

The Photographic Record of Pre-Confederation British Columbia

by JOAN M. SCHWARTZ

The research potential of historical photographs has not yet been fully realized despite growing interest in a wide variety of primary, often unconventional source materials. Nineteenth-century photographs have traditionally been used to corroborate manuscript findings or to illustrate written text, satisfying the anthropologist studying Indian burial customs, the architectural historian searching for Classical bank facades, the social historian investigating modes of dress and the historical geographer examining man's impact on the natural landscape. Such researchers have sought specific information pertinent to their particular interests, but have left the broader significance of the detail and range of subjects unexplored. Recently it has been clearly acknowledged that "a photograph is a document, and the historian's first business is to ask of it, as he would of any other record, who made it, to whom it was addressed, and what it was meant to convey."¹ If the integrity of historical photographs has been recognized, few studies anywhere have employed photographs as a primary source. A description of the photographic record of British Columbia before its entry into Confederation in 1871 and a subsequent commentary on its contents suggest the research opportunities and historical significance of archival photographic collections.²

Nineteenth-century photographs constitute valuable evidence supporting the study of land and life in early British Columbia where pioneering proceeded under the camera's eye almost from the beginning of white settlement. The first photographic gallery was established in Victoria soon after the Fraser River gold rush began in 1858. By 1871, no fewer than a dozen photographers had been active on the island and mainland colonies. These professionals produced large and delightfully varied collections capturing the distinctive landscape and emerging society of colonial British Columbia. In subtle but perva-

1 G.H. Martin and David Francis, "The Camera's Eye," in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds. (London, 1973), p. 228.

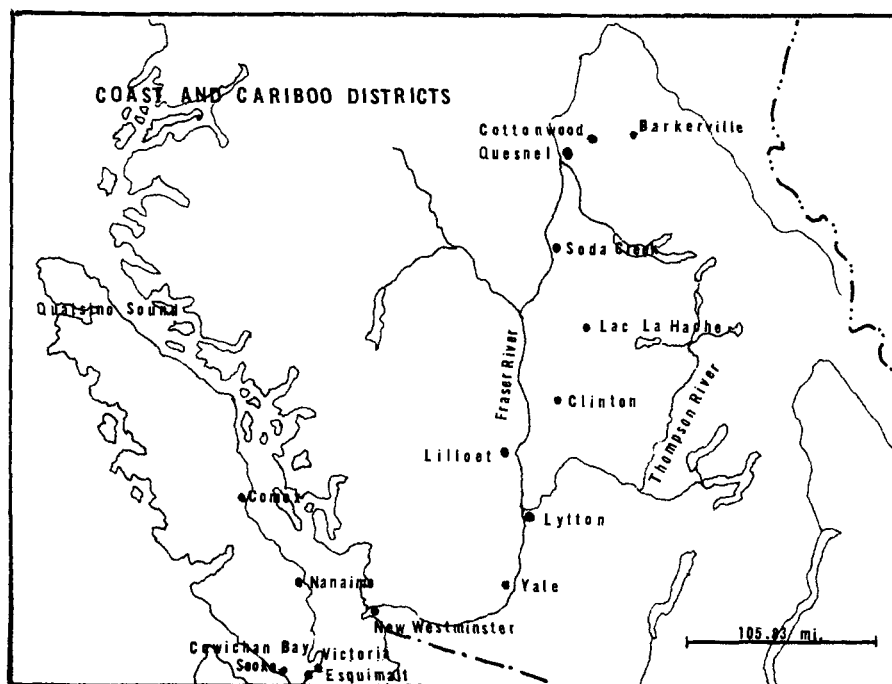
2 For the purpose of this essay, pre-Confederation British Columbia refers to both Vancouver Island and British Columbia which existed as separate British Crown Colonies until 1866. Victoria was the capital of the island colony established in 1849; Fort Langley and soon thereafter New Westminster served as the seat of government for the mainland colony proclaimed nine years later. When the two colonies were united in 1866, Victoria became the capital of British Columbia with its present geographical extent.

sive ways, these images describe the newcomers who transformed the wilderness and, within the practical and conceptual constraints of prevailing technology and attitudes, demonstrate what photographers considered worth recording as well as what people wanted to buy. In short, the photographic record reflected the intellectual, political, economic and social milieu within which it was created.

The period 1858 to 1871, years of mid-Victorian rule, was characterized by the sudden, dizzy excitement of gold rushes and their often equally abrupt decline, accompanied by vigorous, if sometimes ephemeral, settlement. The photograph, a new recording medium, had an impact largely denied the written word adding a further dimension to our capacity for analyzing and understanding the past. The most effective use and interpretation of these documents, as with the written record, should proceed from an appreciation of certain circumstances peculiar to their creation. For example, during these early years, photography was the almost exclusive preserve of professionals working by commission or as freelancers whose livelihood depended upon public patronage. While many landscape views were taken at the request of a patron whose interest or taste would be thereby revealed, it is seldom readily apparent by whom, or even if a photograph were commissioned. Nor does the appearance of a particular view in an individual's collection necessarily imply that the photograph was taken at the request of that individual, since a scene recorded for a client in one location was often reprinted for sale elsewhere. Even though photographers, especially those engaged in itinerant trade, exercised a degree of initiative and judgment in recording a variety of subjects, it is also true that they were in some measure bound by what they thought would sell. Purchasers chose what appealed to them and the professional photographer had to be sensitive to the popular market if he hoped the samples he displayed would attract orders for prints. Consequently, the photographic record of this period exhibits a selectivity which is in considerable measure a reflection of pioneer British Columbians' sense of themselves and their new land.

Nineteenth-century photographs should also be seen within their technological context, for the photographic record of pre-Confederation British Columbia was shaped by certain practical constraints. Pioneer photographers were encumbered by the awkward paraphernalia, messy procedures and time-consuming delays of collodion or wet-plate technology.³ Because emulsions required preparation and developing immediately before and after exposure, the content of a photograph was carefully considered before a glass plate was readied for the camera; contact printing further encouraged efficient composi-

3 The daguerreotype and calotype processes were virtually obsolete by 1858, and it is doubtful that either was used much in pre-Confederation British Columbia. Pioneer photographer Stephen Spencer advertised himself as a "Daguerreian Artist" in 1859 (*Victoria Gazette*, 23 July 1859), but a year later had changed his title to "Ambrotypist and Photographer" (*Victoria Weekly Gazette*, 4 August 1860). Collodion or wet-plate photography, popular for about thirty years after its introduction in 1851, was based upon a light-sensitive emulsion which had to be exposed and developed while wet. A large number of prints could then be made from the resulting glass negative. For a discussion of the wet-plate process see Andrew J. Birrell, "Wet Plate Photography," *Photo Canada* (September/October 1977): 40-43.



tion.⁴ Exposure times measured in whole rather than in fractions of seconds did not permit early photographers to handle motion — to capture unposed scenes of human activity, to record land from on board ship, to stop the waving of leaves, the movement of animals or pounding surf, or to show the interior machinery of a mill. Subjects which could not or would not remain still are notably missing from the photographic record or exist only as blurred forms. River rapids were preserved as soft swirls and waterfalls as delicate curtains. Streetscapes were more easily recorded although skittish horses, restless dogs, wind-tossed flags and impatient children appear indistinctly. Consequently, street scenes often fail to convey the real bustle of traffic and pedestrians because, for the sake of clarity, carts were parked and merchants posed for the camera. Similarly, teamsters halted their freight wagons on the bluffs of the Cariboo Road, miners interrupted their work at the gold fields and cricketers gathered on the pitch to be photographed. This somewhat misleading stasis apparent in nineteenth-century photographs largely reflects the inability of collodion technology to capture movement.

