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**Regulating Prostitution in British Columbia
1895-1930**

by

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ABSTRACT

At the local, daily level, the regulation of prostitution was a plural process, one in which moral and socio-legal regulations overlapped and were influenced by competing discourses. In this context, the debate over the regulation or suppression of prostitution was an arena of struggle that was complicated by the resistance and negotiation tactics of the women themselves. Prostitutes were important contributors to the economies of fledgling resource towns in the BC interior, such as Rossland, Nelson, Princeton, Revelstoke, and Kelowna. In the urban centres of Vancouver and Victoria, prostitutes' experiences suggest a constant process of re/negotiation to the rhetoric surrounding the social reform movements of the first two decades of the twentieth century. As part of a community network, prostitutes had some protection within the law and did not hesitate to bring charges against men who abused them, and damaged or stole their property. When prostitutes became increasingly marginalized and forced to exist outside the law, they lost any protection they might have had, and turned to men whose actions were no longer constrained. Whatever economic benefit women might have gained from engagement in the trade increasingly went to those men who gave them some measure of security from the streets and from the law. Over the period, control of the sex trade in British Columbia clearly shifted. This study examines the social, legal, and economic circumstances that led to that shift, by using a case study, regionally-driven approach through an examination of primary archival sources from local museums and archives across the province.

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Introduction

In Washington State, the city of Spokane recently passed a municipal ordinance targeted at dealing with 'nuisance' properties. The law was enacted to give city police the power to deal with escalating neighbourhood complaints about properties in which undesirable activities take place, such as excessive noise, keeping the premises in an unsightly manner, selling illegal drugs, gang activities, or prostitution. The bylaw seeks to make property owners, and especially absentee landlords, more responsible for their tenants' actions, allowing for a system of rising fines if a dispute resolution process between police, neighbours, landlords, and tenants is ineffective.¹ Over a century ago, municipal governments, judiciary and police in British Columbia may well have agreed with the necessity for this type of ordinance, reflecting the prevailing beliefs in the difficulty of suppressing 'nuisance' activities and the need for using pecuniary sanctions to regulate undesirable activities.

Increasingly, politicians and policy makers are expressing an interest in the historical legacy of legislation like nuisance ordinances, vagrancy laws, and other forms of moral regulation. Recent works addressing this interest include a group of studies of urban prostitution across Canada, commissioned by the Department of Justice in 1989, that resulted in a number of policy recommendations for communities and legislators.² Like their contemporary counterparts, historical studies of prostitution have tended to focus primarily on moral regulation in the urban environment. This study seeks to present a synthesis of both urban and rural responses to a single form of 'nuisance' activity by focusing on prostitution in selected regions of British Columbia from 1895 to 1930. However, as prostitution did not flourish in British Columbia in isolation, this study also seeks to connect the local or regional experience with broader trends in

the regulation of prostitution, such as changes to Canada's criminal code, the international initiative against the white slave trade, and clerical, feminist, and medical debates.

Central to this study, is the experience of the prostitutes themselves. In post-colonial British Columbia, prostitutes had to deal with fluctuating resource economies, changing bylaws, ordinances, law enforcement policies and personnel, and relationships placed under stress by transient lifestyles. By living outside of the 'norms' and mores of society, prostitutes lost the slim protection traditionally given to women of the Victorian era. As historian Mary Murphy points out in her study of prostitution in Butte, Montana, prostitutes' lives "challenged Victorian notions of family, womanhood, sexuality and privacy, and provoked scrutiny and regulation." They were the most public women in their societies, and as such, given little protection under the law.³ Yet, to see all these elements as only acting upon prostitutes' lives is to view them only as victims. Instead, prostitutes' lives, like the lives of all other women, must be viewed as a process of constant adaptation and negotiation to the exigencies of daily life. Prostitutes also had to contend with a number of forces that appeared to be ranged against them. These forces may be external, societal, or internal forces, like alcohol and drug addictions, violence, and disease that often seemed to go hand-in-hand with prostitution.

In the 1970s, a split in feminist theory occurred over the approach to prostitution and its role as a historical subject. In a contemporary study of feminist views of morality and prostitution, Karen Peterson-Iyer simplifies a very far-reaching and complex debate into the two models that are used here to facilitate understanding of the topic.⁴ The first, Peterson-Iyer calls the "liberal/contractarian approach" which views prostitution as a matter of individual free choice. "In this view, feminist arguments that condemn prostitution as wrong do little more than perpetuate the separation of women into 'good girls' and 'bad girls,' 'whores' and 'madonnas.'"⁵

Individual agency is what is prominent in this model, not the socio-economic context. Peterson-Iyer calls the second model the “domination/subjectation approach” which argues that prostitution “should not be viewed as a free contract at all but rather as an instance of male domination and female subjection”⁶ Adherents to this model argue that it is wrong to stress the primacy of individual agency in isolation from social context: “rather, only when [the] socio-economic context takes centre stage will the true character of prostitution become clear.”⁷ Although Peterson-Iyer’s heuristic device attempts to draw firm boundaries between the two models, just as reformers have historically attempted to do in their arguments to banish or ameliorate the sex trade, the boundaries are not always so firm in reality. This study attempts break those barriers and demonstrate the ways in which individual agency may have played out within a confining socio-economic and legal context.

There may be as many ways to write a history of prostitution in the West, as there are writers. The historian’s decision on what the subject of a history of prostitution should be directly affects the final product. Moreover, the subject is decided by the questions the historian asks of the sources. In a recent review of the literature, Ann-Louise Shapiro identifies some of the questions that may guide the historian: Is the history of prostitution primarily a story about gender or about sex? Is it a history of women’s work or women’s resistance, or of exploitation or entertainment? Who are the reliable witnesses?⁸ We do not have to adhere to post-modern ideology to recognize that histories are directed by the suppression and subordination or highlighting of certain events, by characterization, motif repetition, variation of tone and point of view, and the employment of alternate descriptive strategies.⁹ As Elizabeth Vibert reminds us, historians can never remove themselves from “the social, cultural, and intellectual contexts” in which we are embedded - from our own “predicament[s] of culture.”¹⁰ The historiography of

prostitution demonstrates that the way we narrate women's sexuality affects our knowledge about women's lives, often with far-reaching implications.

Over the last thirty years, the writing of prostitution history has undergone several important developments. Before the solidification of social history in the 1970s, the stereotypical representations of prostitutes that dominated popular culture were seldom questioned. The legend of the whore with a heart of gold was (and in some cases still is) perpetuated in the popular imagination in books, film, and television. Few historians considered prostitution an important topic, so scholarly works tended to include prostitutes "only for a dash of spice in frontier accounts."¹¹ With the rise of social history and the acceptance of women's history as a serious subject, prostitution was also treated more seriously in the historical narrative and a number of works appeared in which prostitution was the main subject. The first serious split in approach may be found in this early period, in which a new generation of histories with an image of the West that was entirely at odds with the standard narrative of development appeared, written from the 'bottom up,' at the same time that feminist scholars were beginning to relocate the history of prostitution away from criminal or popular history, by making it part of women's history.¹²

The techniques of social and women's history established in the 1970s are typified in Anne Butler's examination of prostitution on the American frontier. Although written in 1985, Butler's work uses many of the previous decade's approaches to the study of prostitution, at the same time that it draws on some of the influences of the new western histories of the 1980s. Her examination of prostitution in the American West forcefully revises stereotypical representations of frontier prostitutes as "glittering 'painted ladies,' who moved about a noisy, crowded bar dispensing earthy fun to a boisterous clientele."¹³ Butler paints a desolate picture of prostitution

in the West by examining the lack of economic opportunities that drove women into prostitution because she does not accept the premise that prostitution was often a well-thought-out career decision that permitted a degree of control or economic amelioration for poor women.¹⁴ Instead, she says “in an atmosphere that encourage violence, dissipation, and the corruption of character, prostitutes could not construct professional lives of long-range, steady employment with the promise of economic improvement.”¹⁵ Butler argues that high overhead expenses, pimps and brothel owners, and corrupt officials worked to keep prostitutes in an impoverished state from which few ever escaped.¹⁶

In the 1980s, however, a number of new western historians complicated the subject and focused on the daily lives of prostitutes as ordinary women making rational choices, directed by circumstances specific to locale. The result of situating prostitution within the world of working-class culture was to integrate prostitutes into mainstream culture instead of marginalizing them by focusing only on deviance. Determined not to be constrained, new western historians expanded the interpretive frameworks: “prostitution crystallized the intellectual and political interests of a new generation of historians: working class culture, the history of women, the development of urban life and institutions, and the history of sexuality. Prostitution seemed like an ideal historical subject, a microcosm in which one could view a society’s organization of sexual and economic life.”¹⁷ Marion Goldman’s examination of prostitution on the Comstock Lode, published in 1981, is one of the earliest examples of the case study or ‘microcosm’ approach to the study of prostitution.¹⁸ Although published earlier than Butler’s work, Goldman’s study is theoretically connected with the scholarship of the later period. Her work foreshadows some of the concerns of the new western history, especially in the ways she uses sources and how she focuses on prostitutes as agents of social change who affected and were

affected by communal and regional events. Mary Murphy's thesis on prostitutes in Montana, as well as her article "The Private Lives of Public Women," added a new focus on the daily lives of prostitutes as ordinary women while furthering the study of prostitution as gender and labour history.¹⁹ The works of Goldman and Murphy offer an integrated perspective of prostitution -- connecting issues of gender, sexuality, economics, region, race, and ethnic and cultural diversity.

Specialization of the field in the 1990s was connected to the larger fragmentation of history evidenced by the advent of post-modernism, and is reflected in how historians approached the subject of prostitution. Joel Best's work on the regulation of prostitution in St. Paul and Benson Tong's study of Chinese prostitutes in San Francisco, demonstrate some of the contemporary trends in prostitution histories of the West.²⁰ Each has opened up new categories of interpretation, and each reflects an increasing focus on state power as it relates to sexuality and gender, influenced by Foucault's work on discourse, sexuality, power, and knowledge. "As if with a kaleidoscope, each author has slightly shifted the angle of the vision to scatter the material so that it forms different patterns and assumes new shapes."²¹ This fragmentation has resulted in a possible dispersal of significance in the writing of prostitution history. While variation in interpretive strategies has opened up new ways of exploring the subject, the overwhelming focus on state power has the potential to replace the prostitutes themselves at the centre of the narrative.

Studies of prostitution in Canada may be located within the major trends of American prostitution historiography. There are few full-length works dedicated to the study of prostitution in Canada, although there are a plethora of articles, theses and dissertations, and chapters in books that focus on other subjects. Of the longer works, two regional studies, James Gray's

work on prostitution in the prairies and Andrée Lévesque's examination of prostitution in Québec are diverse, yet outstanding examples of the earlier styles of prostitution writings.

