

Locating the University of British Columbia¹

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The decision to establish a university of British Columbia raised a problem of location that was characteristic of frontier societies. In older societies, the location of the future often was taken for granted, but on the frontier, where the flux of pioneering was as much spatial as temporal, "where" could be as unknown as "when." In these societies, human landscapes were just taking shape, places were in a state of becoming, and no local traditions fixed the spatial order. If the prominent physical features of new terrain could be relatively easily located and mapped, for a time the emerging human geography existed primarily in settlers' imaginations. Individual imaginations readily projected different patterns. Indeed, on the frontier spatial order might be established long before the fact was widely perceived. No one in the Upper Canada of the 1830s, for example, realized that its principal city had been determined. Similarly in British Columbia a good many years were to pass before immigrants could begin to feel confident about the location of their future. Miners had followed rumours of gold. Land surveyors had not known where to survey. Politicians had agreed to a railway to the Pacific long before they knew its route through the mountains or its terminus on the ocean. Arable farming was promoted where the growing season was too short, and orchards planted where markets could not be reached. In the late 1890s, when Vancouver replaced Victoria as the largest city in British Columbia, only Vancouverites felt that the province's urban primacy was settled. And so, when a young province began to feel itself ready for a university, the issue of where to put it came immediately to the fore, to command far more direct public attention than the type of education the new institution should provide.

Most of the debate over the location of the university was caused by

¹ Research for this article was facilitated by a grant from the University of British Columbia. Several graduate students in the Department of Geography at UBC — Derek Reimer, John Bottomley, Deryck Holdsworth and Angus Robertson — are warmly thanked for their ideas and criticism, as is my colleague Professor J. L. Robinson.

what British Columbians described as sectionalism, by which they meant attachment to a particular locality before the general interest of the province. As such, pleas for a university fell back on the exuberant local boosterism of newspaper men, Boards of Trade and businessmen. But for some British Columbians a university, unlike another sawmill or railway, marked a young province's coming of age. Its location, therefore, had symbolic overtones that went beyond the development of a particular centre. But what should it symbolize? What was this fledgling British Columbia and where was it headed? What type of university was appropriate to it? As British Columbians argued the location of their university, they might have addressed themselves to these questions about themselves. Indirectly a few did, but early British Columbians were hardly ready to understand a society that had just come together, and to identify the ideas that were relevant to it. Too much was new or was recombined in novel ways in a different setting. The debate about the location of a university reveals not only why the University of British Columbia is close to Vancouver yet tucked away on the tip of a peninsula, almost as remote from the centre of gravity of the city's population as possible within a few miles of the central business district; it also reveals something of the mentality of British Columbians, of the difficulty with which British Columbians conceived themselves, and of how they coped with this problem.

The location of the University of British Columbia had been intermittently debated from 1885, when a provincial university was first proposed,² to the fall of 1910 when an independent site commission appointed by the provincial government recommended a location in the vicinity of Vancouver, preferably on Point Grey. Legislation for a provincial university had passed in 1890 and 1891, but when Islanders and mainlanders could not agree on the election of university senators, the legislation lapsed.³ An attempt by Victoria to establish its own university failed with the defeat of a money bylaw. There matters sat for more than a decade

² *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 21 October 1885, p. 2; see also 8 January 1886, p. 2, 14 January 1886, p. 2, and 23 January 1886, p. 2. To the opinion that British Columbia, with fewer than 40,000 whites, was too small to support a university, the *Colonist* replied that ten students could be expected in each of three years, enough for a basic programme in classics, mathematics, and English.

³ Much of this early history is treated by F. C. Wade in an article in the *Province*, 2 March 1910, pp. 10 and 16. On first ballot all the senators were from the mainland and when, a month later, the senate was to meet in Victoria, a quorum of members was not present. The Attorney-General then advised the chancellor that, as the University Act had stipulated the senate had to meet within a month of election, no subsequent meeting legally could be held.

until, in 1906, in response to growing public interest in a local university, because managerial and professional positions in a burgeoning provincial economy were being filled principally by outsiders,⁴ the McBride government introduced two bills that would give McGill University, which had been providing a first-year programme in Vancouver for some time, the right to establish a University of British Columbia. This legislation stirred up a hornet's nest. Victorians objected that the new university would be fixed in Vancouver, graduates of the University of Toronto, more numerous in B.C. than those from McGill,⁵ objected that their university was discriminated against, and almost all objected that a private eastern university would manage a public university in British Columbia. A good deal of public feeling was aroused. In the spring of 1906 meetings of the Presbyterian Synod, the Methodist Conference and the Baptist Convention all urged the government to create a provincial university. The Baptists advocated an endowment of one-quarter of all public land.⁶ Editorialists and Boards of Trade argued that the time was ripe for a provincial university, and letters and delegations began arriving in Victoria. The McBride government responded to this pressure with two bills, one in 1907 to create a university land endowment of two million acres, and another the next year to replace the University Acts of 1890 and 1891. With their enactment the legal and financial framework for a future University of British Columbia appeared to be secure, but neither act had mentioned where the new university would be. "It has," said the leader of the opposition, "a name but no local habitation."⁷

The omission had been deliberate, for the government was well aware that British Columbians would agree to the need for a university long before they would agree to its location. When the university had been first proposed, Victorians had assumed it would be in their city, although by 1890 many people knew the lower mainland would be a strong contender. Businessmen in one place were in no mood to support a university in the other. This quarrel, surfacing in the election of senators, convinced the government to lay aside a project that was perhaps premature and was

⁴ Occasional letters to various newspapers in 1901 and 1902 put the case for the university. In March 1904 the University Club of Nelson passed a resolution calling for a land endowment for a provincial university, and there were similar initiatives about the same time in Vancouver and Victoria.