The bulky equipment of the wet-plate era also circumscribed in other ways the range of subjects that were recorded. Although pack horse and cart could negotiate crude trails, dense vegetation and rugged terrain rendered much of the Coast and Interior inaccessible to itinerant professional photographers burdened by portable darkrooms, heavy equipment and copious supplies.

4 Until the advent of enlarging techniques in the late nineteenth century, the size of the negative determined that of the positive, and cropping necessarily reduced the dimensions of the final print.



Clinton Hotel, ca. 1865. Charles Gentile. *Notwithstanding differences in camera angle, hotel proprietor, road traffic and photographer, similar views of the Clinton Hotel taken several years apart underline the sustained interest in the landmarks of the Cariboo Road.* (Public Archives of Canada C-88907)(Photograph titles by the author.)

Even where access was not a problem, outdoor work entailed considerable inconvenience for early photographers plagued by inclement weather, the ever-present dust and annoying insects, to say nothing of hostile Indians, menacing wildlife⁵ and their own noxious chemicals. The deliberation and effort entailed by each exposure made collodion photography anything but a spontaneous procedure and nineteenth-century photographs anything but haphazard compositions.

In addition to such considerations relating to the creation of the photographic record, the researcher must also accommodate in any analysis of these documents the distortions arising from more than a century of loss and breakage. The following examples chosen to illustrate the professional photographer's portrayal of pre-Confederation British Columbia reflect the factors which shaped the province's photographic legacy. The selection in-

5 Frederick Dally noted in his photograph albums encounters with eagles and rattlesnakes demonstrating some of the tribulations with which itinerant photographers had to contend. "When taking this view of the Great Chasm (all alone) two eagles came to attack me, but I managed to drive them off." (Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Frederick Dally, Album 2, p. 23) "At this point [Little Bluff on the Thompson River], I had to take two views as a rattler happened to be under the stone that I rested my plate against to dry it in the sun, and licked the water off, marking the plate from the top to the bottom with its forked tongue." (Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Frederick Dally, Album 5, p. 44)

cludes both the obvious, because such images are frequently published as illustrations and often best characterize a genre, as well as the obscure, because these views offer fresh representations of popular subjects and often reveal new information. The photographs demand examination both individually and collectively not only for their factual content, but also for their underlying statements about place and society.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

At first glance, the hundreds of surviving photographs depict a bewildering array of subjects, but almost all can be described and classified under the broad categories of transportation, resource industries, settlement, society, nature, and portraiture. Certain features of the natural and human landscapes appear with monotonous regularity, some rarely, and others not at all. In some instances, virtually the same perspective on a subject was used time and again while in others the perspective changed but the subject remained the same. More often, subjects which differed in detail were generically similar. Precipitous canyons, milehouses, mining claims, new towns, and genteel pastimes were the most popular subjects.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a particularly common theme in the photographic record and the Cariboo Road is certainly the most prevalent subject. This wagon road, completed by the Royal Engineers in 1865, created its own settlement geography, opening to view new wilderness scenery as it traversed formidable



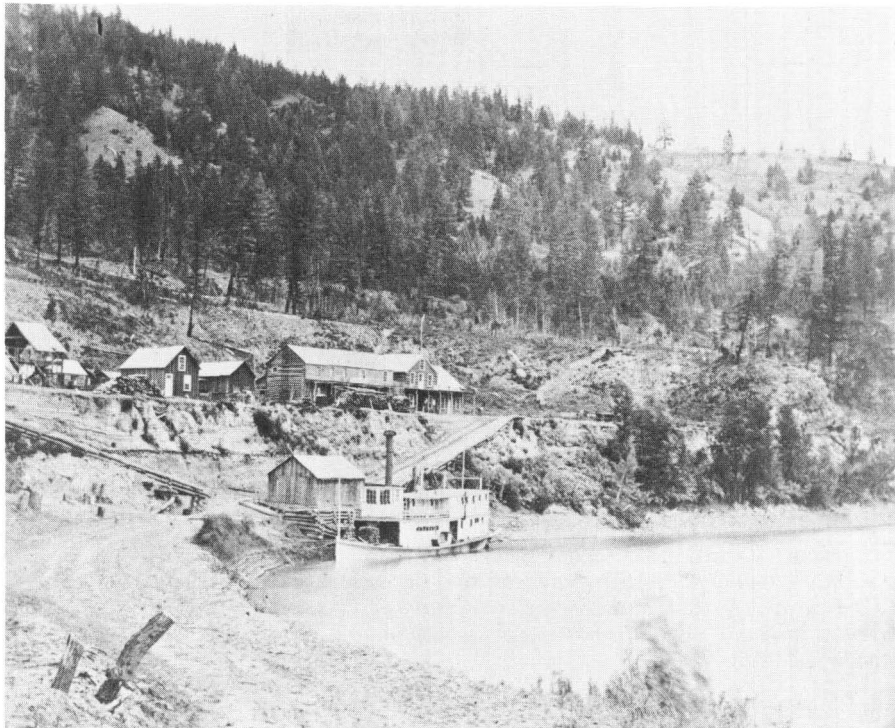
Cariboo Road, Seventeen Miles above Yale, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *The formidable terrain and precarious route contributed to the popularity of this and similar views. Was the focus of the pioneer photographer the natural landscape, or the imprint of man upon it?* (Provincial Archives of British Columbia 10224)

mountain terrain. Photographs emphasize river canyons, engineering feats and service towns. They show the covered wagons and paddlewheel steamers, bridges and stopping-places that linked the colonial capitals to the gold fields. The timber cribbing, sheer cliffs and rock-cuts of the Fraser and Thompson canyons imparted particular interest to portions of the route and frequently attracted the eye of itinerant photographers travelling between Coast and Cariboo. A far smaller number of views, more serene than spectacular, show the roadbed crossing the less precipitous hillsides and rolling range of the Alkali Valley and the Lac La Hache district.

Numerous photographs taken in town and en route illustrate the carts, coaches and wagons hauled along the Cariboo Road by mules, oxen or horses. At Yale, the head of steamboat navigation on the lower Fraser and the beginning of the overland trek north, photographers recorded teamsters embarking with their consignments on the long journey to the mines. Where streams had to be crossed, pack mules were photographed with their loads piled in front of them, waiting to be ferried to the other side. Views of the local express office and steamer landing frequently included a variety of vehicles and draft animals in the foreground. The flat-bottomed, shallow draft sternwheel vessels which plied the waters of the lower Fraser between New Westminster and Yale, the



Nineteen Mile Post, Cariboo Road, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *Mule teams and wagon trains ascending the bluffs of the Cariboo Road on their way to the mines were stopped for photographs. In many such views, the photographer's own wagon and dark tent can be identified. Here they appear inconspicuously at the extreme lower right.* (Public Archives of Canada C-29881)



Sternwheeler *Enterprise* at Soda Creek, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *This photograph is commonly found in recent history texts and picture books about early British Columbia. Rarely omitted from album collections, it was evidently equally popular more than a century ago, and understandably so, for it embodied almost all the elements of the transportation landscape of the gold rush era — the wagon road dips down the embankment to meet the river where the steamer waits at the shore within sight of the Colonial Hotel. Only an ox-drawn wagon train is missing from this portrait of a trans-shipment point.* (Public Archives of Canada C-4965)

lake route to Lillooet and the upper Fraser between Soda Creek and Quesnel were another integral part of the transportation link between government centre and gold town. Trans-shipment points, where steamers met freight wagons, were seldom photographed without a sternwheeler waiting at riverside.