Gray's *Red Lights on the Prairies* is exactly the kind of popular history that Butler derides as "invented, anecdotal tales that celebrate the West as an epic of romantic conquest."²² Unlike the other works which are written for an academic audience, Gray's work is a rollicking tale of "booze and broads" on the Canadian prairies during "the bawdiest, brawlingest, drunkenest and back-breakingest era in prairie history," written for a popular audience.²³ Nevertheless, underneath the colloquial language, Gray presents an interesting look at prostitutes from the point of view of social reformers, police, journalists, and western citizens. He also presents most of the elements of prostitution other historians of prostitution examine: economic and social circumstances which forced women into the trade, their involvement with the judicial system, health concerns, addictions, and the mobility and the lack of permanent residence common to the trade. In Gray's portrayal, prostitutes were ordinary women, devoid of qualities of body, mind, or personality that distinguished them from other frontier women.²⁴ Gray traces the controversy over prostitution and prohibition that arose with the influx of social reformers into the west as the frontier became a more stable and settled society. Though his study is ostensibly on prostitution, he finds that it is so closely connected with the illegal alcohol trade during the prohibition years that the focus ends up more on the 'booze' than the 'broads'. Regardless of the actual focus of the work, Gray's tale is an amusing rendition of popular views of prostitutes. It adds the point of view of the average citizen, furthering our understanding of historical responses to prostitution.

Instead of arguing for or against various representations of prostitutes in her study, in *Making and Breaking the Rules*, Lévesque examines prostitution as a deviant behaviour that

transgressed normative social and sexual standards of patriarchal society in Québec; standards maintained and upheld by men in the Catholic Church, politics, and medicine. She attempts to separate the individual from the ideal by measuring conformity to the 'norm' to determine how representative was the norm and how effective were the dictates of patriarchal society.²⁵ Like most other studies of prostitution, Lévesque's sources are primarily court, police, and medical records with a few references to newspaper articles of the period. But in her preface, Lévesque says private conversations with elderly women confirmed what she learned from the written record, although she is unable to use these conversations to augment her evidence because she found that women who were involved in deviant behaviour "prefer to bury the past."²⁶ Lévesque also examines the geographic dispersal of the profession, the motives for entry into the trade (which she finds are chiefly economic), the mechanics and hierarchical structure of prostitution, the dangers of disease and violence, and the frequency of drug and alcohol addiction and premature death. Yet, in each topic Lévesque provides short case studies of people involved in the trade and provides descriptions of their experiences through their reported conversations with ministers, doctors, and commissioners. Despite this effective portrayal of prostitutes' private lives, she is the only historian to openly acknowledge the limitations of her sources:

As objects of public discussion and repressive policies, the prostitutes of the period are known to us only at second hand, through intermediaries. When their contemporaries leave a picture of them behind, it is modified to a greater or lesser degree by the convictions, expressed or not, of the commentator. They were not permitted a voice in the various studies of their milieu; they speak to us only in gestures, which are dependant for their transmission to us on the good will of those who observed and recorded them.²⁷

Although Lévesque clearly recognizes the limitations of her sources, as she uses a variety of primary sources with less emphasis on reformers' works and sensationalist newspaper stories, her study provides a clear representation of prostitution.

This study, like all other examinations of prostitution, is limited to some extent by the paucity of the sources, as prostitutes left few records of their individual experiences in their own words. In the United States, the collection of correspondence left by Helen Jewett, a prostitute who was murdered in mid-nineteenth century New York City, is the most complete record of a prostitute's experience. Jewett was an educated, extremely literate woman who charged the upper strata of New York society high prices for her services. Jewett's correspondence to family and friends is examined in Marilyn Wood Hill's *Their Sister's Keepers*, which emphasizes the positive appeal and rewards of prostitution and focuses on the cooperative relationships amongst prostitutes.²⁸ As Hill relies heavily on Jewett's correspondence throughout the sections of her work that examine prostitutes' relationships, it can be assumed that at least this one prostitute was surrounded by a supportive network of friends and family. Her reliance upon Jewett's correspondence leads Hill to conclude that only the emotional support of family and friends permitted prostitutes to function effectively in their difficult working situations.²⁹ But Hill somewhat negates the importance of evidence to the contrary, concluding that despite the reports of spousal violence and child abuse or neglect found in court documents and newspapers, prostitutes' experiences were part of the wider "women's sphere." Thus, it is difficult to know if their experiences were different from the violence and abuse suffered by poor women in general.³⁰ Hill bases her understanding of prostitution upon the life of a woman who, in contemporary terms, would be classified as a high-priced call girl, and compares her experience to that of poor women constrained by economic limitations. Therefore, Hill represents prostitutes as having the agency to choose a life in prostitution that was open to possibilities of financial reward and control; overall, this is represented as a more prosperous and fruitful life than those lived by 'respectable' poor women.

In Canada, no documentary equivalent of the Jewett correspondence has come to light so far. In Québec, Lévesque's aforementioned study is based on the testimony of women involved in the trade, but is clearly filtered by the clergy, police, and judiciary charged with obtaining their testimony. The problems of using personal interviews as a documentary source are also evident in Lévesque's work.

In western Canada, historical examination of prostitution is difficult, given the lack of historical documents left by women involved in the profession. Thus, this study of prostitution depends in large part on records left by social and civic agencies, such as the documents of religious reformers, police and court records, and newspapers. However, it is important to remember that these types of sources must be used carefully, because these groups each have their own agendas, and therefore represent prostitutes according to the goals of the group. In her study of prostitution in Victorian England, *City of Dreadful Delight*, Judith Walkowitz examines how newspaper stories appearing in 1885 shaped public perceptions and responses to prostitution, representations that have continued in England to the present.³¹ To overcome the difficulties of the lack of direct source material, this study uses techniques developed by social historians of marginalized groups and therefore gathers a broad selection of source material. "By piecing together bits of information from contemporary sources such as newspapers, brothel guides, reformers' surveys and reports, along with data from public documents such as tax, census, courts, and police records, it is possible to discern many hitherto unknown dimensions of the prostitutes' private and public lives."³² As well as these types of materials, this study also relies on fire insurance plans to map spatial movement, archaeological material, maps and building plans of individual properties, BC vital statistics, pictures contemporaneous with the time period, and anecdotal evidence from a series of informal interviews with long-term

residents in many of the areas, which opened up new avenues of investigation. Of the primary materials gathered for this study, the few documents that were written by prostitutes themselves are used to augment the more public source materials.

One issue that arises out of the types of sources used in this study is the use of names and the suppression of personal information. Many of the repositories that hold police and court records have policies regarding access to personal information. In the attempt to preserve anonymity, I have chosen to use only the first names of prostitutes throughout the work - to adhere to the restrictions where necessary, and to ensure continuity in the work when using public records where full names are easily accessible. Just as I am aware that naming and categorization of women may have negative effects, I also realize that there is a danger of removing identity or personhood when denying women the right to their full names, and hope that my choice does not negatively impact the representation of women whose lives and experiences are the central focus of this study.

Generally, the sources have affected the structure of the thesis and are connected with economic trends in the province as a whole. Thus, the first chapter examines prostitution in the small towns of the Kootenays during the gold and silver mining boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and is based primarily on property ownership and tax records. Female property owners who also appear in police records, charged as either 'keepers' or 'inmates' of a bawdy house, may be assumed to be involved in the sex trade. Their ability or inability to pay property taxes and monthly fines suggests the cyclical nature of a trade dependent upon larger economic trends. Similarly, tracing prostitutes' movements as they appear in police registers of monthly fines suggests a degree of independence within the trade, especially when the movement is voluntary and not decreed by local police. This chapter also examines the movement in and

out of prostitution, economic choices available for women, personal relationships, and some of the negative sides of the trade, including violence, abuse, and police corruption, found in a collection of letters written by the women themselves, as well as in accounts of their lives and deaths that were recorded in official records and in newspapers of the era. By the end of the period, the early mining booms in the province that had driven development in areas like the Kootenays ended, and the towns settled into stable resource-oriented communities with more balanced gender ratios and a higher degree of homogeneity in racial and class breakdowns. At this time, prostitutes either left the area or operated with much less visibility.

When early mining development in the interior regions slowed-down, provincial focus shifted to developing more sustainable and diverse resources; especially in BC's urban areas. Therefore, Chapter Two focuses on prostitution in the urban environment in an examination of the trade in Vancouver and Victoria from 1906 to 1917. During this period, women's groups, moral reformers, and citizens became increasingly concerned about the occurrence and location of prostitution, vocally calling for the closure of officially sanctioned red-light districts. This section is primarily based on evidence found in the records of these groups. As part of the rhetoric that surrounded calls for the suppression of the trade, the twin spectres of the white slave trade and the international traffic in women were raised. In this context, the records of the Chinese Rescue Home in Victoria, originally established by missionaries to protect and assist Chinese prostitutes, along with immigration records, and testimony to a Royal Commission on opium smuggling and illegal immigration, are examined to understand further the Asian experience and involvement in the trade. The climate of the period, in which suppression of prostitution appears paramount, was also connected with concerns about police and official corruption. Therefore, the testimony found in two commissions examining the actions of the

police in Vancouver and Victoria are examined, and provides some interesting instances of interaction between police and prostitutes.

The focus remains on reformers in Chapter Three, in which medical discourse surrounding the connection between venereal disease and prostitution is discussed. In the first part of the twentieth century, missionaries, government officials, and the public increasingly represented prostitutes' bodies as disease-ridden and thus worthy of reformation, by force if necessary. As a site of conflict, prostitutes' bodies were subjected to intense criticism – their choice of clothing, lifestyle, mobility, and health all came under increasing scrutiny. The reformers' focus on the downward path of prostitution as a route to despair, disease, and death led to fears of the prostitute as a source of contagion. This fear of disease eventually led to calls for the stronger suppression of prostitution. In this section, the remote island community of Alert Bay is examined to determine how the rhetoric surrounding venereal disease was connected to the regulation of Aboriginal women, as evidenced in the voluminous correspondence generated by the Department of Indian Affairs.