⁵ In 1891, for example, at the time of the first university convocation, fifteen members were graduates from McGill and thirty-three from colleges that affiliated to the University of Toronto. See Wade, note 3.

⁶ *Province*, 4 May 1906, p. 1; also Wade, note 3.

⁷ *Province*, 3 April 1907, p. 4.

certainly explosive. When the discussion of a university resumed early in the new century, the need for it was quickly accepted, but where to build it was another matter. Although Vancouver and Victoria were principal contenders, other places were now interested: Nanaimo on Vancouver Island; New Westminster, Mission, and Chilliwack in the Lower Fraser Valley; Nelson, Kamloops, and Vernon in the interior. The government, said the Minister of Education, found itself "inundated with arguments from real estate agents . . . inundated with arguments from localities . . . inundated with arguments from deputation after deputation and [by] a mass of correspondence inspired by selfishness from the local point of view, by selfishness from a financial point of view."⁸ Its response to this situation was to appoint an independent site commission made up of eastern Canadian university men (excluding representatives of McGill and Toronto).⁹ These men would select the site. Their decision would be final. The site commissioners toured British Columbia in May and June of 1910, hearing submissions in a dozen localities.¹⁰ Their report, tabled in September 1910, ended a twenty-five year argument about the location of higher education in British Columbia.

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"Sectionalism," said John Robson, Minister of Education in 1890 at the time of the first University Bill, was the "main breaker ahead in the launching of this ship."¹¹ When the senate collapsed, that failure, observed the *Colonist*, "was caused by the illiberal, sectional and, we are grieved to add, tricky conduct of men of whom better things might be expected. . . . If our institution of learning is to be supported by the . . . whole province its governing body must be actuated by some higher principle than sectionalism and its methods must be more open and more liberal than those of ward politicians."¹² The chancellor-designate decried the "untoward and unhappy sectional feelings . . . that would compel us to realize the inevitably disastrous effect of a house divided against itself."¹³ When the

⁸ From Henry Essen Young's speech introducing the site commission bill, reported verbatim in the *Victoria Daily Times*, 12 February 1910, p. 3.

⁹ Members of the site commission were: R. C. Weldon, Dalhousie; G. Dauth, Laval; C. C. Jones, University of New Brunswick; O. D. Skelton, Queens; W. C. Murray, University of Saskatchewan.

¹⁰ As well as the cities mentioned above, the commission visited Revelstoke, Kelowna and Prince Rupert.

¹¹ Reported in the *Daily Colonist*, 27 August 1890.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12 July 1891, editorial.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4 February 1892.

university debate resumed, editors who urged the claims of their city usually also insisted that the decision must transcend sectional feelings. In his speech introducing the site commission bill, the Minister of Education expressed the hope that, finally, sectionalism would be allayed forever.¹⁴ But however lamented, sectionalism was a fact of life in early British Columbia. Recent immigrants were not wanting in enthusiasm for their particular new home.

The basis of this sudden attachment to place lay in the fact that people who had come to British Columbia seeking opportunity (to use a characteristic phrase of the day) associated their own success with that of the place where they lived. Those would best succeed who lived in the most successful city, but as no one knew where this would be, it made sense to boost where one was. Before the railway, the province's dominant city was Victoria; but the CPR had upset this apparent order, and the university bill had been caught in the resulting tension. Victorians were bitter that the railway did not terminate in their city, dismayed at the pace of growth on the mainland. Even in 1910 when Vancouver was three times the size of Victoria, the Victoria delegates to the site commission were not convinced that the province's urban primacy was settled. They assured the commission that it was impossible to predict the largest city in the province ten years hence. They said that the west coast was likely to become the industrial and commercial centre of the whole British Empire, and as the population spread along the coast Victoria would be well placed to service it. A railway to the north end of Vancouver Island was a certainty, and would connect the city to the new towns of Prince Rupert and Stewart, to the new empire of the developing north.¹⁵

Other claims were almost as grandiose. Some in Nelson felt that their city would soon be as large as Winnipeg; with abundant water power, raw materials from the prairies would be processed there for the British Columbia market.¹⁶ Kamloops thought of itself as the geographical centre of the province and, with the prospect of three railways, soon a "centre of commanding influence in the commercial life of this province."¹⁷ The

¹⁴ As reported in the *Daily Times*, 12 February 1910, p. 3. A letter from John A. Lee of the New Westminster Board of Trade to the Premier reveals something of what the government faced. Lee felt that the New Westminster Board of Trade was "not strictly sectional" because it was willing to cooperate with Vancouver to obtain the university at Central Park. John A. Lee to McBride, 9 June 1909, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, McBride Correspondence, 1909, no. 264.

¹⁵ *Daily Times*, 30 May 1910, p. 1, 31 May 1910, p. 4.