The stopping-places en route to the Cariboo district were as popular with photographers as the canyon terrain of the wagon road. Historical photographs document abundantly the hostelries which proliferated in response to the bustle of traffic to and from the gold fields. Views of the milehouses, Alexandra Lodge, Bonaparte House, Boothroyd's Forest House, Cache Creek House, the Clinton Hotel, the Colonial Hotel, Cottonwood House, Hamilton's Wayside House, and Salter's Half Way House portray the one- and two-storey log or less common frame inns where travellers stopped overnight. Often in the immediate vicinity were stables, storage sheds and a variety of out-buildings as well as stump-strewn fields and garden plots enclosed by cedar



Cottonwood Ranch, 1865. Charles Gentile. *Frequently photographed were the numerous stopping places between Coast and Cariboo. The Cottonwood Ranch, built in 1864 between Quesnel and Barkerville, was one of the many hostelries which offered travellers little more than the bare necessities of room and board.* (Public Archives of Canada C-88915)

rail fences. In front of these hostelries, itinerant photographers recorded stagecoaches and freight wagons, teams of yoked oxen and lines of pack mules, inn-keepers and ostlers, travellers and teamsters.

RESOURCE INDUSTRIES

The resource industries of early British Columbia attracted travelling photographers, but only the gold rush rivalled the attention devoted to the Cariboo Road. Claims, miners and their surroundings became part of an imagery common to Williams, Grouse, Lightning, Lowhee, Mosquito and other creeks of the Cariboo and lesser rushes. Panoramas taken at the gold fields show mining communities amid a clutter of flumes, Cornish wheels, shaftheads, tunnel entrances, stumps and log cabins. Scenes at claim sites depict the landscape transformation wrought by the men who moiled for gold. In a few Cariboo views with mountain and forest surroundings, mining operations are virtually peripheral to the overall impression of place, imparting to these records of natural setting scenic qualities shared by generically similar landscape panoramas of transportation and settlement.

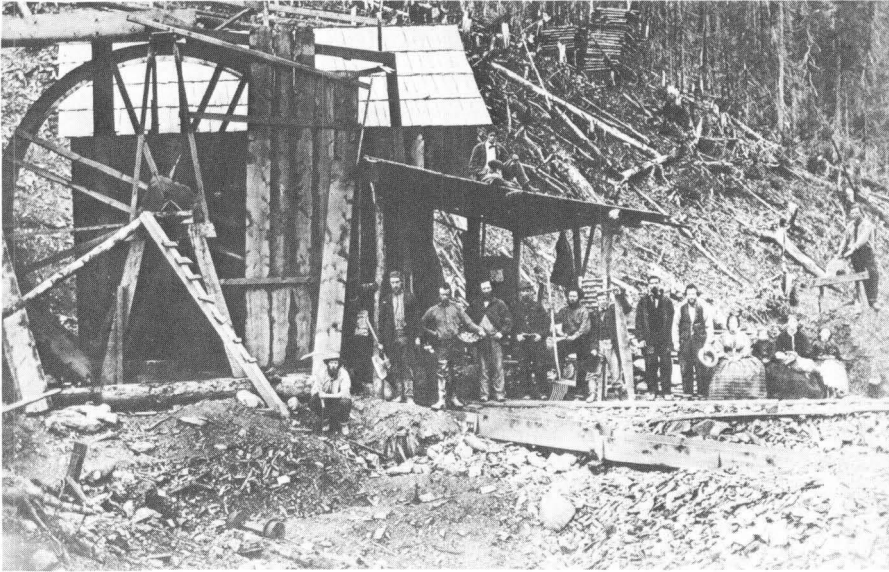
Most photographs taken at the mines show men at the scene of their labour. Independent miners, business partners and mining companies commissioned photographs of themselves and their claims. Group likenesses, much more common than individual portraits, are of a kind. They generally include men sporting the usual mixture of beards, moustaches, workclothes, hats, boots, and brandishing picks, shovels or pitchforks beside some other evidence of their activities such as gravel-car and dump-box, wheelbarrow and plank track, or windlass and bucket. A widespread feature of the gold rush land-

scape, the large Cornish wheels used to pump water out of mine shafts were even more popular than flume or tunnel mouth as a backdrop for these group photographs.

Views of gold mining alone are more numerous than those of all other resource industries combined principally because, before Confederation, other resource industries were adumbrated but not developed. Nevertheless, photographers left a modest record of the nascent forest industry by capturing hand-loggers, yoked oxen and skid roads. Fishing and farming are more sparsely represented by historical photographs with the most commonly depicted subjects being canoes, weirs, racks and caches of the Indian fisheries in the Cowichan district and Fraser canyon. Although agriculture had begun, only the occasional view shows tree-stumps rising above a grain crop or stooked sheaves in a cleared field near Victoria or Nanaimo, in the lower Fraser valley or near the milehouses en route to the Cariboo. Most farm scenes record only a proprietor and his property while exhibiting few obvious signs of farming. Similarly, photographs of the secondary industries of saw and flour milling present building and owner, but no productive activity and little technological detail.



Hydraulic Gold Mining, Williams Creek, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *Panoramas taken at the gold fields reveal the havoc of truncated hillsides where miners posed proudly among felled trees, rock tailings, planks, barrels, ladders and sluice-boxes on their claims.* (Public Archives of Canada C-26181)



Alturas Claim, Stout's Gulch, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *This view of the Cornish wheel on the Alturas Claim, probably showing the company partners and their families, exemplifies a genre of gold rush photographs commissioned as personal mementos by claim owners in the Cariboo and reprinted for household collections of interested citizens in Victoria.* (Public Archives of Canada C-8078)



John Muir's Saw Mill, Sooke, ca. 1868. Frederick Dally. *The few surviving views of early saw mills are limited to outdoor scenes taken from the mill yard or dock, usually showing a building exterior, sawn lumber, mill workers and sometimes three-masted ships which sailed to distant markets.* (Public Archives of Canada C-8073)

SETTLEMENT

The photographic record of settlement, composed mainly of town panoramas and mainstreet views, documents extensively the influence of transportation and resources upon the development of British Columbia's demographic patterns. Peripatetic photographers concentrated on the shanty towns which rapidly followed the discoveries of gold, and on service centres and transshipment points. Images of compact communities were often preserved in their entirety on a single glass plate. These panoramas demonstrate the outward appearance and spatial configuration of frontier settlements revealing developed property and stump-strewn fields as well as the proximity of river, forest or mountain and transportation connections by water or wagon road. Vantage points sometimes spawned hackneyed images of place, for where a hill or meander afforded an unobstructed view, different photographers independently produced almost identical town views. Lytton, for example, located at "the Forks" where the Fraser and Thompson rivers meet fifty-seven miles above Yale, was repeatedly photographed looking upstream from a hillside on the eastern flank of town. In some cases, a community was too dispersed or local topography did not offer a suitable vantage for a single-plate panorama. By the late 1860s, for example, Victoria was already too large for a single-exposure illustration of its geographical extent, natural setting and architec-



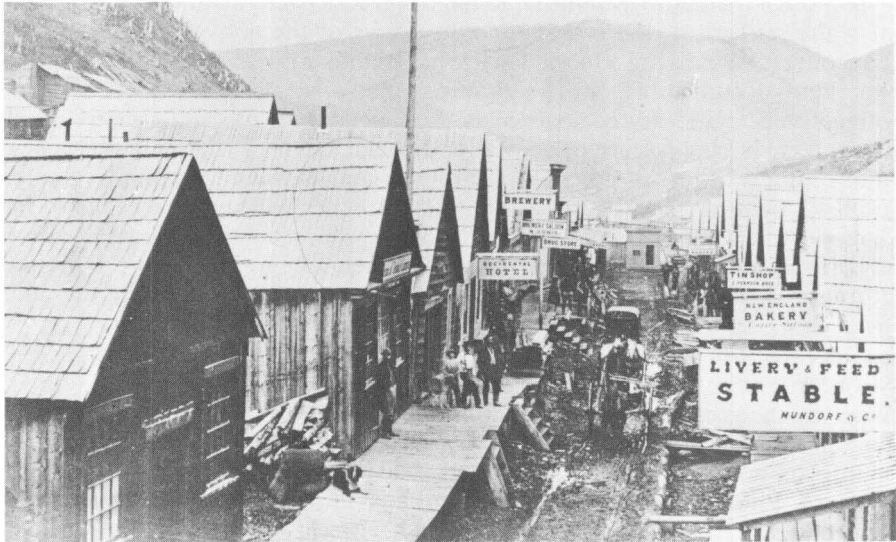
Yale, ca. 1865. Charles Gentile. *A curve in the river just downstream from the town enabled this panorama of Yale which shows the relatively large frontier community spreading from the bank of the Fraser to the base of the mountain. In the 1860s, this scene was not only recorded by numerous photographers, but also painted in watercolours by Frederick Whymper and published as an engraving in the Illustrated London News, 12 May 1865. (Public Archives of Canada C-88930)*

tural variety. At least one photographer adopted the multiple-exposure solution: from a height of land at the south end of town, several different plates were taken and the prints mounted contiguously to produce a view of Victoria extending from the government buildings and the James Bay bridge north along Wharf Street to the upper harbour area.

