particularly in land alienation and transportation control) objected to the domineering manner of the Company.<sup>17</sup> The Colonial Office's desire to end the Company's control on Vancouver Island was well advanced by the mid-1850s, and in 1856 the first legislative assembly met in Victoria — the first representative political institution in the Colony. In the following year a British parliamentary inquiry pointed to the end of Company monopoly in New Caledonia, and the Colonial Office was seeking ways of phasing out Company control on the mainland at the very time news reached London of the great rush to the Fraser in 1858. The result this time was a Crown Colony: a formal jurisdiction in which the colonial governor was answerable to London within rather confined limits. Now the governor was solely an imperial representative, and in a series of political moves initiated the Hudson's Bay Company's imperium came to an end. In its place London's authority held sway, more paternalistic than the Company regime and more anxious as time progressed to make the colonies on the Pacific seaboard not only united but self-sufficient and members of a British North American confederation.

By creating British Columbia as a colony proper, the imperial government could increase British executive control because, as the preamble to the 1851 act stated, "it is desirable to make some temporary provision for the Civil Government of such territories, until permanent settlements shall be thereupon established, and the number of Colonists increased. . . ."<sup>18</sup> Self-government was deliberately withheld because the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, thought "the grand principle of free institutions" should not be risked "among settlers so wild, so miscellaneous, perhaps so transitory, and in a form of society so crude."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Governor Douglas' identification with the Company was so strong that independent colonists tried to short-circuit imperial communications by sending delegations and petitions to London. During the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Company's affairs in 1857 the same critics were able to make their complaints known to the government.

<sup>18</sup> Great Britain, *Statutes at Large*, 21 and 22 *Vic.*, c. 99.

<sup>19</sup> Great Britain, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3d ser., 151 (1858), 1102.

The Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, Herman Merivale, believed that only by providing security for settlers and affording the appropriate political climate could a responsible government free from the factiousness of American politics be fostered.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, central authority would provide trusteeship over the Indians, and prevent "cruelties and horrors that had been perpetrated in the early days of our colonies" and in the western United States.<sup>21</sup> In these respects, the British government devised a form of government that they thought suitable for the circumstances: it was arbitrary government, they admitted, but one in which there could be a relaxation of executive powers with the changing circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

This metropolitan form of control allowed the governor, James Douglas, and the first chief justice, Matthew Begbie, to establish a uniform judicial system throughout the colony. Californians, who formed the large majority of migrants into this frontier, by and large came to respect British law on this far western frontier. The reason for this, Begbie argued, was that the populace had willingly submitted to the powers of the executive — powers which, no matter how contrary to their wishes, were clearly and directly expressed.<sup>23</sup> At the same time Douglas devised a licence scheme (based on a system used in New South Wales in 1851 and the Colony of Victoria, Australia, in 1854) for miners that enabled the government to raise revenue for administration and public works, to keep a record of the number of adventurers entering the gold region, and to provide salaries for law enforcement officers and gold commissioners. Douglas attempted to establish a boat licence whereby the public were to observe the Company's exclusive rights of trade with the Indians, its rights of sole navigation to the mining region and elsewhere within its territories, and its requirement that all non-Company trading vessels possess licences issued by the Company. The Colonial Office declared this proclamation invalid because the Company's monopoly extended only to British trade with the Indians and instructed Douglas that it be removed. However, in the four-month interval that it was in force it alienated miners who rightly saw the governor acting for the private interests of the Company rather than the

<sup>20</sup> These views are set forth in E. Bulwer Lytton to Colonel Moody, 29 October 1858, C.O. 60/3. See also Merivale's article in *The Edinburgh Review*, CVII (April 1858), 295-321.

<sup>21</sup> Hansard, 3d ser., 151 (1858), 2102.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1769.

<sup>23</sup> M. B. Begbie, "Journey into the Interior of British Columbia," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 3, (1861), 248.



public interests of the Crown.<sup>24</sup> Another measure of the colonial government to regulate the activities of miners within their jurisdiction, the establishing of mining boards, provided the miners with regulation over the matters they were most concerned with — the size of claims and sluices and the rules for working and holding them. These boards provided a vent for miners' complaints and thus aided the British in their local administration.