¹⁶ *Nelson Daily News*, 3 April 1910.

¹⁷ *Inland Sentinel*, 13 April 1909, p. 1.

mayor of Vernon in 1910 felt that the coastal cities were only temporarily ahead in population,¹⁸ an editor in Nanaimo thought that Alberni would soon be as large as Vancouver,¹⁹ and one of the city fathers of Prince Rupert was of the view, when the site commissioners briefly visited his city, that the next few years there "would see wonderful changes the likes of which history does not relate."²⁰ Expectations such as these easily encompassed a university.

But sectionalism contained elements besides a bidding for numerical and commercial pre-eminence. Many immigrants appreciated the quality of life where they lived. Such feelings might be based on climate or scenery, on the view that Vernon was the better sort of town because orchardists were "a more worthy class of settlers," that Nanaimo was a city of honest working folk, that New Westminster was a pleasing city of homes. However much some Victorians blustered about future growth, Victoria's case for the university rested on the opposite assertion that Victoria was a city of decent well-bred people, "an almost cathedral town of quiet ways."²¹ When the university was awarded to Vancouver, the warden of the University School in Victoria, a retired Anglican clergyman from the Old Country, appraised Vancouver of its new responsibility. "That city," he said, "glories in its wonderful strides as a commercial centre, but it must now seriously consider and realize that there are greater things in life than bartering and selling."²²

In short, there are two strands to consider — one relating to growth and development, the other to quality of life — and it is important to see how British Columbians dealt with each as they argued over the location of their university.

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The simplest and prevailing view was that the university would be good for business. It would drive up land values, increase trade, and attract immigrants. For these reasons alone Boards of Trade were invariably among the strongest supporters of a local university; every city that sought the university felt that it would stimulate business. On the eve of the site commission's visit to Nelson, an editorial in the *Daily News* expressed the hope that the university would come to the city because it would "add to

¹⁸ *Vernon News*, 16 June 1910.

¹⁹ *Free Press*, 1 June 1910, p. 1.

²⁰ *Prince Rupert Optimist*, 23 and 24 June 1910.

²¹ *Daily Times*, 31 June 1906, p. 1.

²² *Daily Colonist*, 27 September 1910, p. 3.

our population and business."²³ In 1885 the *Victoria Colonist* had thought that a university would make a "not inconsiderable addition to the trade of the town,"²⁴ and a few years later pointed out that a university was a "good investment for capitalists," Upper Canada College having "made thousands last year."²⁵ When the university debate resumed, Victorians realized, although usually they were loath to put it in so many words, that "upon the founding of such a seat of learning in this city hinges a great deal of its future prosperity."²⁶ The New Westminster Board of Trade, pressing for a university between their city and Vancouver at Central Park, noted that Columbian College (the Methodist college in the city) had "a monthly expense account of \$2,000 and in addition to this the students spend considerable money in the city."²⁷ When in the mid-summer of 1910 the rumour circulated that the university had been awarded to Victoria, the *Vancouver Province*, in a sour editorial conceding that Victoria was a charming restful place, more in accord with the "time-honoured view" of a seat of learning than a thriving commercial centre like Vancouver, grudgingly admitted that, in these terms, the people of Victoria "can take the resultant increase in real estate as properly their due."²⁸ Only here and there was this obvious advantage disputed. A reeve in South Vancouver hoped the university would not come to Central Park. Surrounding property would drop in value "owing to the tendency of the students to tear down fences and play similar pranks."²⁹

By 1906, at the time of the explosion over McGill's role in the higher education of the province, a new note was being sounded about the relationship between the university and business. "What we want here," said a prominent Vancouver doctor, "is an institution owned and controlled by ourselves, that will aim at giving our youth the scientific and other knowledge best calculated to assist in developing our great natural resources."³⁰ This relationship between science, technology, resource development and the training of experts in a university was probably perceived by a rela-

²³ *Daily News*, 14 June 1910.

²⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 15 October 1885, p. 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 February 1892.

²⁶ *Daily Times*, 8 May 1906, p. 1.

²⁷ *Daily Province*, 10 May 1906, p. 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 August 1910.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 April 1907, p. 16; and also letter to the editor from A. E. Taylor, 24 October 1906, p. 13.

³⁰ Dr. A. S. Munro, quoted in the *Province*, 8 February 1906, p. 1.

tively small number of British Columbians, but they were influential people, well placed to advance this case. Opening the debate on the University Bill of 1908 the Minister of Education emphasized that the first aim of a university was no longer to train lawyers and doctors. Rather the government would establish a more practical university "in order that the immensely valuable nature of the great natural resources which lie . . . all around us, may be properly realized and suitably utilized, leading almost inevitably to fully a hundredfold increase in their exploitation."³¹

The Vancouver *Province* noted the minister's views with great satisfaction. The man who knew all about classics or literature was useless; even a blacksmith was more to be respected.³² British Columbia was a land of great and varied natural resources, but

the evolution of the great industrial future which all these factors in combination and contiguity imply, involves problems of wise legislation, the employment of much capital, untiring industry, and, above all, the education of the rising generation to a realization of the purchase value of the stores of wealth we possess, and a knowledge of the new processes whereby nature is being forced to yield one hundred fold more than was possible in the past, and whereby the whole of the industrial and commercial economy of the world is being reorganized and readjusted to a new order of things.³³

The Nanaimo *Free Press* felt that the number of students who went to university only to complete their education would be insignificant. British Columbia did not have the leisured classes that supported Oxford and Cambridge. Rather, the university would be given largely to scientific and technical work.