Common among historical photographs of settlement is the representative view focussing on a section of town, distinctive landmarks, prominent buildings or other subjects which symbolized the community's importance. Landmarks selected to represent Victoria and New Westminster reflected town development as ports and also as centres of political and commercial activity. Esquimalt and Nanaimo were readily identified with the British Pacific fleet. Regardless of place, mainstreet in nineteenth-century British Columbia, whether wide thoroughfare or narrow track, epitomized a town's economic activity and promise, and gave rise to a popular genre of landscape views. Even though some settlements were no more than a single street while others boasted a business district of considerable proportions, a street panorama remained a desirable portrait of almost any place showing the width (and therefore economic stature?) of the street, the height of buildings and the type and extent of commercial enterprise.



Harbour, Esquimalt, ca. 1868. Frederick Dally. *British men-of-war at anchor, the naval church, cemetery, arsenal and clubhouse were immediately associated with Esquimalt and the Royal Navy, just as views of Government House, or the Legislative, Treasury, Assay and Post offices signified Victoria and the seat of colonial government.* (Public Archives of Canada C-7848)



Streetscape, Barkerville, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *Photographs of mining town mainstreets showed the false fronts, shake roofs and advertising placards which faced each other across plank sidewalks and muddy roads, signifying progress in settlement and commerce.* (Provincial Archives of British Columbia 5191)



Indian Village, Quatsino, ca. 1868. Frederick Dally. *While the contents of this photograph offer to the archaeologist discrete details about native settlement, its repeated presence in private album collections illustrates nineteenth-century fascination with the strange world of aboriginal peoples.* (Public Archives of Canada C-22371)

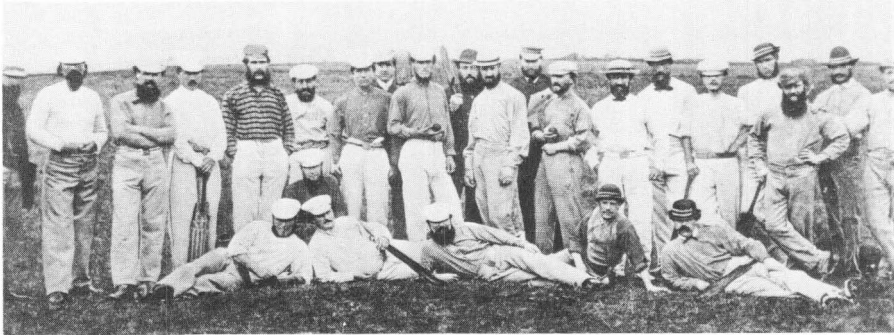
Although the photographic depiction of place is overwhelmingly a chronicle of white settlement, there are numerous views of the native communities of Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlotte Islands and the British Columbia mainland documenting the longhouses, tents and lean-tos of permanent villages and temporary encampments. Scenes at Quatsino and Comox document the recurring pattern of coastal settlement. Drying racks, salmon caches, chiefs' houses, totem poles and dug-out canoes were commonly photographed, but even more attractive subjects were the exotic paraphernalia of Indian mortuary sites. By contrast, very few views portray the Chinese presence in British Columbia. In fact, this element of the photographic record is limited during this early period to the occasional Chinese miner shown at the gold fields or a Chinese name appearing amid the shop signs on mainstreet.

SOCIETY

Whereas the great majority of photographs of pre-Confederation British Columbia illustrate the Cariboo Road, gold rush and settlement, a small but significant group presents the emerging social order of the island and mainland colonies. Photographers recorded the colonial elite, their landscape and their pursuit of leisure pastimes. Scenes of cricket, rowing and other recreational activities attested to the lifestyle transplanted by colonials to outlying parts of Empire. Nattily attired Sunday and holiday picnickers posed incongruously amid a tangle of underbrush or beside the gnarled roots of an upturned tree, at the lip of a waterfall or near its base. Some successful immigrants sought to impose an Old World order on their property. The landscaped gardens and manicured lawns of "Gonzales," "Pentrelew," "Fernwood," "Fairfield" and other Victoria mansions were places to pass leisure hours fashionably engaged in croquet as a genteel recreation, or at tea as a social institution. If most portraits of home were statements about settlement, some were contrived especially to demonstrate high social standing.

NATURE

British Columbia's natural landscape was overwhelmingly wilderness, but pioneer photographers generally paid less attention to the intricacies and diversity of the natural environment than to man's imprint. Many aspects of the natural landscape were not photographed at all: seascapes are singularly absent in the photographic record; lofty mountain panoramas are few; and nature compositions showing carpets of moss, thickets of salal, stands of cedar or fields of bunchgrass are virtually non-existent. Nevertheless, wilderness inescapably appears as the natural setting for views of transportation, resource exploitation and settlement. Photographers captured much of the spectacular and expansive scenery accessible to them; their views of the Cariboo Road could hardly avoid the bluffs, torrents and defiles of the Fraser canyon, the meanders and slopes of the Thompson valley, and the waterfalls, lakes and mountains of the Cariboo. Occasionally, photographs of private estates and public parks portrayed Nature tamed and ordered. Seldom the focus of attention in early views, the forest nevertheless asserted its presence as a wall of trees rising behind a straggling Indian village, a tidewater saw mill, or a mining town; likenesses of loggers beside a giant fir or picnickers in sylvan settings reveal almost inadvertently the extraordinary size of West Coast trees.

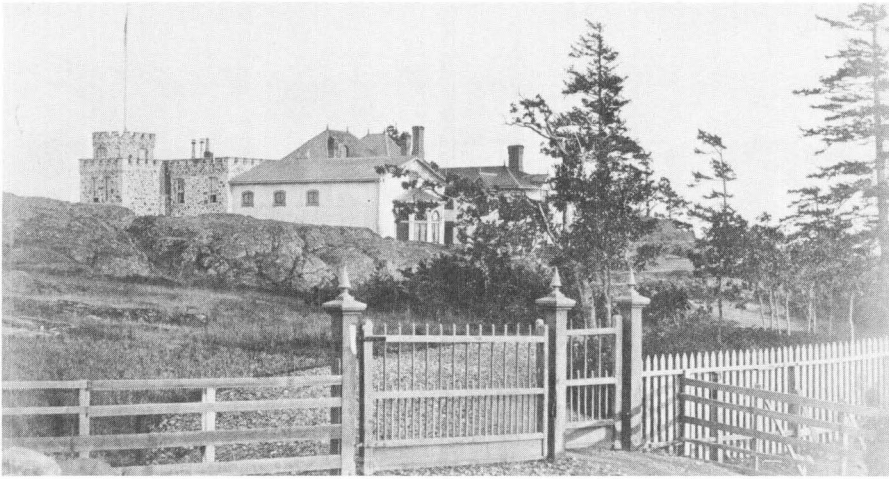


New Westminster Versus Victoria, Victoria, 17 July 1865. Photographer unknown. *This photograph of posed cricketers conveys a static impression common to the early photographer's portrayal of sports. Such group likenesses present team and club members, sometimes showing in the distance the carefully tended grounds or roughly cleared fields where men in waistcoats and women holding parasols gathered to watch local and intercolonial matches. (From a photograph in the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Public Archives of Canada C-36074)*