In Indian relations as well, the executive exercised the initiative. Its principal aim was to prevent whites and Indians from taking the law into their own hands. Interracial conflict did occur during this critical phase of British Columbia's government, but a show of force was made by the governor, who took pains to explain to persons of both races that British law allowed for the protection of all men regardless of race. He appointed prominent members of Indian tribes as magistrates to keep order among the Indians and appointed justices of the peace at various places on the Fraser River to whom whites and Indians alike could apply for redress of grievance. The governor's diplomacy among Indian peoples was important but the forbearance of the Indians themselves<sup>25</sup> allowed for the peaceful resolution of difference so uncharacteristic of race relations in adjacent American territory.

Certainly Californians who entered British territory objected to the domineering influence of the Company and Crown in British Columbia, but they came to respect the strong role of the executive. They found the boat licence "outrageous." They objected to tolls of roads. They disliked mining licences. But they came to respect in British Columbia, as in New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria, the type of frontier government emanating from an empire that had once ruled their own country. They found the colonial government well managed, void of the graft and corruption of California politics, and contributory to the common good of the populace and the growth of the economy.<sup>26</sup>

There were, however, exceptions to the willingness of Californians to

<sup>24</sup> F. W. Howay in F. W. Howay, W. N. Sage and H. F. Angus, *British Columbia and the United States* (Toronto and New Haven, 1942), p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> Indians have argued that the peace on the frontier was owing to their forbearance and willingness to allow whites "to use that country on equal terms with ourselves." One tribe, the Couteau, "saved the country from war when the Indians were about to combine and drive out the Whites." Evidence of Chief John Tedlenitsa of the Couteau tribe, in deputation to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, 27 April 1916, in Borden Papers, MG 26 H 1 (a), vol. 38, pp. 16394-5, Public Archives of Canada.

<sup>26</sup> W. E. Ireland, ed., "Gold Rush Days in Victoria, 1858-1859," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, XII (July 1948), 241. Also, Rodman W. Paul, "'Old Californians' in British Gold Fields," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XVII (1954).

submit to British regulations. Case studies show that some Americans with not a little bravado attempted to violate British regulations in the Fraser River. Others attempted to continue the feuding of California mining camps in British territory. Still others of a criminal nature continued their careers north of the border. Many of them were opposed to British regulations *per se*; they were spirited gold seekers willing to "twist the Lion's tail" if they got the chance.<sup>27</sup> They were individuals bent on fortune, and they did not form a group which might combine to subvert British authority as officials in Victoria and London feared. The United States Consular resident in Victoria, John Nugent, did attempt to marshal American complaints against the colonial government and courts with a view to fostering an annexation movement. But Douglas, in his own defence, prepared a lengthy memorandum for the British government in which he documented how American citizens in British Columbia were treated in a comparable manner to British citizens in California. Subsequently in Washington, D.C., General Lewis Cass, the United States Secretary of State, acknowledged that the regulations prevailing in British Columbia respecting the rights of foreign miners were in fact more liberal than those in force in California. As for Nugent, he was branded as a subversive by British colonial officials who believed that he intended to provoke a filibuster under the guise of protecting Americans from misrule. No such action occurred, Nugent returned to San Francisco, and the only organized American political protest against British rule in the region — a protest by and large the work of one man and without the support of the press — came to an end.<sup>28</sup>

The Nugent case and those of various Americans opposing British law and order tended to underscore the fears of British officials that Americans would indeed subvert the government unless checked by a strong executive authority. It has tended to glorify Douglas and Begbie as guardians of constitutional rights at the expense of ignoring how both had their critics within the ranks of British and Canadian colonists who did not believe that their rights as Englishmen were being protected by an arbitrary government. The birth of the *British Colonist*, a Victoria newspaper, came precisely from this political quarter, and for many years political factions took as their main point of contention the role of the executive in colonial government. The 1858 rush, therefore, had brought important American

<sup>27</sup> Barry M. Gough, "Keeping British Columbia British: The Law-and-Order Question on a Gold Mining Frontier," *ibid.*, XXXVIII (1975), 269-80.

<sup>28</sup> R. L. Reid, "John Nugent: The Impertinent Envoy," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, VIII (1944), 53-76.

influences into British territory: influences that authorities feared, and influences which they used to establish strong, centralized administrations to prevent Americans from undermining legal authority.