Chapter Four studies the regulation of prostitution in the Similkameen region of British Columbia from 1917 to 1930. During these years, hard-rock mining again came to the forefront of provincial consciousness, with reports of new strikes in the area and an infusion of money into developing a variety of mining resources in the area. Miners who had been affected by the gradual shutdown of mining in other towns in British Columbia flocked to the Similkameen with the reports of the new strikes. Development occurred quickly in the area, especially in the war years when the demand for minerals increased. By the end of World War One, as prostitutes were increasingly forced out of officially designated red-light districts in the cities, they also flocked to the mining towns of the Similkameen, and an informal system of regulation of the

trade ensued. In this period, police, faced with the necessity of controlling a trade they could not suppress, increasingly marginalized prostitutes and eventually changed the whole structure of the trade, to the detriment of the women. Police and court records demonstrate an increasing intolerance on the behalf of the police, substantiated by changing attitudes in the tone of official records and an escalating system of fines and harassment. Property records demonstrate an increasing lack of independence for women as police began to enforce laws and force prostitutes to sell their properties, or at least make it very difficult for them to purchase new ones. In this era, many women moved into a transient lifestyle, forcibly moved from town to town, without hope of establishing community ties. With this breakdown in traditional support systems, prostitutes increasingly depended upon male pimps for protection and companionship in their lives on the road.

The fifth chapter uses a case study approach to synthesize many of the themes presented previously. In 1929, a local police board requested that a provincial commissioner examine charges of corruption and irregularities in the enforcement of law in the City of Kelowna. Centred around accusations of official tolerance of prostitution and drug smuggling in Chinatown, testimony presented to the Commission provides evidence of the existence of a real white slave trade in which young white women sold drugs and prostituted themselves under the direction of Chinese men in a well-organized trade that operated on a regular route between the Okanagan in the central interior, and Vancouver and Victoria.

In over a thousand pages of testimony generated by the Kelowna Police Commission, few examples of female agency or independence are found. The days of the female-owned brothel were clearly over. Charges of streetwalking proliferated and few women could truly be considered 'keepers' of bawdy houses any longer, barely being able to 'keep' themselves in the

basic necessities of food and shelter. Previously, ownership of property allowed for the establishment of ties to a community and for the formation of stable personal relationships. When no longer property owners, prostitutes lost the network of community ties that had afforded them some protection. As part of a community network, prostitutes had some protection within the law and did not hesitate to bring charges against men who abused them, and damaged or stole their property. When prostitutes became increasingly marginalized and forced to exist outside the law, they lost any protection they might have had, and turned to men whose actions were no longer constrained. Whatever economic benefit women might have gained from engagement in the trade increasingly went to those men who gave them some measure of security from the streets and from the law. Over the period, control of the sex trade in British Columbia had clearly shifted. This study examines the social, legal, and economic circumstances that led to that shift, while also recovering some of the lost history of women working in a trade deemed illegal and immoral - the prostitutes of British Columbia.

¹ "Nuisance Ordinance Passed," found at <http://www.kxly.com/common/getStory.asp?id=8712>, June 28, 2001.

Details of Ordinance C32855 are in Spokane City Council Minutes, June 25, 2001, found at <http://www.spokanecity.org/documents/minutes/min06-25-2001.pdf>

² Canada, Department of Justice, *Street Prostitution: Assessing the Impact of the Law, Synthesis Report*, 1989.

³ Mary Murphy, *Women on the Line: Prostitution in Butte, Montana, 1878-1917*, (M.A. Thesis, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1983), iv.

⁴ Karen Peterson-Iyer, "Prostitution: A Feminist Ethical Analysis," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12:2 (Spring 1996), 19-44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ann-Louise Shapiro, "Working Girls," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 45 (Spring 1994), 98.

⁹ Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 46-7

¹⁰ Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders' Tales: Narratives of Cultural Encounters in the Columbia Plateau, 1807-1846*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 5.

¹¹ Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-90*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), xviii-xix. See for example Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), especially Chapter Ten, "Pink Tights and Red Velvet Skirts," on the development of the far-western theatre and the careful allusions to impropriety.

¹² For 'bottom up' history see for example James H. Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies*, (Saskatoon, Fifth House, 1971). Among the earliest works that applied new social history and feminist theories to the study of prostitution are Judith Walkowitz, "'We Are Not Beasts of the Field': Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts," *Feminist Studies* 1 (Winter-Spring 1973), 73-106 and Deborah Gorham, "The 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' Re-Examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England," *Victorian Studies* 21 (Spring 1978), 353-379.

¹³ Butler, *Daughters*, ix.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ruth Rosen, "Go West Young Woman? Prostitution on the Frontier," *Reviews in American History* (March 1986), 91.

¹⁸ Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981)

¹⁹ Murphy, *Women on the Line* and "The Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte Montana, 1878-1917," *Frontiers* 7:3 (1984), 30-35.

²⁰ Joel Best, *Controlling Vice: Regulating Brothel Prostitution in St. Paul, 1865-1883*, (Columbus: Ohio State U.P., 1998) and Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth Century San Francisco*, (Norman: Oklahoma U.P. 1994).

²¹ Shapiro, "Working Girls," 106-7.

²² Butler, *Daughters*, x.

²³ Gray, *Red Lights*, 13, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁵ Andrée Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939*, trans. Yvonne M. Klein, (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1994), 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁸ Marilyn Wood Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870*, (Berkeley: California U.P. 1993).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 317-18.

³¹ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Victorian England*, (Chicago: Chicago U.P. 1992)

³² Hill, *Their Sister's*, 2-3

Boomtown Brothels in the Kootenays, 1895 to 1905

Today, British Columbia is internationally known as a premier destination for tourists. Noted for spectacular scenery and a diverse climate, Tourism BC encourages vacationers to visit 'Beautiful British Columbia.' The same cool alpine forests of the Kootenays, desert-like southern interior and central plateau, humid rainforest of the southern Pacific coast, sparse vegetation on the rolling hills in the eastern and central northern regions, and towering mountains on the north Pacific coast that draw people to outdoor recreational activities today, made exploration and European settlement of the province extremely difficult over a century ago. Colonization initially centred on the southern coastal areas that were easily accessible by water to both American and British trade routes and settlement was sparse throughout the rest of the region. Only the lure of vast mineral resources drew people through difficult mountainous terrain and into the remote interior regions of the province.

The hillsides surrounding the area now known as Rossland, in the mountainous region of the southern interior of British Columbia, was the site of summer berry picking by Salish peoples since time immemorial. Early European explorers' journals note that Aboriginal peoples frequently established a summer camp in the area known as Keluwist, possible at a site later called 'Indian Flats.'¹ The site may also have been a summer meeting place for other Aboriginal groups of the Kootenays, including the Lake and Kootenai Bands.

The hillsides blossomed with a different kind of activity in the summer of 1890, when two miners, Joe Bourgeois and Joe Moris, staked out five claims – the lucrative LeRoi, Centre Star, Lily May, Idaho, and War Eagle. Activity in the area quickly increased, and "news of the strike spreading around Nelson caused a regular stampede to the new Eldorado, and a small army of prospectors were soon in the camp."² Growth accelerated, and at the end of 1893, there were

ninety-nine claims staked in the vicinity. By 1895, however, that number had skyrocketed to 1997.³ The trail that wound up to the earliest producing gold mine, the LeRoi, was widened for a few hundred feet, and “merchants, hotel-keepers, doctors, lawyers, gamblers, painted women, and all the rag-tag and bob-tail of civilization gravitated to this new site.”⁴ Early pictures of the area show a collection of shacks, tents, and cabins, vying with each other for a tiny bit of space along a mud-covered path.⁵ This “jerry-built, muddy collection of shacks,” known as Sourdough Alley, was a “byword in many strange parts.”⁶ The word spread that the area was wide open – both for mineral development and for other, illegal activities.

Legal Systems

Mining activity in the Kootenays had an immediate effect on the development of legal systems in the region. In a report for the year ending 1896, Superintendent Hussey of the British Columbia Provincial Police (BCPP) expressed concerns about the difficulty of policing in the Kootenays. He reported: “the search for and subsequent discovery of, precious and other metals in the Kootenay Districts, has caused to spring up with marvellous rapidity numerous towns and villages, prosperous and thriving, which are daily increasing at an enormous rate.”⁷ Hussey requested a considerable increase in funding from the provincial government for policing the district because “the consequent influx of people of all nationalities, classes and grades of society into the Province has necessitated a corresponding increase in the number of police constables, and to meet this necessity additional officers have been appointed at the following places: Rossland, Trail, Revelstoke, Nelson, Sandon, Slocan City, Greenwood City, Grand Forks and Quesnellemouth.”⁸ Although police resources were certainly scarce at the time given the influx of people into the Kootenays, Hussey did not only relate the need for additional officers in the area in his report. Instead, he also described the Kootenays as an area in which “law and order

were as well maintained as could possibly be expected in a new country, especially one which possesses every natural means for the protection and escape of that class of criminals which congregates in every new and busy camp,” thus positioning the work of the BCPP in opposition to the perceived lawlessness on the American side of the border.⁹ As part of his attempt to obtain a large budget increase from the provincial government, Hussey sought to describe the effectiveness of police methods:

The magistrates and officers in each locality appear to use every effort to demonstrate to visitors from the American side that breaches of the law in Canada are not overlooked or lightly dealt with, and to this energetic action in regard to the prevention and detection of crime, and to the innate fear of British justice which almost all disorderly characters from the United States seem to possess, may be attributed the orderly and law-abiding condition of our mining towns and villages... Expressions of satisfaction are frequently heard regarding the administration of justice and the protection afforded to individuals and property in British Columbia.¹⁰

Hussey's inflated rhetoric about the effectiveness of the fledgling justice system and policing in the Kootenay boomtowns, especially in comparison to American mining towns, has been perpetuated in many accounts of British Columbia. In accounts of the period, Kootenay mining towns were commonly represented as “‘miracles of law and order,’ with no gun play or anarchy but only the incorruptible figures of British justice.”¹¹ Only in recent years has the historiography of BC reflected changing perceptions about the efficiency of legal systems. This study of the boomtown brothels in the Kootenays seeks to examine the reality underlying the rhetoric, positing a legal system as an institution requiring constant re/negotiation between those charged with upholding the law, and those accused of breaking it.

BCPP Superintendent Hussey's report for the year 1897 posits only the effectiveness of police officers in the Kootenays: “It is gratifying to note that, notwithstanding this enormous addition to the floating population, including as it does a large percentage of an undesirable

class, there has been but a very small increase of crime during the past twelve months, and no increase in the number of serious offences.”¹² For the overall increase in crime in the province, instead of drawing attention to the American example of lawlessness just across the international boundary, Hussey blamed criminal activity in the cities, stating an additional thirty-nine convictions for the year “consist[ed] almost entirely of offences against the by-laws of the various cities.”¹³ Yet, these statistics were generated during the years that an average of 47 prostitutes were charged and convicted monthly for either keeping or being an inmate of a bawdy house in Rossland.¹⁴ These convictions appeared neither in Hussey’s report for BC, which showed 89 women in 1897 and 105 in 1898 convicted for ‘frequenting bawdy houses or inmates thereof,’ nor in the criminal statistics in the Sessional papers, which showed 519 and 812 women convicted in the respective years across all of Canada.¹⁵ There are two reasons why the Rossland convictions do not appear in the criminal statistics of the period. The first is connected to the prostitution laws in place in the 1890s, and the second to the manner in which prostitution was policed in the region.