"Fairfield," Victoria, ca. 1865. Photographer unknown. *A particularly eloquent example of the landscape of social order is presented in this photograph of "Fairfield," the home of Joseph W. Trutch, engineer, road-builder, speculator and first Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of British Columbia. The ornamental architectural detail and landscaped property, family and servants, curved driveway and horse-drawn carriages, trellissed ivy and croquet hoops exude a conception of the Old Country parkland estate. (Public Archives of Canada C-3854)*

ARCHIVARIA



Government House, Victoria, ca. 1866. Probably Frederick Dally. *Photographers recorded the world of the colonial elite: Governor and Mrs. Seymour, Admiral and Mrs. Hastings, naval officers, political figures and visiting dignitaries as well as government offices and Government House in both capitals, churches and prominent public buildings.* (Public Archives of Canada C-65085)



The Gorge, Victoria, ca. 1868. Frederick Dally. *The public park offering nature in a domesticated form was transplanted to the British Columbia wilderness. Picturesque views of the Gorge show paths leading down a hillside to a foot-bridge where the waters of the inlet narrowed.* (Public Archives of Canada C-37888)

PORTRAITURE

Portraits, undoubtedly the mainstay of the nineteenth-century photographer, were produced in a variety of sizes and formats to satisfy patrons from a range of social and economic backgrounds. However, the studio composition — whether a head-and-shoulders portrait taken against a plain background or a full-length likeness set in a mock Victorian drawing-room — presents for the researcher an extremely insular and rather limited perspective on its subject. Governed by “a very strict decorum of costume, occasion and pose,”⁶ formal portraiture imposed a sameness upon studio likenesses, masking class distinctions. The significance of such photographs lies more in the fact of their existence than in their factual content. On the contrary, the *in situ* portrait, for example, of a family in front of their home or of miners in front of their claim, makes a statement about the relationship of people to place, capturing the interaction between subject and setting. Whereas the studio portrait symbolized social standing or material success, the *in situ* likeness demonstrated it. For the purposes of this survey then, the former is a subtle indication of British Columbians’ sense of themselves in the emerging social order; the latter is an obvious affirmation of their perception of place. Only the *in situ* likeness has therefore been integrated into this examination of the photographic record.

FRONTIER PROGRESS AND COLONIAL TRADITION

British Columbians shared the widespread international fascination with the photograph, one of the amazing discoveries of the nineteenth century. The novelty of fixing for all time the image of a person, a place, or an event using a mechanical device and a chemical process gripped the imagination, particularly because the photograph possessed the singular intriguing characteristic of reproducing appearances accurately and relatively inexpensively. Clarity of detail imparted universal appeal and although early portraits and views were sometimes as much a product of luck or perseverance as of technical skill, even the poorest photograph conveyed a sense of the actual. As a document which was perceived as a faithful representation of reality, the photograph complemented the Victorian belief that “truth” was revealed through careful observation and drew public praise for its honesty and clarity.⁷

Formal studio portraits aside, the popular enthusiasm for photographs derived from interests including personal association with or curiosity about place, fascination with technology, and preoccupation with progress. British Columbians sought photographs of themselves with their friends, relatives, business partners, and team-mates at home, work and play. Likenesses of miner and claim, logger and tree, family and house, merchant and shop gave rise to a boastful imagery of success and personal property akin to the illustrations commissioned for late nineteenth-century county atlases of Ontario. In capturing both an individual’s appearance and his physical surroundings or

6 Alan Thomas, “Authenticity and Charm: The Revival of Victorian Photography,” *Victorian Studies* 18, no. 1 (September 1974): 104.

7 Advertising in the *British Colonist*, *Cariboo Sentinel* and other local newspapers exploited the public fascination with truth, proclaiming the opportunity to obtain a “correct likeness,” describing photographers’ work as “beautiful and truthful” or noting that it exhibited “truthful delineation” or “truthfulness, beauty and clearness of execution.”

social milieu, such compositions declared personal aspirations and achievements, just as the town panorama or streetscape view revealed the collective advance of settlement and commerce.

British Columbians wanted a record of familiar places: views of their town, mainstreet, prominent buildings, transportation links, social amenities and nearby scenery. In promoting views of various places within the Cariboo district, the editors of Barkerville's newspaper expressed confidence that few readers would not "avail themselves of the opportunity of procuring souvenirs of places made familiar to them from the force of association."⁸ A photograph, in preserving the evanescent, imparted importance to the mundane and confirmed the personal attachment to a place made familiar through this "force of association." Sent to family or friends, such a memento permitted others to see the setting of an individual's activities, the place of his emotional attachment, or the source of his pride. The immigrant to British Columbia was encouraged by newspaper advertisements to send photographs of his house, claim, town or local scenic attractions to reassure family at home, to boast of personal success, or to encourage friends to immigrate. Views of Cariboo scenery were "always on hand and for sale"⁹ at L.A. Blanc's photographic gallery in Barkerville and, in 1870, an advertisement in the *Cariboo Sentinel* suggested that "parties writing home would do well to call on Mr. Blanc and select from his varied supply a souvenir for their friends."¹⁰ The further suggestion that views of Barkerville taken after the 1871 Dominion Day celebration were "very handsome, and when sent abroad [would] give strangers a favorable impression of our town"¹¹ underlines the boosterism evident in the record images of nineteenth-century British Columbia.

If British Columbians were eager to purchase views of familiar surroundings, they were also keen to obtain photographs of distant landscapes never before seen. This interest derived from nineteenth-century curiosity about place which encompassed Victorian concerns with truth, technology and progress, lending photographs more than mere local appeal. This curiosity encouraged travel, exploration and imperial expansion, news of which enhanced a growing popular sense of the diversity of the physical environment and human experience. Travel literature "in the form of published journals and diaries, travel books, and accounts in the illustrated press proliferated in response to the enormous Victorian demand for information and new experience."¹² Within this intellectual climate, photographs of places never visited appealed to the nineteenth-century taste for the exotic, the spectacular or the unusual. Belief in the objectivity of the photograph enabled Victorians to enjoy distant landscapes vicariously; album prints, stereograms¹³ and *cartes de visite* became a surrogate for travel.

8 *Cariboo Sentinel*, 11 July 1867, p. 3.

9 *Ibid.*, 13 August 1870, p. 2.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, 16 July 1871, p. 3.

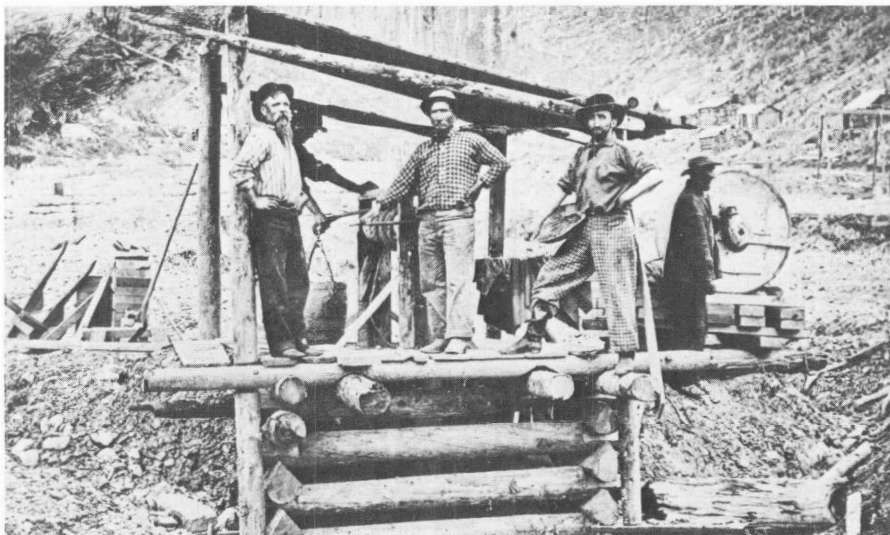
12 Ronald Rees, "Images of the Prairie: Landscape Painting and Perception in the Western Interior of Canada," *Canadian Geographer* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1976): 260.