The province calls for engineers of all kinds, civil, marine, electrical, chemical, mining, and what not, for experts in mine operating, in metallurgy, in smelting, forestry, and all the other industries which are opening out all round in every section of our glorious country. Today we get these men, these professional experts and captains of industry, where we can, from the U.K. and even the U.S. With a university we shall make these men from our native

³¹ Dr. Young's speech was reported verbatim in the *Daily Colonist*, 4 February 1908, p. 1. Interestingly enough, Mr. A. H. B. MacGowan, MLA for Vancouver, also equated the training of doctors and lawyers with a liberal education. He thought the university needed a faculty of commerce — part, he claimed, of practically every modern university. If the university were to provide only a liberal education, a land endowment of one million acres was quite enough for it; if a faculty of commerce were included, a two million acre endowment was warranted. The *Province*, 17, 18 and 20 April 1907.

³² *Daily Province*, 4 February 1908.

³³ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1908, p. 8.

sons. It will be the chief function of the university to turn them out, and in this it will find its chief usefulness.³⁴

The *Daily News* of New Westminster agreed that the wealth of British Columbia lay in the land, but warned that

lack of knowledge has of recent years imperilled our future prosperity: forest production and tree cultivation, equally with fishery production and development, must be studied scientifically, or these two great industries will pass into alien hands; the fruit growing experts fear (with good reason) for the future of our orchards, now threatened by insects and parasites imported from elsewhere.³⁵

The tiny university of forty or fifty students that had been considered in 1890 and 1891 would have been devoted primarily to the arts and to the training of teachers. Fifteen years later, the university the government and some British Columbians had in mind would be a handmaiden of industry, an essential cog in an industrial society dependent on primary resources.

On the day in January 1908 that the Minister of Education brought down the university bill, he introduced another for the better regulation of the civil service. Some months before, he had gone to eastern Canada to seek advice on the drafting of the university legislation and on the organization of a modern asylum. These initiatives were all part of the same trend. Coming strongly into British Columbia in the decade after 1900 was the concept of the scientific expert and of his importance as planner and manager in government and industry. If lip-service were still paid to a free enterprise economy, in fact the self-regulating market, to the extent that it had ever existed in British Columbia, was slipping rapidly away. Agricultural experimental stations were in operation at Summerland and Agassiz, reports of agronomists and plant pathologists were common in the *Sessional Papers*, and for several years the annual meetings of the Farmers' Institute voted support for a land grant to a provincial university that would support a scientifically based agriculture.³⁶ Sharper regulation of the salmon industry reflected a growing concern for conservation.³⁷ H. R.

³⁴ *Nanaimo Free Press*, 2 June 1910, p. 4.

³⁵ *New Westminster Daily News*, 14 June 1910, p. 1.

³⁶ See, for example, *Sessional Papers of British Columbia*, 1906, K 63-4.

³⁷ The growing interest in conservation in the salmon fishery is well revealed in the *Report and Recommendations* of the British Columbia Fisheries Commission, 1905-1907 (Ottawa, 1908). In this industry, however, attempts to regulate the fishing with a view to conserving the resource base had been made as early as the late 1880s, at which time the impetus for conservation came to British Columbia via Ontario. Keith Ralston is thanked for his assistance on this point.

MacMillan, then provincial forester, wrote admiringly of Gifford Pinchot and of his ideas about forest conservation, while the Royal Commission of 1909-1910 on the Forest Industry in British Columbia went to Washington to talk to Pinchot himself. The disdain for sectionalism — which at the civic level was a disdain for the ward politician — became partly a disdain for lack of expertise. The expert would take a larger view; the university would create the expert, healing the very problem that had stymied its inception.

These ideas had been hatching for some time — in the 1860s the Vermonter George Perkins Marsh had written *Man and Nature* to plead for the scientific management of resources in the interest of long-term utility — but they gained momentum and currency in North America at the beginning of this century, finding expression in the proliferation of engineering and other technical societies, in the growth of town planning, and in the progressive conservation movement under Theodore Roosevelt. This largely American enthusiasm for technical expertise worked quickly into British Columbia, probably losing in the process some of its momentum for conservation and the populist tinge that would manage resources for all the people, but retaining the central conviction that technical expertise was essential to a healthy, resource-based economy. For some British Columbians the relevance of this view in an economy dominated by primary resource industries, and dependent on an increasingly complex and powerful technology that was beginning, here and there, to show signs of exhausting the resource base, was quickly apparent. It gave a rationale for the establishment of a university that squared entirely with the outlook of a government bent on the development of a vigorous, resource-based economy, and it made Oxford and Cambridge seem effete and irrelevant. Some arts courses would be admitted to the new university, but the government had made it very plain that basically it wanted a solid corps of technical experts.