Prostitution Laws

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, changes in prostitution laws were connected to changes in public opinion about the usefulness and acceptability of the sex trade. In a series of articles, John McLaren clearly outlines the evolution of prostitution laws in Canada throughout the period. This study, like most Canadian examinations of the topic, draws heavily upon his understanding of the legal context.¹⁶

With the implementation of the Criminal Code of Canada in 1892, two groups of provisions on prostitution were drawn together. The first set focussed on “the nuisance effects of

prostitution or the vagabond character of those who practised or exploited it.”¹⁷ Section 207 contained the older vagrancy laws on streetwalking, and ‘keeping,’ ‘being an inmate of,’ or ‘frequenting’ a bawdy house. These were summary offences subject to a fine of \$50 or six months imprisonment, or both. Section 198 added a new indictable ‘nuisance’ offence of keeping a common bawdy house, subject to a prison term of one year. The second set of provisions was directed at the exploitation of prostitution. Section 185 contained laws against the procurement of women or girls for “unlawful carnal connection whether openly or by devious means, for service in brothels or to become common prostitutes, and their inveigling or enticement into houses of ill-fame or assignation.”¹⁸

Although the existence of these laws may suggest a structured approach to prostitution that provided some protection for women, when used, the laws tended to discriminate between ‘respectable women’ and women of ill repute, providing little protection for the latter group. Further, overlap allowed magistrates considerable flexibility in sentencing. In a section on ‘procedural realities’ of prostitution laws, McLaren finds that “at the trial level, decisions on which charge should be laid and what procedure should be followed had an impact on the penalties extracted.”¹⁹ In the Kootenays, these decisions were much less formalized in that trials as such, with testimony, evidence, and argument did not often occur. Instead, policing prostitution involved a system of standardized charges and penalties that seemed to exist at some level outside of criminal trial procedures and thus not within the realm of criminal activities nor part of the process of reporting criminal statistics.

Policing Prostitution

Rossland's first policeman, John Kirkup, quickly achieved mythic status in newspaper accounts of the day, forming a legend that has remained in force for more than a century. Described as a huge man, weighing between 250 and 350 pounds, Kirkup was appointed Chief of Police in March 1895, allegedly in the aftermath of a bloody dispute about squatters' rights on Sourdough Alley that resulted in the murder of Hugh McLaughlin. Kirkup reportedly believed in settling any disturbances before they reached the courtroom, and enjoyed a reputation as a tactful, kindly, and sympathetic man who did not hesitate to use his bulk and a steel cane especially fashioned for him by an ex-convict in the enforcement of law.²⁰ During Kirkup's tenure as constable, Rossland is described as 'a wonder':

Not a dance hall or rowdy place in the whole town, and although the streets are crowded from morning to night with miners, prospectors and others there is not the least sign of lawlessness. The writer, during his few days' stay, saw less drunkenness on the streets of Rossland than is to be seen on the streets of good old-fashioned Victoria... There are some disreputable women in the place but evidently they know enough to behave themselves and seldom show their faces on the street. Saloons are plentiful; so are eating-houses, and there is a large bowling alley, but all these places are kept in a most orderly manner. Yes, Rossland is a wonder as a law-abiding place.²¹

A later publication on the history of the city by the newspaper, *The Rossland Miner*, states that from the time of Kirkup's appointment in 1895 to 1 July 1897, "there is not one police court case recorded in the Rossland newspapers."²² While this statement is difficult to verify given the number and variety of Rossland newspapers of the period, police court dockets that begin in May 1897 show that Kirkup was indeed bringing cases before the police magistrate, G.A. Jordan.

On the first day recorded in the docket, 8 May 1897, Kirkup charged Eva, a twenty-five year old American, with being the keeper of a house of ill fame. She pled guilty and was fined \$50 or two months in gaol. She paid the fine the same day. On 5 June 1897, a group of charges are recorded against three Italian men, Frank, Mike, and Gabriel, brought by Kirkup on the

evidence of Maud and Jennie (women who were later regularly charged with prostitution-related offences) with using insulting language and with common assault. The men were brought before the magistrate, and while the cases against Frank and Mike were dismissed because they were “not made out,” the third charge against Gabriel, of “assault with intent to have carnal knowledge of her [Maud]” was proven and he was fined \$20 or one month in default, which he paid to Kirkup on June 8. Similarly, Jerry, a thirty-six year old American miner, was fined \$15 for assaulting Della, another known prostitute, a few days later.²³

Kirkup’s style of law enforcement, combining tact, tolerance, and brute strength was apparently not appreciated by the first city council of Rossland, officially sworn in on 10 April 1897. Kirkup’s reign as constable ended after only sixteen months after a dispute with the new mayor and on 1 July 1897, John S. Ingram replaced Kirkup as Chief Constable. With the appointment of Ingram, a new era of policing began in Rossland. Order and accountability became paramount in the newly incorporated city. As a result, regular record-keeping procedures were enacted that make it much easier to trace charges for prostitution-related offences from mid-1897 into the first decades of the twentieth century.

Forms of Prostitution

The Rossland police records demonstrate that a broad range of activities took place under the rubric of ‘prostitution.’ Classification of prostitutes can be a difficult business, especially given the fact that many women only engaged in prostitution in times of dire necessity, or as a means of gaining extra income part-time while maintaining other occupations. In her study of prostitution in Butte, Montana, Mary Murphy argues, “...it is probable that women combined these jobs [as waitresses, dressmakers, and domestics] with prostitution to augment their income.

Women who worked in saloons and dance halls as waitresses and hurdy-gurdy girls may also have been part-time prostitutes.”²⁴ In a study of prostitution on the Comstock Lode, a western American mining region, Goldman similarly argues that “stratification within the fast life was so intricate and so far-reaching that it sometimes masked all prostitutes’ shared relationship to the larger society...prostitutes take on their self-definitions from other peoples’ responses,” and found that these definitions were directly connected to prostitutes’ economic status.²⁵ In BC, Deborah Nilsen’s study of prostitution in Vancouver found that the occupations of women charged with prostitution-related offences were significant and demonstrates a correlation between economic need and prostitution.²⁶

This focus on a stratification of the trade that was connected to economics is important because it may lead to a more nuanced understanding of prostitutes’ lives. When Anne Butler tried to overturn stereotypical portrayals of the prostitute surrounded by luxurious furnishing and clothing, she focused only on the violence and despair in prostitutes’ lives. But the stereotype is not all myth, as there were some “top of the line” parlour houses that were elaborately furnished “and functioned as social centres as well as brothels” in which attractive women, “who dressed well, acted like ladies and played the part of companion” worked in privacy and security while they sold sexual services.²⁷ At the same time, prostitutes working in the streets and in the cribs, “women of all ages and races [who] were ‘everynight workingman’s whores,’” suffered from the constant public display of their lives.²⁸ An examination of stratification of the trade in the Kootenays demonstrates that the same forms of the trade existed in BC as in the western American mining towns. However, an important distinction in this region is that ownership of property was key to gaining financial security, community acceptance, and protection under the law.

The Brothels

City of Rossland tax records show several brothels in which a female 'keeper' owned the property and building. Stella appears on the tax rolls from 1898 through at least to 1902, the only years for which records are available. She owned two lots on Queen Street, located in the block behind the main street, that were valued at \$2000 in 1898. One lot contained improvements that consisted of the 'Vancouver House Hotel,' which Stella operated as a brothel, was assessed at \$1250, while the other remained unimproved.²⁹ Stella's \$3250 in property holdings were considerably more than the average female property owner held in 1898. Of the forty-four women on the tax rolls, the average value of land and improvements was \$1343.50. Only eight other women held more property than Stella, and of those eight, four were hotel owners. Clearly, Stella's holdings were very substantial for the period.³⁰ She frequently had difficulty making her tax payments averaging \$40.00 per year, ending up on the 'delinquent' lists every year, but always managed to come up with the money before she was assessed interest.³¹

In the same period, two other prostitutes regularly appeared on both the tax rolls and delinquent lists. Dora owned substantial property in the south-eastern end of the city valued at \$2500 and assessed taxes averaging \$50 per year, while her next-door neighbour, the madam Sid had the highest recorded tax assessment at \$64 per year, and also went into arrears from 1900 to 1903.³² During the time that Dora and Sid appeared on the tax rolls, they, like Stella, were fined monthly by the police magistrate for being 'keepers' of houses of ill fame, with an average of four 'inmates' every month. These fines considerably added to the cost of doing business in Rossland, as the three madams paid an average of \$360 per year for their own fines, and may well have contributed to their inmates' annual fines of over \$900, for an average of almost \$1300

per year for each house. The records demonstrate that brothel fines were usually paid monthly; in one lump sum on the day they were assessed. For the purposes of comparison, it is interesting to note that annual liquor licenses in Rossland sold for \$100 in 1897 for all retail businesses selling liquor, including the largest hotels in the city. By 1900, licenses had increased to \$300 per year for all establishments and in 1903, varied between \$150 and \$300, depending upon the size of the establishment, but were still considerably less expensive than the fines levied against brothel prostitutes.³³

The dispersal of brothels throughout the city suggests that a formal red-light district did not exist in Rossland's early years.³⁴ Although large brothels owned by female prostitutes existed, they were not grouped together in any recognizable formation. Instead, they may have catered to specific clienteles. Stella's Vancouver House was on the 'respectable' edge of a large block of tenements used as cribs. Close by were numerous saloons, hotels, a bowling alley and poolroom, lodging houses, and miners' rooms over offices and stores. Presumably, her women catered to workingmen who spent their leisure time in the downtown core, as well as to those who lodged at her hotel.

Conversely, Dora and Sid's brothels were located in the southern end of the city, almost out of the city limits in 1897. Far from the bustling downtown saloons and hotels, their substantial brothels likely catered to workers coming from the smelter in Trail and to travelers. They were located half a block away from the passenger platform of the Columbia and Western Railway that traversed the southern edge of the city on its route to Trail, with important connections south to Washington state and north to steamer connections on the Arrow Lakes.³⁵ By 1914, when the wagon road to Trail had bypassed the area, the railway had been shut down and the ore supply started to slow down, Sid sold her property. Between 1914 and 1917, the next date that tax

assessments and collectors rolls for Rossland are available, the owner of the two lots was a Chinese man named Hop Ching.³⁶ The majority of Chinese property owners had relocated to this area by the 1920s, closer to the 'Chinese Gardens' on the southern slopes of the city, from their former location in Sourdough Alley, and the brothels in the area had closed down.