13 Based on principles of binocular vision, two slightly offset three-by-three-inch prints were mounted on a 3½-by-7-inch card and viewed through an optical device known as a stereoscope to produce a single image with the realistic sensation of three-dimensional space.



Fort Street, Victoria, ca. 1869. Frederick Dally. *From saloon owners to bank managers, entrepreneurs and government officials alike were photographed in front of their stores and offices, extolling individual and collective contributions to the growing community. In this view, Dally's Photographic Gallery can be seen at the immediate right of Scotch House. Framed samples of his work are on display, the oblong frame likely containing his multiple-exposure panorama of Victoria.* (Public Archives of Canada C-17807)

British Columbians were curious about their own part of the world no less than residents of the Old Country were about this outlying corner of the Empire. The colonial capitals commanded the attention of Cariboo miners and inn-keepers as centres of political importance, commercial development and social amenities where wide thoroughfares and brick buildings, stately residences and public parks bespoke settled comfort in a civilized environment. Yet, if Victoria seemed elegant to the residents of Williams Creek, then the gold fields seemed to the citizens of the capitals an exotic frontier where fortunes were made. Newspaper reports of government proceedings in Victoria, freight traffic through Yale, gold strikes on Stout's Gulch, Indian Commission business in the Queen Charlottes, and naval operations at Esquimalt piqued public interest in distant parts of the colonies. Such accounts made creeks and shantytowns, bluffs and milehouses familiar, if only in name, and popularized photographs illustrating different lifestyles, human enterprise, engineering feats, resource exploitation, natural wonders and material progress. The success of photographers who travelled up the Coast and into the Interior, some on official business, others pursuing a freelance trade, was in large part the result of the market for landscape views which transmitted some of the pioneer excitement of pre-Confederation British Columbia.



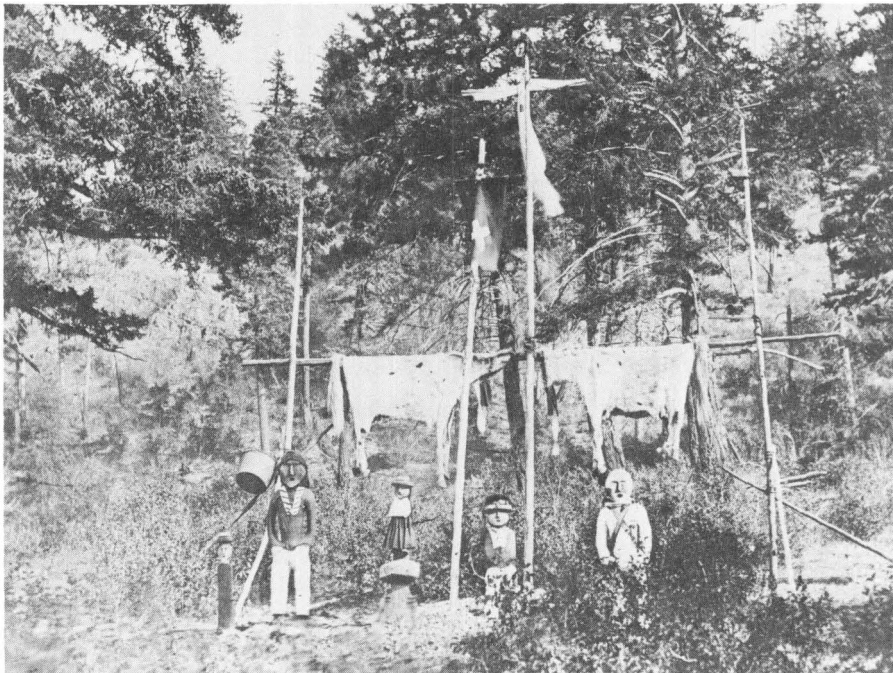
The Sheepshead Claim, Williams Creek, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *The editors of the Cariboo Sentinel asked, "What more acceptable souvenir can be sent to one's friends than a carte de visite [a 2¼-by-3½-inch print mounted on a 2½-by-4-inch cardboard mount the size of a calling card] or a view of the scene of labor in which the wanderer from home is engaged?"* 13 August 1870, p. 3 (Public Archives of Canada C-19423)



Yates Street and the Harbour from the Nicholas Hotel, Victoria, 1871. Benjamin Baltzly. *Brick buildings, embellished facades, streetlamps and fancy signs lining parts of Fort, Government, Yates and Wharf streets in Victoria, and Columbia Street in New Westminster presented more civilized faces befitting their stature in the colonial economic and social order.* (Provincial Archives of British Columbia 25312)

Victorians, at home and in the colonies, were fascinated by photographs which effectively conveyed the exotic world of the indigenous populations of imperial possessions. While the native people did not constitute a large market for photographs, perhaps because of superstitions, perhaps because of financial considerations, the Indians of the Coast and Interior were subjects included in reports of the Indian Commissioner, accounts in the illustrated press, and household collections on display in Victorian parlours. Nevertheless, the extent of the photographic record of native peoples and their landscapes was circumscribed by a number of factors. While the Cariboo Road gave professionals on their way to the gold fields an opportunity to photograph the tribes of the Interior, the northern coasts of the island and mainland were sparsely populated and virtually undeveloped by European immigrants, and therefore were less likely to be visited by itinerant photographers. Furthermore, access to Indian settlements was difficult and native co-operation was not assured. Consequently, the early record of these areas was largely the work of a few official photographers on government tours of West Coast tribes.

Seen in the nineteenth century as a witness to marvels of science and engineering, the photograph documented the Victorian enchantment with technology, as well as being in itself a manifestation of scientific progress; it also recorded the technological advances which provided increased comfort,



Grave of Indian Chief, near Lytton, ca. 1868. Frederick Dally. *Photographs of Indian chiefs, villages, canoes, weirs and gravesites intrigued Victorians, whether they lived in colony or homeland, for the native, his landscape, customs and dress were exotic.* (Public Archives of Canada C-10337)



Suspension Bridge, Fourteen Miles Above Yale, ca. 1865. Charles Gentile. *Photographs of the wagon route through the Fraser and Thompson canyons, often combining feats of civil engineering with spectacular scenery, symbolized the progress of transportation and commerce.* (Public Archives of Canada C-88890)

greater efficiency and higher profits to the pioneers who were beginning to control, rather than be controlled by, their environment. Photographers captured the rudimentary resource technology of the early mining and logging industries. Scenes at the gold fields showed distant audiences how fortunes were made through the use of Cornish wheels, flumes, sluices, tunnels and windlasses; views of hand loggers and skid roads illustrated the crude but effective methods of forcing the coastal forests to yield their wealth. Photographs of the bluffs and bridges of the Cariboo Road celebrated the feats of civil engineering which at once conquered awesome obstacles of terrain and distance while opening avenues of transportation to the Interior.