Vancouver was the only city in a position to exploit this sense of the relationship of the university to the economy. Other cities could propose themselves as future giants, could claim, as did Nelson, a particular relationship to one industry or, as did Nanaimo, a central location amid all the main resource industries; but only Vancouver could declare itself the commercial centre of the province, the place where a university, if it were to produce the experts who would manage the economy, obviously should be located. In a lengthy booklet published for the site commission it did

this most emphatically.³⁸ Statistics showed Vancouver's growing lead in population, its burgeoning tax base, its connections with a vast hinterland. A long section dwelt on the many advantages for future doctors, lawyers, engineers, economists, foresters, and others of studying in the centre of provincial population and commercial activity. All members of the first convocation in 1891 had been graduates of universities in Britain or the Dominions; no one in the late 1880s or early 1890s talked of sending a son to an American university. But in the Vancouver brief of 1910 American universities were the model. Even in Britain, it noted, the more modern universities were going to the industrial centres, while on this continent universities languished if not in large centres. The brief concluded with letters from twenty American university presidents or deans, all but one of whom argued for the location of a university near a large centre. If the university were to provide the technicians of a rising industrial order, Vancouver's claim was hard to assail.

There were, however, other conceptions of a university, and if the university were to be located anywhere other than near Vancouver these conceptions had to be put.

The university, said an editorial in the *New Westminster Daily News*, "must be a place of fine culture, and its object must be to make men and not mere specialists and technical adepts."³⁹ This view was raised intermittently throughout the university debate and, like the contrary opinion that the university was good for business, it came, if much less frequently, from all quarters of the province. The *Victoria Colonist* in 1886 had considered the public educator the most valuable of all men for "the wisest and greatest men in all ages and countries have exalted learning."⁴⁰ In an uncharacteristic editorial, the *Vancouver Province* maintained that the primary function of a university was to lay a foundation for life. It should "give instruction in those arts which for centuries have been regarded as going to the formation of a liberal education before any of these professional colleges became associated with it, and it must continue to exist as such."⁴¹ A speaker before the site commission in Vernon thought that however important professional education, forming the character of young

³⁸ *University Location in British Columbia: A Summary of the Arguments presented by the Lower Mainland University Committee to the University Sites Commission appointed to fix the location of the Provincial University of British Columbia*, privately published booklet, U.B.C., Special Collections, University Endowment Lands Box.

³⁹ *New Westminster Daily News*, 13 June 1910, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 13 January 1886, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Daily Province*, 11 May 1906, p. 6.

people was far more important. Materialism was not the goal, but even from a materialistic standpoint, our resources would not "remain in the hands of the white race" unless by upbringing and education we instilled the finest qualities in our youth.⁴² A few days later the *Vernon News* reported with great approval the views of one Professor Mills who had left McGill after twenty-five years because, in Mills' view, it was becoming a mere technical school — making not men, but practitioners and specialists. Was it not a little singular, asked the *News*, "that the chief circumstances upon which the Vancouver committee bases its claims should be the one which Professor Mills considers most inimical to the well-being of a university."⁴³

An aspect of the argument that the university's central task was to improve the quality of life by training men rather than specialists related to climate. Men of quality had to be healthy; it was important to locate the university in a healthy climate. Even North Vancouver, where annual rainfall exceeds two-and-a-half metres, described itself to the site commission as on a sunny, southern slope. The editor of the *Nanaimo Free Press* was sure Nanaimo had the best climate on the coast, without venomous reptiles and with few mosquitoes.⁴⁴ The Vancouver brief to the site commission admitted that climate was not ideal for those with poor lungs, but then very few students were so afflicted. Others disagreed. "It is a well-known fact," said a speaker before the site commission in Vernon, "that the disposition among the youth of this age is towards weak lungs, and it is essential that an institution in which the youth of the country are to assemble should be built in an altitude and in a climate favourable to their sturdy growth."⁴⁵ The *Inland Sentinel* thought Kamloops had the best climate in Canada. "The clear, bracing, tonic influence of the sunny atmosphere, especially in contrast with the humid and oppressive character of the coast winter climate, marks this place out as most fitted by nature as a seat of learning."⁴⁶ When the site commission reached Nelson, they learned of bracing Kootenay nights, and of a climate that encouraged work. One speaker, coming twenty-five years before from Cambridge University, had spent two years at Victoria during which time he could not work, "forgetting in the morning what he had toiled to memorize the

⁴² *Vernon News*, 16 June 1910, p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23 June 1910, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Nanaimo Free Press*, 1 June 1910, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Vernon News*, 16 June 1910, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Inland Sentinel*, 13 April 1909, p. 1.

night before." He had come to Nelson, worked longer, and passed.⁴⁷ Even so, interior opinion was almost unanimous that if the university were to be at the coast, Victoria was preferable, for climatic reasons, to Vancouver. For its part, the Victoria delegation, obviously convinced of the delights of their city's climate, told the site commissioners that Victoria produced seventy-five per cent of all flowers grown in the province, and that roses bloomed there the year round; they brought along the professional from the golf club to say that golf could be played in Victoria all winter long.⁴⁸