While useful in understanding the valuation of turn-of-the-century brothels, property ownership records provide a rather dry account of brothels. Newspapers of the era and police documents provide interesting insights into brothel 'keepers' and 'inmates' lives. For example, in Nelson, one of the earliest service centres in the Kootenays, which had been settled in 1886 to tend to the needs of the surrounding mining towns, controversy in 1899 about the location of the 'tenderloin' district generated a lot of useful documentation about life in the brothels. Nelson was one of the first towns in the Kootenays to establish a full-fledged system of regulation and one of the last towns in BC that maintained a system, as the brothels were not permanently shutdown until the 1950s. However, unlike Rossland's Sourdough Alley, which was viewed as a 'wide-open area,' Nelson's system appeared to offer regulated prostitution in an orderly manner throughout the first few decades of its existence.

Until the late 1890s, the red-light district in Nelson appeared to run quite smoothly. Monthly fines were collected from the madams and inmates of brothels concentrated in a restricted district at the east end of Baker Street. But city employees were careful to insist that fines were not a form of licensing.³⁷ In 1897, City Clerk Sealey stated to *The Miner* that all "the girls' who kept houses held his receipts for \$20. He said they were not 'licenses' but the money paid for them was more in the nature of 'fines.' The money was extracted from them in this manner so as to save the trouble of arresting and fining them."³⁸ Little controversy surrounded the system of regulation until Judge John Andrew Forin built an imposing home on the bluff above the east end

of Baker Street. In 1897, Forin initiated a letter writing campaign to local newspapers, attended city council meetings, and circulated petitions urging the closure or removal of the Baker Street brothels. From these documents, details about the brothels themselves may be culled.

In 1897, between eleven and twelve houses were in operation in Nelson's 'tenderloin.' The women themselves owned all of the properties, and each house contained several inmates, a pianist, and often a housekeeper, as well as the madam of the house, variously called the 'land lady' or 'keeper.'³⁹ The madams, as property owners, appear fairly constant in the records of monthly fines, while the women working within the brothels changed frequently – sometimes moving to another local brothel, other times leaving the area altogether.

Different brothels catered to different ethnic groups. In all the towns of the Kootenays, records identify some brothels as Asian in which the madam was usually of European descent while the inmates were Japanese or Chinese women catering to Asian men. Black brothels are also apparent, in which the inmates were described as 'coloured,' and variously worked for either a White or a Black madam who tended to provide services for the broadest group, including White, Black, and Asian men. Occasionally there were ethnically grouped brothels, such as the group of women described as 'Italian' in Greenwood's police records or 'French Mary's' house in Rossland. But of course, most brothels contained inmates from a wide variety of backgrounds, and some of the most successful ones may have purposely offered a selection of women of different nationalities.

The madams' duties varied according to the affluence of the house, but as property owners, they were responsible for the financial success of the house, arranging payments such as property taxes and police fines, organizing housekeeping services or providing the service themselves, selecting women to work in their houses, and possibly overseeing most aspects of the inmates'

lives, including the provision of food, clothing, and arranging regular medical inspections with local doctors.⁴⁰ Testimony in a Cranbrook trial suggests that madams typically met prospective customers first, seated them in a front room, described as a parlour, provided liquor and sometimes food, facilitated the introduction of the prostitutes to the men, and arranged or received payment for the proposed services. In this instance, the madam also provided laundry and bathing services for one of the men who had fallen into a swimming pool in a drunken stupor.⁴¹

Some of the brothels were sumptuous, as a dispute in Nelson Assize Court over furniture valued at \$3000, suggests. Grace Gilbert bought furniture from Grace Little “when she became, as she frankly stated, [the] landlady of a disorderly house in Rossland.”⁴² Gilbert paid \$2000 cash and arranged for fortnightly payments of \$150 for the remainder. However, after two months, “she was ordered to close the house by the Rossland city authorities.” Thus, she crated the furniture, which included beds, wardrobes, washbasins, tables, chairs, a sofa, and an expensive chiffonier, and arranged to have it shipped to Nelson by train, where she intended to open a brothel in a rented house. When Gilbert planned to relocate to Nelson, Little, fearing she would not be paid the balance owed on the furniture, arranged for a sheriff to seize it for non-payment of \$700. Gilbert brought a suit before Justice Murphy for \$5000 - \$2000 for damages and \$3000 for the seized furniture and for crates that the CPR redirected into Sheriff Doyle’s custody because “she felt she should have damages against Henderson [the furniture mover] and Sheriff Doyle for interfering in a legal business by holding back her furniture.”⁴³ Her suit was successful, but she was only awarded the return of her furniture and damages of one dollar for trespass, and twenty-five dollars for bodily injury incurred when Sheriff Doyle pushed her down in the snow, causing extensive bruising.

Other brothels were certainly more modest, as the list of furnishings of three brothels in the small boomtown of Phoenix suggests. In these houses, a coal stove was valued at \$15, carpets, bedding and pictures \$30, and a piano stool, carpet, and slop bucket that were destroyed in a fight cost \$14.15 to replace. From the property management records of these brothels, upholstered furniture and bedding appeared to require replacement every year, while regular repairs to broken windows, torn wallpaper, and miscellaneous furniture destroyed by both customers and inmates were frequently required.⁴⁴ An unusual expense of running the brothels was the cost of lights – the brothels were named the ‘Blue Light,’ the ‘Red Light,’ and the ‘Small House,’ and were known in town by the different coloured lights over their porches; blue, red, and yellow. Although the records do not indicate if these were gas lamps or electric, lights regularly cost \$4 to replace in all three brothels.

Whether modest or sumptuous, all the brothels in Nelson were forced to relocate in 1900, when Judge Forin’s campaign to move the restricted district proved ultimately successful. The “incessant pounding upon a score or more of pianos all night” that “the decent people” of the neighbourhood found “unbearable,” and the constant stream of complaints brought before city council, resulted in the city relocating the tenderloin to the more secluded area of Lake Street.⁴⁵ But this occurred only after council agonized over what to do with the women. The aldermen were concerned about the possibility that closing the tenderloin down altogether would “run the risk of the women being scattered throughout the city, where they would do more harm than by being kept together as they are now.”⁴⁶ At first, council did decide to run the women out of town altogether, believing that moving them would only “transfer a nuisance from one part of the city to another.”⁴⁷ But when it was realized that this would be difficult given that the women owned the houses and the city would have to enter into some kind of agreement to buy the property in

order to force them to abandon their holdings, some aldermen argued that “the City should [not] be party to an arrangement with the proprietors of the houses” and the idea was dropped.⁴⁸

A number of locations were proposed for a new tenderloin district, but none met with the approval of either city council or with local residents. “It was thought they could be located close to the new Chinese section to be started in the flats, but the railway company was opposed to this.”⁴⁹ As council could not agree, the matter was laid to rest for almost a year, until Judge Forin finally persuaded council to issue an eviction order to the madams. A newspaper article in April 1900 notes that the women had been given until June 1st to move, and the city had decided not to take any responsibility for their relocation.⁵⁰ After initially refusing to move, the women relocated to Lake Street, “a locality which is less conspicuous and more secluded,” in the Chinatown and warehouse district, where their pounding pianos were unlikely to disturb anyone.⁵¹

The brothels built on Lake Street varied from unpretentious to palatial. Three of the four houses were described in a memoir as “rather large nondescript two-story wooden buildings on small lots. They were a bit down at the heels and needed a coat of paint.”⁵² The fourth, Rosie’s house, was described as “a Victoria-type building, large, square, two-story well kept with many architectural features and an imposing concrete fence across the front.”⁵³ Behind the big concrete fence, Rosie had a “beautiful rose garden” and indicated her love of gardening in an interview, saying: “After things quiet down here its usually daylight and I like to take a taxi and look at the gardens. I know every good flower garden in town.”⁵⁴ Nelson’s postmaster, Wilf Hall, described Rosie’s house as having “seven exits through which business men and other important people could escape. There was also an electrical signal system to warn occuppants [sic].⁵⁵ Rosie’s

house was bought by the Nelson Museum upon her death in 1941, and was recently designated a heritage building.

The Cribs

Although they certainly existed in the boomtowns of the Kootenays, large brothels might be considered exceptional for the period. The five other women on the Rossland tax rolls who are identifiable prostitutes had average property holdings valued at \$435 and only one of them went into arrears for property taxes between 1898 and 1902. Of these five, only Annie appears in the magistrates' records with an 'inmate' for a few months. Otherwise, these prostitutes worked alone. This may suggest a smaller style of brothel, in which a single woman worked by herself, but more likely, it indicates female ownership of individual buildings referred to in the police records as 'cribs.' The cribs are very difficult to map, which suggests the transient nature of buildings used for this purpose. In one 1900 reference, a police officer attended a dispute where a "vagrant Slav was making trouble with his family...[at] the old crib row back of the Hoffman House."⁵⁶ This implies that the area, called Hogan's Alley and located close to the downtown core, may have changed in usage from prostitution to housing for poor or itinerant labourers. The cribs may have been relocated to "the allie back of the Strand" where Constable McDonell made several arrests of single 'keepers' in December 1900.⁵⁷ The other areas in which cribs were numerous was in Chinatown, centred on Sourdough Alley, and in a group of seventeen tenements called the McGregor Terraces, which were located directly behind Stella's Vancouver House Hotel.

Cribs are much more difficult to distinguish in areas that had formal restricted districts, as in Nelson's tenderloin. The records of monthly fines clearly indicate groups of brothels, but do not

suggest the existence of singly owned and operated houses. Only one reference in a women's column in 1900 suggests that places where sexual services were sold, other than brothels, may have existed in Nelson. The columnist clearly differentiates between "the numerous houses of assignation...found in several localities" and brothels, as she argues that "these latter are ten times more damaging and insidious than the places known as houses of ill-fame."⁵⁸ These types of houses may suggest the presence of a much more informal sexual trade than is usually associated with brothel prostitution.