Wonders of technology were also monuments to astonishing changes in man's relationship to his world. For example, views of the wagon road were more than a testimonial to the Royal Engineers. Scenes of freight traffic along the bluffs of the Fraser, at the milehouses above Lillooet or at the express office in Yale were proof of the development of trade and commerce. New lines of communication were portrayed, bringing easier access and expanded economic opportunities. The imagery of mining and logging demonstrated British Columbians' dominion over nature's resources. Cornish wheels and skid roads were the means by which the gold-bearing gravels and the giant cedars were exploited, forming the basis of the emerging economy. These photographs were "part of the process by which men could persuade themselves of their mastery of material things."¹⁴

14 Martin and Francis, "The Camera's Eye," p. 234.

Scenes of men physically dwarfed by immense trees embodied metaphorically the clash between David and Goliath and were not, as has been suggested recently, “stately death portraits of the great cedars and firs” in which there is “dignity and respect and a profound sense of tragedy.” The conclusion that “the loggers themselves, who paid for the pictures, are subsidiary figures, like the donors in an altar-piece; the central figure is that of the victim”¹⁵ is simply far too romantic a view of so exploitive an industry. If there were any dignity in such photographs, it was that of the logger; any respect was surely an exaggerated self-respect. These images were boastful, not elegiac; they were not so much a death portrait of the tree as a testimonial to the logger. The central figure was the assailant, not the victim.

The paucity of fishing photographs reflects in part the embryonic state of the industry before Confederation. Views of salmon weirs, drying racks and tree caches of the Indian fishery commanded attention more as examples of foreign customs than as statements about resource exploitation. At the time, neither fishing nor fish processing involved impressive or complex technology. Most work was done manually by Indian labourers who did not constitute a ready market for likenesses and whose photographs did not represent pioneer progress in early British Columbia. Canneries were few before 1871 and, like tidewater logging camps and saw mills, were often inaccessible to photographers because of geographical isolation. In any event, canning lacked appeal for photographers and their clients because views of building exteriors revealed singularly little about the industry and photographs of interior operations were precluded by low light levels.

The comparable scarcity of agricultural subjects suggests that farming did not evoke in popular interest and everyday experience the excitement of gold mining or even the challenge of hand logging. The early influx of white population sought money and adventure far more than land. Because farming, traditionally considered a conservative and settled pursuit, required heavy personal investment and yielded financial returns only gradually, it was peripheral to the British Columbian frontier enthusiasm for signs of rapid and obvious material progress.

The transformation of wilderness generated much excitement, and it was photographs of the ordered settlement landscape emerging from raw physical surroundings which best typified the Victorian ethic of progress. Photographs documented the existence of towns where a short time before there had been nothing but rock and forest. Views of frontier communities showing the juxtaposition of settlement and wilderness were unambiguous statements about the rapid transformation of the natural landscape in the name of civilization. A town panorama became a measure of progress realized and a portent of further development; successive views begged comparison and boasted visible growth. Photographs confirmed the importance of settlements — individually as products of local initiative and collectively as integral parts in a larger scheme of colonial affairs. Each town, village, and milehouse commanded the attention of photographer and public by virtue of the fact that a community existed to which people were committed and through which commerce flowed.

15 John Szarkowski, *The Photographer and the American Landscape* (New York, 1963), p. 4.



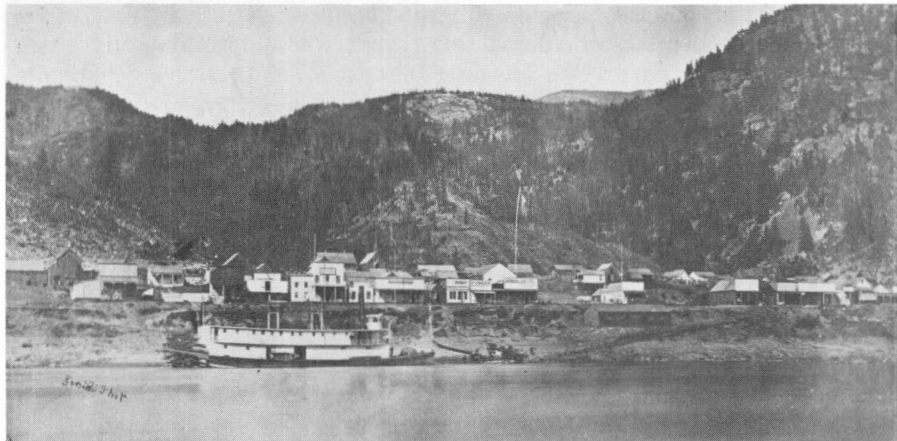
Indian Salmon Weir, Quamichan, ca. 1868. Frederick Dally. *Photographers offered for sale views of the Indian fishery capitalizing on the public interest which focussed not on the resource industry but rather on the crude and ingenious practices employed. Many such photographs were later published in the pictorial press, this one appearing in the Canadian Illustrated News, 6 September 1873.* (Public Archives of Canada C-10334)



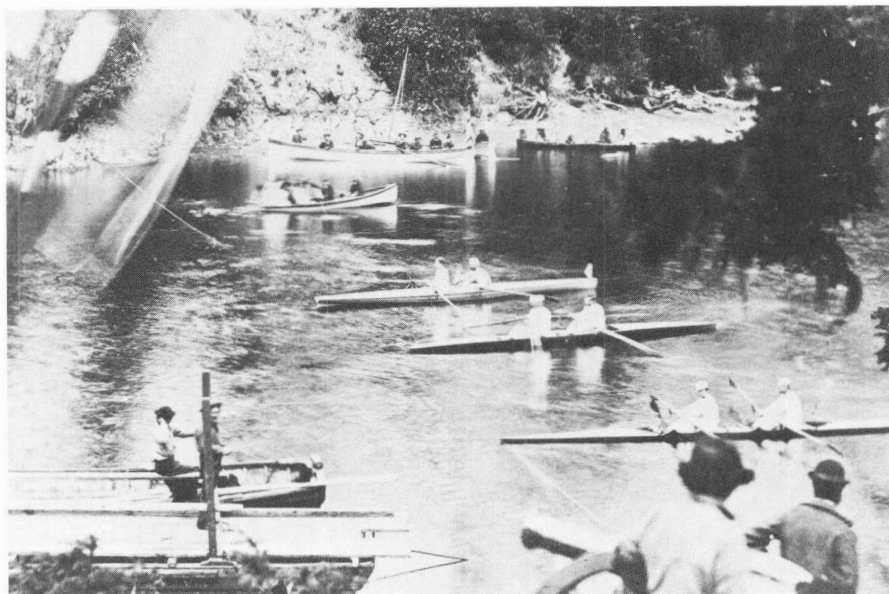
Farm, Cowichan, 1866. Frederick Dally. *The elements of this scene were carefully composed to illustrate the full extent and diversity of one man's agricultural enterprise. Such photographs, taken at the request and expense of the farm owner, were not general images of agrarian felicity, but rather were personal statements of financial investment, family enterprise and the successful creation of home.* (Provincial Archives of British Columbia 68306)



Barkerville, Williams Creek, 1867-68. Frederick Dally. *Views of Barkerville, Camerontown, Richfield, Kelleyville, Marysville, Van Winkle and other gold rush communities drew attention to tightly grouped wooden buildings flanked by denuded hillsides. Shops, offices, saloons, hotels and log cabins shared the creek floor with flumes, mineheads, Cornish wheels and rock tailings proclaiming the reason for the town's existence.* (Public Archives of Canada C-24479)