The British Columbia frontier, then, was a British imperial frontier — a counterfrontier, so to speak, projected from London and Victoria in response to influences and pressures from neighbouring frontiers, particularly from Oregon in the case of Vancouver Island and California in the case of British Columbia. The frontier process occurred in a zone already occupied and exploited by the Hudson's Bay Company, and for a time (particularly on Vancouver Island and for a brief moment in British Columbia) a type of double-image executive authority existed whereby the interest of Company and Crown were often inseparable and often confused. The imperial government, however, forced the clarification of responsibilities between the two. Indeed, the 1858 rush afforded the Colonial Office the opportunity of pressing for full imperial jurisdiction in New Caledonia.<sup>29</sup>

This imperial extension of control allowed for the opening up of the colonies by new transportation routes and by settlement of lands hitherto controlled by the Company. These measures were undertaken by government in response to fears that large numbers of Americans and other foreign land or gold seekers might squat on British territory, establish a popular government and drumhead court, invoke their own crude legal remedies for existing lawlessness, and treat Indians in a violent and inhuman way. These inter-related forces — squatter settlement, the filibuster, and lawlessness — became in their own ways material determinants on the British Columbia frontier. They forced colonial and imperial governments to establish regulations, introduce judicial systems, and provide military aid in support of the civil power in order that similar developments could be avoided in British territory.<sup>30</sup> It was precisely the American frontiersman's propensity to manage his own political affairs (in Frederick Jackson Turner's words, "to preserve order, even in the absence of legal authority"<sup>31</sup>) which most disturbed governors of Vancouver Island and

<sup>29</sup> John S. Galbraith, "Bulwer-Lytton's Ultimatum," *The Beaver*, Outfit 268 (Spring 1958), 20-24.

<sup>30</sup> On the question of military support for the civil power, see Barry M. Gough, "Turbulent Frontiers' and British Expansion: Governor James Douglas, The Royal Navy and the British Columbia Gold Rushes," *Pacific Historical Review*, XLI (1972), 15-32.

<sup>31</sup> Turner's statement is quoted in H. C. Allen, *Bush and Backwoods: A Comparison of the Frontier in Australia and the United States* (East Lansing, Mich., 1959), p. 101.

British Columbia and a succession of British Colonial Secretaries and Undersecretaries during the course of the timespan considered by this essay. Officials wanted a self-sufficient territory free from American lawlessness, and they responded in a fairly regular and predictable way in the founding of the Colony of Vancouver Island, in the extension of jurisdiction to the Queen Charlotte Islands, in the constituting of the gold colony of British Columbia, and in the extension of boundaries in the Stikine. Government's concerns for securing the boundaries of British Columbia adjacent to the Alaska Panhandle and the Yukon as well as in the San Juan archipelago were merely extensions of government's attempts to secure the outer fringes of the imperial frontier.

In this way the British Columbia frontier was markedly similar to that of the rest of Canada. It was structured, to employ the words of the Canadian economic historians Easterbrook and Aitken, in "the interests of a unity threatened by United States' penetration." The American frontier, by contrast, "with its security against outside intervention, constituted an expansive, emerging force which greatly accelerated the rate of economic advance."<sup>32</sup> The structured unity of the British Columbia frontier was provided by London, erected on foundations supplied by the Hudson's Bay Company, and made secure by the material means which the British government was able to provide in the form of ships of the Royal Navy and men of the Royal Marines and Royal Engineers. London provided the finance, the manpower, and, not least, the psychological support rendered by the world's pre-eminent nation and empire that made the British Columbia frontier an imperial frontier.

But such metropolitan dominance on this western North American frontier also meant that arbitrary government enjoyed a lingering death; responsible government did not appear until British Columbia joined the Canadian confederation in 1871. Myths of suspected American takeovers continued for some time.<sup>33</sup> The founding fathers of the new colonies, Douglas and Begbie, were lionized at the expense of others such as Richard Blanshard and Amor de Cosmos who fought for more democratic causes. Above all, metropolitan influence tended to reinforce colonial perspectives whereby things British were, as a colonist wrote enthusiastically, "burnished and made the most of!!!"<sup>34</sup> In these ways the metropolitan origins

<sup>32</sup> W. T. Easterbrook and H. G. J. Aitken, *Canadian Economic History* (Toronto, 1958), p. 356.

<sup>33</sup> W. N. Sage, "The Annexationist Movement in British Columbia," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, ser. 3, vol. 21 (1927), sec. II, 97-110.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in M. A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto, 1958), p. 107.

of the British Columbia frontier did much to define the uniqueness of that province in relation to adjacent American states, and, for that matter, to other provinces in Canada or to certain Commonwealth countries. The unique environment of the Pacific slope meant obviously that the founding of a new society in the area now known as British Columbia would be influenced by geographical features, particularly in land occupation, resource extraction and spatial functions of hinterland and metropolis; but the British role in the extension of political jurisdiction and sovereignty, a role undertaken to counter American influences, also shaped the character of the political society emerging in this most distant west.