In a study of the 1901 Rossland census, Jeremy Mouet examines the occupations open to women and finds that both social and legal barriers constrained women from participating freely in wage labour in Rossland, as elsewhere."⁵⁹ Of the 1308 women in Rossland, 250 gave their occupation to enumerators and "more than half of this group worked in the service sector, running boarding houses or [were] employed as servants, cooks or launderers." Thirty-seven were employed in the clothing trade, working as "milliners, dressmakers, seamstresses and so on," although Mouet finds that this group is "perhaps problematic, since it was allegedly common practice for enumerators to list prostitutes in this category."⁶⁰ Regardless of the type of work women were engaged in, they frequently suffered from lack of work, fluctuations in the labour market, or had personal problems that made maintaining a job difficult. In 1897, "A Working Girl" wrote of her difficulties in finding work in the *Rossland Miner*:

On May 10th of the present year I arrived in Rossland from Toronto looking for work as a house servant. I went to one of the second class hotels and found a Chinese doing the chamber work...I asked if there were no girls doing house work in Rossland and was informed that there was but little employment for girls, although there were a number of them out of work...After seeking employment for a week I became disheartened...⁶¹

This enterprising young woman decided to dress up as a man when she found that male workers were in demand and writes that she had saved over \$200 working as a man between June and

September.⁶² Although this girl's story is one of success, not every woman was willing or able to take the rather radical step of cross-dressing to gain employment. On a temporary basis, many women turned to prostitution in times of financial stress, short-term unemployment, or to make extra money while employed in low-paying occupations.

Mrs. Welsh's story demonstrates an easy movement in and out of prostitution over a long term. Between 1896 and 1907, she was fined under a variety of names and in several locations throughout the Cariboo and Kootenays for running a bawdy house. In a letter to the Attorney General appealing a charge of keeping a bawdy house and a fine of \$64.50 levied in 150 Mile House on 19 August 1907, Welsh's description of her life is one of economic difficulty and hardship, explaining why she may have consistently returned to prostitution over the years. Welsh admits to opening a 'disreputable house' in Quesnelle Forks three and a half years previously, but claims that for the last two years "I have lived quiet with a man here that no one could say a word against...this man and myself have work[ed] hard here with all intention of running a Hotel."⁶³ She was not married to the man, whom she is careful to describe as an "Engineer of the Gold Point Hydro Company with a good salary," but says that although they were "never married by the law...we have a contract of our own." Welsh anxiously points to her own good character, stating that in the last three months she had earned \$310 nursing the sick. Among Welsh's other activities she claimed several legitimate pursuits: "I have sold light drink here; ever since I have come here I have sold garden vegetables out of my three gardens here and have sold eggs and poultry also," and insists that she has "worked very hard [to] put everything in my place." In her appeal, Welsh declares wide-spread community support, saying: "[the] General Public here is very interest[ed] in this case...several of the business men here is going to

write to the Atty General [sic] about this matter for it is all spite work from the beginning to end.”

Welsh ends her appeal by trying to evoke some pity for her hardship and concern about the consequences of the charge for her future: “About two years ago I had a fire and destroy[ed] everything I had here[,] about \$26 of furniture and provisions and now to think that I am getting so I can live again and have this thing come up [the charge] in the midst of all my bright prospects.” Welsh’s movement in and out of the sex trade may have been quite common and may account for the frequent fluctuation in numbers of sex trade workers in the Kootenay cribs. But usually these women are fairly identifiable because they appear in the police record books either regularly for a period and then disappear, or are fined intermittently over a long term, as was the case with Mrs. Welsh. Other women, who appear in the records only a few times, or whose movements may be traced as they move from town to town, deserve their own categorization, called here ‘transient’ prostitutes.

The Transients

The group of women categorized as ‘transient’ prostitutes are the most numerous in the historical record, but also the most difficult to discuss with any degree of certainty because of the very nature of their movement in and out of towns throughout BC. Frequently appearing in police records only once or twice, and then dropping out of sight altogether, or possibly not appearing in the record at all, the historian can only speculate about their lives on the road. Occasionally, circumstances permit a glimpse into their experiences, such as when the women were involved with the authorities for reasons other than prostitution, or when their movements are traceable as they traveled through a number of towns. Transient prostitution will be dealt with in more detail

in chapters four and five in the sections on the Okanagan-Similkameen, when their movements can be correlated over longer periods of time and across broader geographical areas

In the Kootenay boomtown brothels, transient prostitutes are most noticeable for their non-involvement in the communities. Moving quickly through the area, possibly on a regular route between the mining towns and Spokane, Washington, transient women had little time to form personal relationships with other brothel inhabitants, or with men. They often travelled alone or occasionally with a spouse or partner, and never appear in the historical record with children. Such was not the case with the long established prostitutes in the region who did have time to form relationships, give birth to children, and maintain a working relationship with their co-workers.

Co-Workers

At first glance, public fights, abusive language, and thefts appear to characterize prostitutes' relationships with each other. Rossland police records show twenty-seven instances of fights between prostitutes between 1898 and 1902 and numerous cases of stolen property. One example is the charge brought against Irene by a fellow prostitute for stealing a silver tray valued at \$4. Also typical were the results of the case – the plaintiff decided to drop the charges and the case was dismissed the next day. No mention was made of the disposal of the alleged stolen property.⁶⁴ Although Irene was released, throughout the summer of 1905 she repeatedly encountered the law, usually in connection with complaints by other prostitutes. On June 23, she was charged with “drunk and disorderly” and placed “under interdiction,” under the Government Liquor Act, a step taken with alcoholics that made it illegal for her to drink, or for anyone to supply her with alcohol.⁶⁵ Despite these measures, on August 25 she was charged with “creating

a disturbance...screaming, swearing, and singing” in a brothel on Kootenay Avenue on a complaint laid by the madam of the house and fined \$50.⁶⁶ After one final charge of “keeping a bawdy house” in September, Irene was ordered out of town as a “habitual nuisance,” probably to the relief of Rossland’s other prostitutes.⁶⁷

Not all prostitutes’ relationships were characterized by violence, jealousy, and competition. Goldman notes that structural aspects of the trade led to the formation of long-lasting friendships between women. Women living and working together in brothels or as independent prostitutes forced into close proximity in restricted districts led to “isolation from the respectable community [which] created a bond among them.”⁶⁸ In the Kootenays, instances of this type of bond are difficult to identify but may be inferred through evidence which shows that prostitutes traveled together over long periods of time, protected each other from the hazards of the trade, provided charity to co-workers in time of need, and responded emotionally in times of extremity.

In the record of monthly police fines, occasionally it is possible to identify prostitutes who likely had a family connection through the uniqueness of their surnames - Gay and Marion were two such women who traveled together through Rossland brothels in 1904. They changed residence frequently as their names appear below that of a different madam every month or two, but they always appeared together until they left the area in August 1904.⁶⁹

Similarly, Blanche and Louise fled Vancouver together and opened up a brothel in Hedley in the aftermath of a very public trial of Louise’s alleged husband, Desire Brothier. In 1904, Brothier received seven years for forgery, procuring, and buggery. At the time, Brothier’s sister and brother-in-law were also charged in connection with the forgery of a medical certificate that claimed Blanche was free of disease, but the charges were dropped. The persistent

efforts of Brothier's brother and new evidence of his sister's involvement in the forgery led to Brothier's release after serving just two years. Blanche and Louise remained together for the duration of his incarceration and disappeared from BC immediately upon Brothier's release, presumably to return with him to the United States.⁷⁰

At times, prostitutes assisted their colleagues, even when it was dangerous for them to do so. Mrs. Welsh was fined for running a bawdy house because she opened her doors to a known prostitute who had no other place to go, ensuring "she would no[t] be drove [sic] around like a dog when she had not done anything."⁷¹ In the same spirit of sisterhood, a group of prostitutes in Nelson raised money for a madam "to provide her with the necessities of living, she being sick and destitute with a large family, and no one to assist her but the charitable." This show of support appeared in the newspaper, even though it was not expedient for the women to make a public display of themselves in the midst of the Judge Forin's controversial attempts to close the Baker Street tenderloin.⁷²

Children

Although prostitutes' isolation may have led to the formation of stronger personal ties, it likely made doing things common to all women, like bearing children, that much more difficult.

Goldman finds that prostitutes' options for raising children were extremely limited:

"impoverished prostitutes had the choice of raising their children in bleak circumstances and perhaps killing them slowly or deliberately murdering them soon after birth." Although she does find that some women chose to raise their children in the restricted districts, "few prostitutes could protect their children from emotional brutality, just as few could protect themselves."⁷³

In Rossland, children appear in the records in connection with brothels quite regularly, to the concern of the Children's Aid Society of British Columbia. In 1905, Superintendent South requested remuneration from the provincial government of \$1000 per year to travel the province and investigate charges of child endangerment. South was especially concerned about children in brothels subjected to "misery," "injury," and dim prospects for the future: "I ask you are these children to be left where they are to become prostitutes, thieves, and drunkards or are the little ones to be slowly murdered before our eyes?"⁷⁴ The province refused South's request for funding even though he provided details of the neglect and endangerment of children in Rossland houses of ill repute, given to him by the Chief of Police, Thomas Long.

Long reported several cases of child endangerment in Rossland, including the plight of six children, aged one to fourteen, whose mother "is a drunkard [who] sends her little tots several times daily to a saloon for beer. The children have hardly enough clothes on to cover their nakedness." The Chief reported his intentions of charging the woman with running a bawdy house in the hope that she would be unable to pay the fine and go to jail, thus forcing her neighbours or family to care for the children. He believed that the mother's dissipation into prostitution and alcoholism was complete because her "husband left her about two months ago and since that time men have been seen going to and from her house very frequently both by day and night." Long also told South the story of a family in which "the father is quite a drunkard and the mother is considered a prostitute." He was concerned about their four daughters, as "they are all very immoral. One little girl age ten is going to the dogs fast, in fact it has been reported to me that she is soliciting men for the purpose of prostitution." In four more cases, Chief Long reported similar stories of neglected children who were endangered by their mother's involvement in the sex trade.⁷⁵

In an unusual turn of events, the following letter portrays a more complicated relationship between prostitutes, their families, and their children than is suggested in the stories above: "I have seen Mrs. B. and she says her child is in Spokane with your mother and that she does not owe you any money at all for the keep of the child. She also says that she is supporting the child and sends money to your mother for its keep."⁷⁶ The respondent of the letter, Minnie, was a well-known madam in the Golden area. She appears in the records several times between 1906 and 1910 as the keeper of a house in the restricted district and likely owned it. Emma B. appears in police records only once, in 1906, when Calgary Chief of Police English contacted the Golden BCPP constable about an underage girl named Emma in a house of ill fame in Golden. The constable arrested her and put her in the care of a matron. He then made enquiries about a man named Roland, "who procured the girl and brought her to Golden." The constable found that Roland had moved west, and the matter was dropped.⁷⁷

Although it is impossible to be certain that Emma B. is the same woman referred to in the letter,⁷⁸ the Calgary Chief of Police's interest in her case and the constable's attempt to find Roland indicate a case of seduction, which was considered much more serious than a prostitution-related offence, especially if it involved an underage girl. In addition, a pregnancy at the time of her arrest would explain why Emma was placed under the care of a matron – an unusual expense for police who tended to send underage girls found in a house of ill fame to a reformatory for incorrigibles. Regardless of the circumstances of the child's arrival, the letter clearly indicates that Minnie took care of a child within her home with the expectation of payment, and then sent the child to Spokane to be cared for by her mother, still with the expectation of regular payment. Although this may have been an unusual case, it suggests that

prostitutes may have had a broader range of options for caring for their children than is suggested in other accounts.