Sport was central to this conception of a university. Playing field and rowing course were character-building, teaching self-reliance, obedience, discipline and comradeship. All the aspirants for the university mentioned facilities for sport, particularly for rowing, although Vancouver made the least of this argument. "No great school of learning can exist," said a speaker for Coquitlam, "without its practice water for aquatics."⁴⁹ In Nelson the commission was told that the Kootenay was the greatest fishing river in the world, and the West Arm of Kootenay Lake the greatest rowing course, "five miles straight-away." The commissioners should remember, said this speaker, that the British Empire had been built on rowing, cricket and football.⁵⁰ Characteristically, the sports were English, although it was noted in Kamloops that winter there was cold enough for ice hockey, "a representative Canadian sport."⁵¹ Coquitlam and North Vancouver mentioned shooting for large and small game. A Victoria delegate assured the commission that if sport elsewhere in British Columbia had been poisoned by professionalism, that had not been the case in Victoria.⁵²

Health and sport suggested countryside, and some British Columbians felt that their new university should have a rural location. A few believed that the province's economic future lay with agriculture. The commissioners encountered this claim in Chilliwack,⁵³ and more emphatically in a pamphlet prepared by John Todd, native of Victoria and professor of parasitology at Macdonald College of McGill University. In Todd's view,

⁴⁷ *Daily News*, 18 June 1910.

⁴⁸ *Daily Times*, 30 May 1910, p. 1.

⁴⁹ *Daily Columbian*, 8 June 1910, pp. 1 and 3.

⁵⁰ *Daily News*, 18 June 1910.

⁵¹ *Inland Sentinel*, 3 June 1910, p. 1, and 17 June 1910. The *Vernon News* mentioned skating, hockey, sleighing and tobogganing, 7 April 1910, p. 1.

⁵² *Daily Columbian*, 1 June 1910, reporting the views of W. W. Bolton, warden of University School.

⁵³ *The Progress*, 15 June 1910, p. 1.

the essential fact was that "Canada is at present, and always will be, mainly an agricultural country."⁵⁴ An agricultural population, he argued, was a nation's greatest strength; young people at a rural university would grow to respect the farmer's intelligence and scientific training. Although an agrarian ethic was not absent in British Columbia — the long sections on agriculture in the Sessional Papers, to take one example, reveal a dedication to farming as a way of life as much as to scientific agriculture⁵⁵ — no one other than Todd argued for a university in quite these terms. Although by 1910 the Okanagan Valley had come into commercial fruit production, orcharding was expanding in the Kootenays, and new railways in the north were raising expectations that vast areas of the northern interior were suitable for agricultural colonization,⁵⁶ those who argued for a rural university thought it far more important to get out of the city than to encounter the farmer or even the farm landscape. Many thought that large cities were unhealthy; in Todd's view "a town-living race tends to deteriorate physically." They were also immoral ("cesspools" a citizen of Vernon called them), the wrong moral environment in which to bring up the young. In the countryside, it was argued, the young were isolated from the city's nefarious influence, and could be formed by the principles of high-minded professors in the community of the residential university, on the playing field and close to nature.

In this form the argument for a rural university grew neither from American agrarian populism nor from nostalgia for an English yeomanry. It had much more to do with affection for Oxford and Cambridge, with distaste for the British industrial city and, to some extent, with belief in the ennobling power of nature.

When the location of the University of British Columbia was being most vigorously debated, the first garden city, Letchworth, was being built near London. Behind Letchworth lay a reaction against ugliness and social

⁵⁴ John L. Todd, *Concerning the Choice of a Site for the University of British Columbia*, privately published booklet, 1910, U.B.C., Special Collections, University Endowment Lands Box.

⁵⁵ For example, the Report of the Irrigation Commission of British Columbia, by L. G. Carpenter, 22 January 1908, contains the following: "Of all sources of wealth, that which depends upon agriculture is the most stable, varies least from year to year, and furnishes a population whose interest is always on the side of good government and forms an element which is always in favour of good citizenship". *Sessional Papers*, Second Session, Eleventh Parliament of the Province of British Columbia, Victoria, 1908, D3.

⁵⁶ In 1909 and 1910 the *British Columbia Magazine* printed a number of articles on the agricultural potential of north-central B.C. The physical limits of agriculture in the province still were unknown, and there was a good deal of optimism.

alienation in the industrial city; a search for a more collective life, a healthier environment, and craftsmanship in a setting containing some of the qualities of the English village; and a tradition of social thought, stretching from Ebenezer Howard back through Morris and Ruskin to Robert Owen, that assumed that environmental change could effect social improvement. In the United States at the same time the reaction to the city was expressed in agrarian populism; or it reflected the enthusiasm of liberal democrats for wilderness for every-man, as revealed in Olmsted's Central Park, in the creation of the great federal parks, and in the battle over Hetch-Hetchy in Yosemite. There was, therefore, a base of anti-urban feeling in Britain and the United States that had come into sharp focus at the time British Columbians were considering the location of their university. Whereas the drive in the first years of this century for technical efficiency and expertise in British Columbia seems to have had predominantly American origins, almost all the anti-urbanism generated by the university debate apparently came from the British Isles.