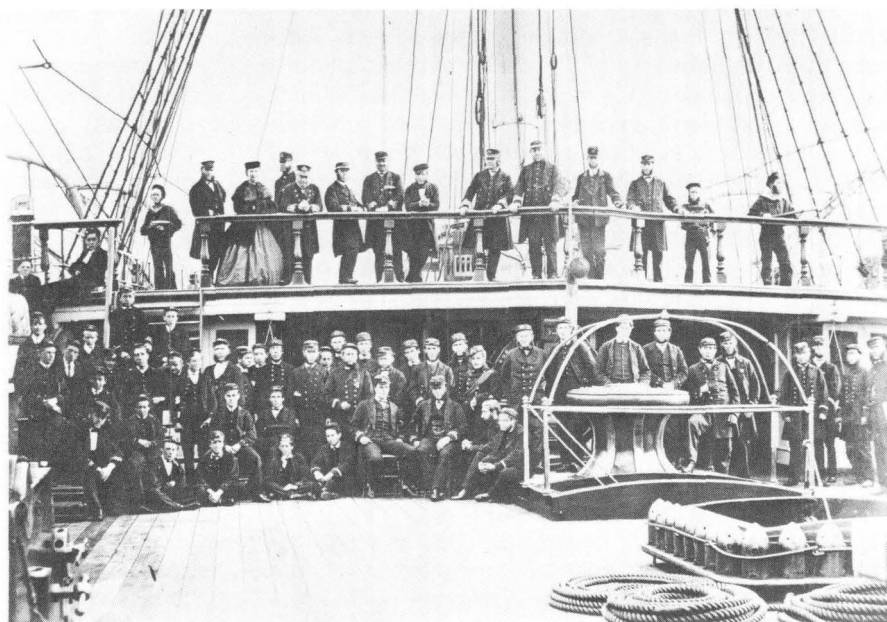
Yale, ca. 1865. Charles Gentile. *Fraser River, Cariboo Road, freight wagons and paddlewheel steamers were integral parts of the photographer's portrayal of Yale. The head of inland navigation on the lower Fraser and with completion of the wagon road in 1865, the beginning of the overland route to the gold fields, Yale was significant as a trans-shipment point from which distances were measured and unfamiliar locations placed in relation.* (Public Archives of Canada C-88886)



Rowing on the Fraser River, ca. 1868. Frederick Dally. *The Queen's birthday was celebrated with regattas in the tradition of Henley upon Thames. Although the racing shells were stationary, the blurred flags, oars and spectators in the rowboat betray a time exposure.* (Public Archives of Canada C-37841)

Frontier conditions did not long survive in parts of early British Columbia, for settlers soon established social amenities and imposed order and even elegance on the landscape. The stamp of Empire formed an integral part of the progression from pioneer hardship to settled comfort. Newly arrived British immigrants, like members of colonial societies elsewhere, looked upon the Old World as “the mecca of all that was tasteful, refined, and creative.”¹⁶ Despite the realities of frontier British Columbia, many colonials clung to their conservative and English conception of a genteel society that incorporated order and decorum within a stable hierarchy. Views of government buildings and colonial officials, British men-of-war and Queen Victoria’s birthday celebrations clearly illustrated the Imperial presence in this remote outpost. Habit and homesickness motivated many citizens of Victoria and New Westminster to pursue Old World recreational pastimes. Leisure time was given over to croquet or tea enjoyed in the landscaped gardens of Old Country estates. Club and school sports were introduced by the Royal Engineers, the Royal Navy, schoolmasters and colonial officials. Along with the public park came the picnic organized by families, friends, church groups, clubs and businesses. A genteel social institution, it was considered at least a relaxing diversion and, in some cases, even a rejuvenating moral experience. Photographs of such trappings of upper middle class life which were most easily and inexpensively transplanted demonstrated that early British Columbia was a civilized place despite the wilderness and isolation.

16 Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, 1967), p. 71.



H.M.S. *Zealous*, Esquimalt, 1869. Frederick Dally. *The British Colonist* informed its readers that "Mr. F. Dally, of Fort street, has lately taken several charming photographic views of Government House and surroundings; the Admiral's house at Esquimalt; H.M. Ship *Zealous* with a number of officers grouped on deck." 25 February 1869, p. 3. Similar group likenesses taken on board H.M.S. *Sutlej*, *Sparrowhawk* and other ships of the Pacific fleet based at Esquimalt were purchased by crew members and public alike. Often included in household albums, they pronounced unequivocally the ties of Empire. (Metropolitan Toronto Library K-57)

While coniferous forests, dense vegetation, rugged mountains and abrupt coastlines did not conform to nineteenth-century European artistic taste for the picturesque, photographs of British Columbia's wilderness did satisfy the Victorian enthusiasm for the exotic. In contrast to the very orderly appearance and gentle proportions of the British countryside, the topography of the island and mainland colonies was big, empty and raw. In their views of canyons and cataracts, peaks and passes, early photographers emphasized the intractable, the forbidding and the spectacular aspects of the natural environment. However, the photographic record also reveals that despite this abundance of surrounding wilderness and the absence of industrial urbanism, traditional enclaves of domesticated nature were re-created in public parks where town residents enjoyed holiday picnics and Sunday strolls. Yet, nature views were straightforward and unreflective. Artistic attention to microscale detail was not part of pioneer photography. Fascination with light, shape and texture had not yet entered the aesthetics of the new medium. Essentially "placeless" compositions were invariably identified by captions; alone they would not have satisfied nineteenth-century curiosity about place, and abstract fine-art motives would not have suited the popular concept of the photograph as a record image.

In short, photography in pre-Confederation British Columbia was a simple kind of picture-making, not a refined vision. Although acquainted with technological innovations,¹⁷ pioneer photographers were not pre-occupied with the acceptance of the medium as fine art. While they were not insensitive to artistic considerations, their professional concerns were essentially pragmatic. Work was executed with respect for style and composition, but the choice of subjects was dictated by the interests of the buying public. The portrayal of subjects was neither allegorical nor artificial. Photographs were record images, not aesthetic abstractions. As a means of visual expression, they revealed more about the appearance of the subject than the inner emotions of the photographer who recorded the style of a house, the members of a family, the construction of a bridge, the mechanism of a Cornish wheel, and the terrain of a gorge. These photographers described, but did not interpret. Yet in photographing both ordinary and extraordinary subjects, they produced a visual history of early British Columbia which reduced such intricate historical episodes as the gold rush to their elemental aspects.

The photographic record, because it began with the initial influx of white population, captures the pioneer outlook of pre-Confederation British Columbia. A preponderance of images depicting and extolling the rise of settlement, the growth of industry, and the improvement of transportation attests to a perception of place intimately tied to progress in a new land. This enthusiasm for material development, this predilection for striking symbols of man's impact on the natural landscape is understandable. From the perspective of the frontier experience, everything seemed new and different. The pioneer regarded the transformation of wilderness as "the reward for his sacrifice, the definition of his achievement, and the source of his pride."¹⁸ Through technology, investment and prodigious effort, British Columbians had subdued the imposing physical environment, exploited the resources, and reduced the isolation. The recency and rapidity of this development made progress a common and concrete reality that was highly visible in material terms. A photograph which showed British Columbians' imprint on the land was clearly a reflection of their own accomplishments.

British Columbia also offered the photographer an intriguing juxtaposition of elegance and roughness. To colonials who brought with them conservative ideas of government, home and society based upon British traditions and Victorian taste, photographs of elegant surroundings and genteel pastimes confirmed the creation of a civilized society and an ordered landscape in an isolated corner of Empire. British Columbians' desire for a simple record of their accomplishments produced a photographic legacy that reflects the interests, attitudes and values which they brought to and imprinted on their new environment.

17 Advertisements in British Columbia newspapers and illustrations in periodicals elsewhere clearly indicate that connections existed between professional photographers in British Columbia and photographers, galleries, manufacturers, and publishers in London, San Francisco, New York, Montreal and other centres of photography. Such connections enabled the distribution of information about new equipment, techniques, and ideas, suggesting that, although British Columbia was geographically remote, its photography did not develop in isolation.

18 Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, pp. 24-25.