Men

In the Kootenays, the presence of men in the brothels in the roles of lovers and pimps are apparent, though not all that common. Further, charges of 'living off the avails of prostitution,' may have included many types of relationships, other than the obvious one involving economic exploitation and physical abuse. In Desire Brothier's case, procuring appears to have concerned a relationship with Blanche and Louise that transcended even a few years in jail. A letter from one of Brothier's former prostitutes, who fled to France to escape testifying against him, declares her undying love and an offer to send letters or money if it would help him gain his freedom.⁷⁹

A few years later in the Grand Forks area, Elmer left "the woman with whom he [had] been living for the past fifteen years" and began to board with Mrs. D. and her children, who were receiving a Workman's Compensation pension. When the constable investigated allegations that she was taking money from Elmer for lodging, Elmer claimed he "had gone to board at Mrs. D.'s thinking that the money would help her out, but that if he was in any way jeopardising her pension he would move at once." The constable reported that in the aftermath of his visit, Elmer did move - next door to the woman's sister's house where the constable had "no doubt that no difficulty is found in sharing him between them." The women both had a reputation as "pretty hard characters" and had been charged "several times previously" with prostitution-related offences. The constable was not very concerned about Elmer's role in the household, but he was worried about reports that both women might be pregnant, since Mrs. D.'s sister had already given up her children to authorities at the Children's Home in Vancouver.⁸⁰

Many prostitutes also traveled with men and may have benefited from their protection. In Rossland, there were two husband and wife teams operating brothels, and police remarked on the lack of conflict in those houses compared to others in operation at the time. Jennie, a Japanese prostitute from Revelstoke who had entered BC in 1900 with her husband, Shonosuki, appeared to have a stable relationship in which she controlled the couple's finances. Yet, her husband's presence did not prevent her murder in 1905.⁸¹ For the occasional woman who might have gained from long-term connections with men, more suffered from abusive, violent relationships - and some paid the price with their lives.

The Dark Side: Violence and Addiction

In a historiography of western American prostitution, Ruth Rosen criticizes Anne Butler's focus on the violence, drugs, and alcohol used by prostitutes, because "Butler loses sight of the social context in which they lived. In fact, there are few places where prostitutes' behaviour more closely approximated the culture in which they worked."⁸² Josie Perkins' death from a drug overdose is proof of the hopelessness and addiction of a desperately unhappy poor woman, but the fact that she was a prostitute does not seem to have affected the circumstances of her death. Josie lived in Rossland barely a month before she died. She had moved from Victoria to escape her husband and the memories surrounding her baby's recent death.⁸³ On the morning of her death, Josie allegedly visited an undertaker, looking at the children's coffins "like those in which her baby had been buried."⁸⁴ Later that day, she and Capitola, another prostitute, had taken a male friend to the train station whom Josie had reportedly 'begged not to go.'⁸⁵ Upon his departure, Josie declared that she would have "a long draw" of opium to help her forget him. She apparently died from an overdose at a local opium den. The man with whom she traveled to

Rosslund, Harre Bucker, was initially suspected as being involved in her death but was ruled out when it was learned that he was in the company of another prostitute at the time of Josie's death. The jury could not reach a verdict about the cause of death, but shortly afterwards "a man arrived in Rosslund...with the news that Josie was heir to \$30,000. Her body was exhumed to make a positive identification."⁸⁶

As a result of a white woman's death in Chinatown, local police decided to raid the opium dens, and the same night that the summonses were served for Josie's inquest, police "helped in [the] Chinese round up."⁸⁷ The chief explained to the paper that he was "determined to break up these dens as it is known that a number of white men and women have been in the habit of frequenting them."⁸⁸ In both the newspapers and in their reports, police took a sympathetic view of Josie's circumstances, blaming Chinese opium dealers for her death. Their attitude suggests that neither Josie's addiction nor her despair over the death of her child were directly related to her professional life. The police records are full of women who attempted or committed suicide. Moreover, many people, not connected with the sex trade, were addicted to opium, which was frequently prescribed by doctors for disorders like post-partum depression and for pain relief.⁸⁹ The fact that Josie was a prostitute seems to have been set-aside in this case. Usually, prostitutes were not accorded the same consideration given to other women.

The violence that prostitutes suffered may well have been endemic in the lives of all poor women, but whereas 'respectable' women had some protection under the law, police responses to charges of violent behaviour by customers and lovers was sporadic at best. By the time police responded to a call at a brothel or crib, the perpetrator had left, and police did not usually follow-up on the complaint. This type of entry in the *Rosslund Police Daily Journal* on 28 June 1901 is typical: "On duty 4 to 12 pm. Called at 11:30 to Texas's house. Couple of fellows broke glass in

door, but they moved before I arrived. Quite a few drunks around but are orderly." And on the 30 June 1901, "On duty from 12 to 8 this am was called to Gay's sporting house there was nothing of any disturbance there when I arrived."⁹⁰ Many times prostitutes reported damage to their premises and the police did not respond at all: "On duty from 3 pm to 12 am. Mary ..., a sport in one of the cribs reported that on the night of March the 31 a man smashed her door and windows."⁹¹ This complaint was never followed up at all, and the delay between the time of the incident and the report to the constable suggests that the woman had no expectation of police action.

Occasionally, citizens decried the lack of protection for "defenseless women," as a lengthy article in the *Boundary Creek Times* in the aftermath of a violent spree in the red-light district suggests. Reportedly, a "large crowd of onlookers" did not attempt to restrain a man from "breaking windows and doors and, in fact, everything breakable upon which he could lay his hands" in a brothel, then jumping on his horse and "riding off with the intention of crossing the line." The article rebuked onlookers for not interfering: "That the unfortunate inmates of the house do not belong to a respectable class is no excuse for the cowardly conduct - for it can be stigmatized at little less - of those present at the disgraceful scene of Sunday afternoon."⁹² In light of the public outcry, the BCPP investigated the case thoroughly and eventually charged a man with housebreaking. He received a fine of \$20 and was ordered to pay \$5 for repairing the door.⁹³ Although the perpetrator was caught and given a rather paltry fine considering all the property damage, in many cases of violence against the prostitutes, after a cursory investigation, no charges were laid.

Jennie, mentioned above, was murdered in Revelstoke 19 April 1905. Although the police had a murder weapon, witnesses, and a suspect, no charges were ever laid, and the

investigation was dropped after a month. Jennie's husband became discouraged with the lack of progress and engaged a lawyer to inquire about the progress of the investigation, to no avail. The Chief Constable of the Kootenay District, Bullock-Webster, believed that Chang, the registered owner of her house, had murdered Jennie. The ownership of the property is significant because it provided motive for the murder. On the night of her death, Jennie was heard arguing with Chang over the deed to the house. "F... [her husband] and Jennie, not having sufficient money to purchase the property themselves, [had] entered into an arrangement with Chang to acquire the lot by part payment because they felt that the owner of the lot would not negotiate with them." Chang was well-respected by both Chinese and Japanese people in the city, and "appears to be the manager of all business done by them...he has been implicitly trusted by them." But after Jennie had paid Chang the full amount for the property valued at \$2800, on 28 November 1903, she pressed him to either transfer the property to her or repay the money. He refused to do either, so she took the documentation to McCarter, Chang's advisor, and insisted upon a settlement. "As a result, ...Chang undertook to transfer the property or pay the note" on the day of Jennie's death. Bullock-Webster believed that Chang was not in a financial position to pay for the property as he had taken out a second mortgage on it, "and hence, I [Bullock-Webster] suggest, a strong motive existed for getting rid of Fukushima and Jennie." Evidence implicating Chang was found at the murder scene, including a hunting knife and sheath known to belong to him. The Chief Constable believed that Chang had searched the house the next day to recover the knife. But he concluded that "these are all matters of deduction and not of evidence, and when [he] left Revelstoke nothing existed justifying an arrest."⁹⁴

In a letter sent by Jennie's husband's lawyer inquiring about the progress of the case, Jennie's husband provided the names of witnesses who had seen Chang entering her house at

1:00 am, shortly before the murder. He also provided further information about Jennie and Chang's business dealings, suggesting additional motive for her murder: "She had considerable business [with Chang] involving a considerable amount of money." Besides the property discussed above, she was also the actual owner of three other blocks of which Chang was the registered owner, and "she had been in the practice of handing over all her money to this Chinaman Wah Chong [sic] to keep for her and transact all her business...[this] involved the sum of at least \$3000.00."⁹⁵ Despite probable cause, witnesses, and evidence, Chang was never charged with Jennie's murder and the investigation was dropped on 3 August 1905, as "no new evidence [was] found."⁹⁶ This case is typical of police attitudes towards crimes against prostitutes. While participating in an illegal activity, prostitutes could expect little help or protection from police. Even worse, prostitutes occasionally suffered from violence and corruption from members of the police force, against whom they had little chance of redress.

Negotiating Police Brutality and Corruption

Throughout BC's history, charges of graft have frequently been levelled at members of police forces.⁹⁷ City police commissions in Vancouver and Victoria examined charges of corruption that connected police with the denizens of restricted districts, and are examined in some detail in the next chapter. However, before these large investigations ensued, BCPP dealt with several charges of misconduct by individual constables in the small towns of the interior region and Kootenays. The organization of the provincial force in remote locations was partly to blame for the constables' transgressions. In the Kootenays, a single constable was usually responsible for policing large areas alone. Before the turn of the century, the men often had no formal training and were expected to work with very little direct supervision. The district Chief Constable was

responsible for touring and inspecting all the stations in his district annually, but only spent a day or two in each location and appears to have had little sense of the daily activities of the constables. The constables' conduct was only investigated when citizens' complaints reached either the Superintendent's or the Attorney General's offices.