Most of the reservations about cities were transplanted directly from Britain. In 1909 and 1910 the Canadian Club in Vancouver had heard talks about the garden city movement in which it was stressed that a new society had the opportunity to avoid the problems of health and morality in the industrial city by fusing elements of city and countryside in new suburban areas.⁵⁷ John Todd attributed to a British Royal Commission the alarming finding that working-class people moving to the towns from the countryside rarely survived for two generations. The British industrial city was also in his mind when he argued that students should spend their time on the recreation fields rather than "tramping home through the vicious streets of a large city." While not as extreme as Todd, the editor of the *Victoria Times* thought a rural location would avoid "the conditions existing among the massed peoples of European cities."⁵⁸

But the cities of the Canadian west were not British industrial cities and, if only for this reason, the British anti-urban thinking that reached British Columbia did not fit very well. Vancouver, Victoria and New Westminster, the largest cities in the province, all considered themselves exemplary residential environments. New Westminster presented itself to the site commission as a city of homes, a place where the ordinary man lived in his own home on his own land. It was possible to believe that New

⁵⁷ The most important speaker was Mr. Henry Vivion, M.P. for Birkenhead, England, who addressed the Vancouver Club in September 1910 on "Workingmen's Homes and the Garden City Movement in England".

⁵⁸ *Daily Times*, 1 April 1909, p. 4.

Westminster already was what Letchworth sought to achieve.⁵⁹ “No one acquainted with the West,” said the Vancouver brief to the site commission, “would claim our small towns are morally cleaner or better governed than the cities of New Westminster and Vancouver.” But if British ideas about the city did not fit very well, American ideas about wilderness received no hearing, apparently because those British Columbians advocating a rural university, coming overwhelmingly from Britain or eastern Canada, and conceiving a university within a conservative social tradition, did not think of a university as an institution of liberal democracy. Invocations of nature in British Columbia fell into the pastoral literary imagery of the lake poets or into the health and manners of the playing field rather than the rhetoric of the individualistic American frontier. There was no one like Frederick Jackson Turner to argue that the individualism and democracy of the vanishing frontier would be perpetuated in the state university.⁶⁰ A speaker in Vernon told the commissioners that when he thought of the location of British Columbia’s university, he was reminded of Pope Nicholas the Fifth who had founded the university of Bologna not in a city but in a sunny land of cornfields and vineyards, “close to nature and thereby closer to God.”⁶¹ The Okanagan was another sunny land. Probably thinking of Oxford and Cambridge, British Columbians who argued for a rural setting for their university praised the advantages of a residential college where professors, students and playing fields would be close together and the distractions of urban life removed.

Interestingly enough, the strongest case for a university that was not in a large centre was made by Victoria, the second city in the province. When the university question had first arisen, Victoria, as the principal and most progressive place in the province, had assumed itself entitled to the university. “When we have our new water service,” said the *Colonist*, “our Pickering system of drainage, and our electric motor tramways [Victoria] will be the most attractive and salubrious place of residence to be found in North America.”⁶² But later, as Vancouver rose to obvious commercial pre-eminence, Victorians prized their city for its quiet, restful ways. It was picturesque, healthful, and homelike; its scenery, as Kipling had said and Victorians repeated, combined “the grandest, finest, and best in the most noted parts of the world”; its athletic facilities were excellent; and its

⁵⁹ Of course it was not. The North American suburb embodied the form but not the social ideals of the English garden cities.

⁶⁰ *The Frontier in American History*, 1920, pp. 282-7.

⁶¹ *The News*, 16 June 1910, p. 1.

⁶² *Daily Colonist*, 22 September 1888, p. 2.

population was educated and well-bred. As reported in the *Times*, the Victorians before the site commission were quite explicit about their quality: "The people of this city would not be found coming forward with money considerations. They would not do this because they knew this action would not appeal to the commissioners, and it would show a woeful lack of breeding."⁶³ All in all, Victoria was the "best moral, social, and economic environment our coast contains for the forming of intellectual character."⁶⁴ Theirs was, Victorians were almost saying, a sequestered English university town, without yet its university.

This conception of the university could elicit a sharp reaction, not only from those who thought of the university as an adjunct to industry. A residential university, tucked away in some quiet spot, would become a university for the rich. The Vancouver brief argued that universities should not be "out of reach of those who cannot afford to travel miles to get to them with the doors barred against the young man who has to work his way through college because the opportunities to work are limited by the commercial backwardness of the towns in which they stand." The socialists in the legislature went further. A university, wherever located, would turn out fops not men, and would serve only the top 10 per cent of the population. Money was far better invested in the public school system.⁶⁵ The Trades and Labour Council also saw the university as a class institution and came out strongly against it.⁶⁶ At the other end of the spectrum, the opinion was sometimes raised in Victoria that British Columbia wanted not a university but an excellent private school such as Eton or Harrow.⁶⁷

Finally, some British Columbians thought that the divide between town and countryside was breaking down. Europeans, they assumed, had massed in cities because transportation had been poor, but by 1910, with the electric interurban tramway and the automobile, the population could be more dispersed. People could live where the advantages of town and

⁶³ *Daily Times*, 30 May 1910, p. 1. Basically, though, Victoria's delegates to the Site Commission tried to get this across — and the commissioners, who were not themselves genteel Englishmen, probably missed the point — by a low-keyed presentation intended to reveal themselves as men of taste and breeding.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 31 June 1906, p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 27 March, 1907, pp. 1-2, 12 February 1910, p. 5.

⁶⁶ Resolution re. endowment of a university, Trades and Labour Council, Vancouver, 15 August 1904, U.B.C., Special Collections, Mine Mill Papers, Box 158.

⁶⁷ The *Daily Times*, a liberal paper, frequently accused the *Colonist* of timidity towards the university because a university might not keep the working classes in their place. See, for example, 9 May 1906, p. 4 and 26 November 1906, p. 4.

country were shared. Todd was of the view that "modern town builders" were bringing the country into the city; "easy transport permits people to live in rural suburbs although they work in cities." The New Westminster delegation before the site commission, urging a university in Central Park between Vancouver and New Westminster, felt that, although rural, the university would not be isolated. Students had only to step on the tram and in twenty minutes they would be in Vancouver or New Westminster.⁶⁸ Outside experts were also sensitive to the locational implications of improved local transportation. A professor at the University of London thought it was now feasible to place academic buildings in a city and student residences in the country.⁶⁹ Overall, the preference was for a suburban location, close enough, because of modern transportation, so that the university could partake of the city but not be physically part of it. Indeed, in 1908 the *Victoria Colonist* had described an ideal site in terms that fitted Point Grey. A large university, it said, should be so located "that it would be a thing apart from commercial activity and yet near enough to the social and domestic life of the city. It could be placed where it would have all the advantages of spacious grounds and access to the water, and yet never be built about with commercial and industrial establishments or be cut off from aquatic privileges."⁷⁰ Modern transportation, in short, made it possible to combine in one location the advantages of proximity to city and to nature.

* * *

As the site commissioners toured the province they listened to briefs, went on the excursions and attended the luncheons and dinners arranged by their hosts, but divulged little of their own views. Their final report, recommending a location near Vancouver, was only two sentences long. A short supplementary statement favoured Point Grey and rejected Central Park because, in the commissioners' view, a university there eventually would be surrounded by the city, an astute observation that was to come true in about thirty years. Yet the commissioners' reasoning is clear enough: they thought it important to locate the university near the provincial concentration of population, commerce, and industry; and equally important to keep it out of the city. Point Grey was a beautiful site close to the province's largest city yet shielded from urban expansion. Expert

⁶⁸ *Daily Columbian*, 8 June 1910, pp. 1 and 3.

⁶⁹ This extraordinary opinion from one of the many authorities approached by Todd for views on the ideal location of a university.

⁷⁰ *Daily Colonist*, 4 February 1908, p. 4.

opinion favoured such a site, so did most of the British Columbians who expressed themselves on the issue (although they would have found it outside different cities), and the government, which was committed to a university that would serve the expanding industrial base of the province, must have been secretly delighted.⁷¹ The site commissioners had done their job.

But the debate about the location of the university had revealed something about British Columbians, or at least about that small but influential minority of them which argued for a university. Essentially it revealed a vigorous population aggressive in the interests of their particular place, a population that was not thinking very deeply about itself, and that, when it tried to express its own needs, still borrowed the shells of ideas or lifestyles from elsewhere. Overwhelmingly, British Columbians had wanted a university because it would be good for local business. The Minister of Education had been fed up with sectional representations based on financial interests when he created the site commission. As the commissioners toured the province they seldom heard arguments put so bluntly, but the arguments they did hear — that a particular place was healthy or restful, or well situated with respect to industry, or a coming centre of population — were invariably the only plausible arguments for a university that could be used for the place. Now and then the real cat came out of the bag. Few ever suggested that the university should not be located in their area. Two men from Vernon were of that view, and the brief from the University Club of Nelson, in many ways the best presented to the commission, maintained that the university should be in or near a large centre of population.⁷² The mayor felt that the University Club had stabbed Nelson in the back; a member of the Board of Trade said that he, at least, had faith in Nelson, which would be a great city when the members of the University Club were forgotten. Only a few British Columbians — some members of the government, some newspaper editors, some far-seeing businessmen, and a few others — foresaw the emerging role of the technical expert and the university's relevance to his training. This idea, perhaps the biggest evoked by the university debate, apparently came (minus its populist over-

⁷¹ McBride represented a Victoria constituency. His Attorney-General, Bowser, a man whom many thought was the power behind the Premier, represented the Vancouver riding adjacent to Point Grey. When the decision was announced, the Liberal press in Victoria felt that Bowser had had his way but, although the Premier could not so commit himself in public, a university located near Vancouver fitted his vision of the province. As some editorials had noted, the creation of a site commission had got him off an awkward hook.

⁷² *Daily News*, 18 June 1910, pp. 1 ff.

tones) from the United States, and could be readily fitted into the predominant mood of expansion and resource development in British Columbia. But for most British Columbians the equation of university and business was simpler: the university would help a town to grow.

The only clear alternative to this view of the university drew on the English conception of a gentleman. Wanted was character: the character of the educated man who held money in proper perspective, who valued learning, sport, and fair play. Such a view was held by relatively few, probably even in Victoria where it became the city's case when there was no longer any other. Beyond this, the conceptualization of the university had little to fall back on. The university could not be widely perceived as an institution of liberal democracy, as it might have been in the United States, because British Columbians, particularly university-educated British Columbians, came out of a different political tradition. It could not grow out of the social ideas generated by British industrialization because, in this new place, the problems of industrial urban society seemed irrelevant, at least to those planning a university. British Columbians drew on what they could as they debated the location of their university; their commitment to growth and, for some, their sense of the educated gentleman. In a new place where energy went to development rather than to social thought and where the ideas of the modern world encountered a novel setting that British Columbians themselves did not yet understand, they had little opportunity to do otherwise.