In the three cases examined here, several complaints were required before the Superintendent initiated an investigation, and then only two of the constables were dismissed for their activities. The process was especially difficult for prostitutes to initiate. In the case in Fernie, the constable argued that the Superintendent should not consider the sworn oath of a prostitute because "If a constable has got to be placed in such a position I submit it takes all his usefulness and independence away and he is prevented from properly discharging his duty and he is always at the mercy of every loose character that has no compunction in swearing away a constable's good name and honor."⁹⁸ This constable was discharged when the Fort Steele Stipendiary Magistrate and a Cranbrook constable both testified to the truthfulness of the woman's charge that Constable M. had visited her house "while under the influence of liquor" and demanded \$20 from one of the inmates. When she refused, he reportedly caught her by the arm, and when a "young man interfered to protect the woman, M.... struck the young man over the head with his cane the point of the stick striking and wounding the woman." Once she brought her complaints before the Cranbrook constable, the other "keepers of houses of ill fame [complained] that M....had been collecting money from them under threats of prosecuting them for selling liquor without a licence." Constable M. had no defence other than insisting the charges were false, fabricated because the woman had "declared she would get even with me" for some unspecified reason.⁹⁹

In a similar case that included an abuse of power and violence, a constable in Hedley was accused of entering a prostitute's house with a group of friends and "help[ing] themselves to anything eatable [sic] and drinkable about the place," then demanding entrance to a sick prostitute's room. Upon finding the door locked, "they stated that unless it was opened immediately [sic], they would break in the dor [sic]. The land lady [sic] asked them not to...[and] they went outside and returned with a Hammer or a stick of timber to use as a battering ram."¹⁰⁰

In her testimony, the madam claimed that the constable had physically abused her:

He put his leg between my legs and threw me down on the floor...[then] either struck me with his hands or kicked me in the right side of my body and it has pained me ever since. I started to cry with the pain and I went to my own bedroom...whilst I was lying on my bed Mr. H. [the constable] came into my room and after asking me what was the matter he pulled on my leg and said that would make it all right.¹⁰¹

Despite the woman's testimony and the admission by the constable and two of the men involved that all had been drunk when they had gone to the brothel, the constable was never censured for his actions, possibly because the charges were brought by a man who was known to live in the house 'off the avails of prostitution.'

In Greenwood, after many complaints by leading citizens on the general condition of policing in the town, an investigation of the constable discovered he was the property manager of a group of brothels. Superintendent Hussey found that Constable D. had acted "as agent for the Eastern Townships Bank at Grand Forks, in the renting and collection of rents of houses of prostitution in Phoenix [at] a rate of commission for his services being 10%." Examination of copies of letters he had left in the official police letter book showed the constable had made \$161.35 for his services, and had also bought a property from the bank himself and continued to receive a rent of \$20 per month from the operation of a house of ill fame. The investigation stalled when the constable contracted "typhoid fever complicated with pneumonia, kidney

trouble and a weak heart” and spent almost six months in hospital, but as soon as he was well, he was asked to resign.¹⁰² The constable replied in a scathing letter that he was treated unfairly and that the only thing he had done wrong was to leave copies of his personal letters in an official record book. The constable complained, “After laying in the hospital for months battling for life, the department sees fit to withhold my means of existence and that on the plea that I tried to make a living when stationed at Phoenix, the most expensive town in the interior of BC to live in and receiving the monthly salary of \$65.00 per month. I do not consider this British Justice.”¹⁰³ Although no physical abuse was involved in this case, an abuse of power and authority is apparent, as the constable’s property management records show that he collected rents and arranged for repairs in the brothels at the same time every month that he brought up the women on charges of ‘keeping a bawdy house.’

Conclusion

Prostitution is a multifaceted activity in which prostitutes’ responses and adaptations changed according to changes in economies and social practices. Prostitution thus emerges “as a fluid, episodic, or potential practice in the lives of young women, neither the essential characteristic of their being, nor the permanent mark of their social identity.”¹⁰⁴ Local attitudes, economics, and police practices in the Kootenays are important to further understanding the myriad ways in which prostitutes interacted with and affected the practices and institutions in their communities.

The focus on stratification within the sex trade in this chapter is not intended to romanticize prostitution in any way. Wealthy madams operating costly brothels did exist in the Kootenay boomtowns. At the same time, the hard reality of prostitutes’ lives, in which violence, disease, and early death were a fact of life, is also apparent in the historical record. All of these

experiences must be placed within a socio-economic context to come to some kind of meaningful understanding of the sex trade in BC.

Historians have traditionally come to very different conclusions about prostitutes' experiences, even when their source material was similar. Goldman concludes her study of prostitutes' lives in mining towns with the assertion that their profession degraded most women. She states: "I have focused on the elements of degradation in sexual commerce because they have overwhelmingly dominated American prostitution for more than a century. While a few prostitutes may live the golden legend of luxury and sexual satisfaction, most exist in material and emotional poverty."¹⁰⁵ Conversely, Murphy concludes that historians who cast prostitutes "in the role of hapless victims of society and male exploitation...are as short-sighted as the Victorians who reduced them to one dimensional caricatures of 'bad' women."¹⁰⁶ Although Murphy sees that Butte's prostitutes were victims of "a tangled sexual ideology...a city government that exploited their vulnerable legal position to fill the city treasury...madams and pimps...and men who denied them any personal dignity, treating them only as sexual objects," she also argues that they "exercised some choice...[and] power in their trade and had some pride in their accomplishments."¹⁰⁷ While this may be another example of different facets of the victimization /agency debate discussed above, it also demonstrates that the definition of prostitution may be "destabilized by the variety of sexual behaviours and the proliferation of sexualized social settings and ultimately confused by the conflicting perspectives of difference groups."¹⁰⁸ Some of the groups that were concerned with prostitution are examined in the next two chapters on reformers.

¹ Lance H. Whittaker, *Rossland, The Golden City: A Story of the First Half-Century of Progress and Development in the Trail Creek Area of West Kootenay*, (Rossland: Miner Printing Co. Ltd., 1949), 8.

² Harold Kingsmith, *First History of Rossland with Sketches of Some of Its Most Prominent Citizens, Firms, and Corporations* (Rossland: Studen & Perine, 1897) quoted in Jeremy Mouat, *Roaring Days: Rossland's Mines and the History of British Columbia*, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1995), n 37 at 173.

³ Whittaker, *Rossland*, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ See Appendix 1, male and female convictions for frequenting bawdy houses and inmates thereof in BC from 1895 to 1920 from "Criminal Statistics" in *Canada Sessional Papers*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Provincial Police Department, F.S. Hussey, Superintendent. *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Police Respecting the Police and Prisons of British Columbia, For the Year Ending 31st October, 1896*, (Victoria: Richard Wolfenden, 1897), 915.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Mouet, *Roaring Days*, 39.

¹² Provincial Police Department, F.S. Hussey, Superintendent. *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Police Respecting the Police and Prisons of British Columbia, For the Year Ending 31st October, 1897*, (Victoria: Richard Wolfenden, 1898), 669.

¹³ *Ibid.* During the year ending 31 October 1896, 1849 persons were convicted and sentenced to imprisonment in the common gaols and lock-ups of the Province, while for the same period ending 31 October 1897, 1888 were convicted, showing an increase of 39 convictions.

¹⁴ Between July 1897 and April 1898, 473 women were charged with prostitution-related offences in Rossland, for a rough average of 47 per month. City of Rossland, *Police Court Docket, May 8, 1897 to October 8 1897*, and City of Rossland, *Police Court Docket No. 2, October 12, 1897 to November 25, 1898*, unaccessioned records, City of Rossland Museum and Archives (hereafter RMA).

¹⁵ See Appendix 1 and 2, BC and Canada convictions.

¹⁶ For example, John McLaren, "The Canadian Magistracy and the Anti-White Slavery Campaign, 1990-1920," in *Canadian Perspectives on Law and Society: Issues in Legal History*, ed., W. Wesley Pue and Barry Wright, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988) 329-353, offers a very concise summary of prostitution laws, while two of McLaren's articles, "Chasing the Social Evil: Moral Fervour and the Evolution of Canada's Prostitution Laws, 1867-1917," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 1 (1986),125; and "'White Slavers:' The Reform of Canada's Prostitution Laws and Patterns of Enforcement, 1900-1920," *Criminal Justice History* 8 (1987), 53-117, offer a more in-depth study.

¹⁷ McLaren, "The Canadian Magistracy," 330.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Whittaker, *The Golden City*, 21-22.

²¹ 'Rossland,' *Mining Record* 2, 8 (August 1896), 20, quoted in Mouet, *Roaring Days*, 39-40.

²² Whittaker, *The Golden City*, 21.

²³ The City of Rossland, *Police Court Docket No. 1, May 8, 1897 to October 8, 1897*, see entries on 8 May and 3-8 June 1897, unaccessioned records, RMA.

²⁴ Murphy, *Women on the Line*, 73.

²⁵ Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 156-7.

²⁶ Deborah Nilsen, "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920," in *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in BC*, ed. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), 220.

²⁷ Murphy, *Women on the Line*, 74.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Rossland Fire Insurance Plans*, (Toronto: Chas E. Goad, Civil Engineer, 1897), unaccessioned records, RMA.

³⁰ City of Rossland, *Tax Roll, 1898-1901*, unaccessioned records, RMA. Stella owned block 42, lots 18 and 19.

³¹ City of Rossland, *Arrears of Taxes, 1898 - 1902*, unaccessioned records, RMA. This may have been the tactic of a smart business woman as many men also waited to the last minute to pay their property taxes to earn interest on their money. The arrears books for the period are extensive.

³² City of Rossland, *Tax Roll, 1898-1901* and City of Rossland, *Arrears of Taxes, 1898-1902*. Sid sold her property by 1914, and a man named Hop Ching owned Block 48 Lots 11 and 12 between 1914 and 1917, the next date that

tax assessments and collectors rolls for Rossland are available. The majority of Chinese owned properties had relocated to this area by the 1920s, from its former location close to the downtown core in the Sourdough Alley. Kutenai West Heritage Consulting, *Summary Report Prepared for the City of Rossland and the West Kootenay Chinese Heritage Society*, 29 September 1995, 139

³³ City of Rossland, *Liquor License Register of the City of Rossland Issued from the Time of Incorporation to 1917*, 1-21, unaccessioned documents, RMA.

³⁴ No discernible restricted district is apparent at least to 1905. Records indicate that by 1920, a formal restricted district was in place in Rossland, as the Deputy Attorney General of BC, A.M. Johnson responded to the head of the Methodist Vice Commission for western Canada, Dr. Dobson, regarding his concern that the restricted district in Rossland had not been closed down, in spite of the Deputy A.G.'s instructions to the Municipal authorities and Police Commissioner. Johnson suggests "it is quite apparent that they have winked at the fact that some of these houses have been allowed to reopen. They contend that they have never given any permission for such purpose and that they have difficulty in prosecuting where the inmates claim to be running a boarding house." Letter from Deputy Attorney General of BC, A.M. Johnson to Reverend Dr. Dobson, 14 July 1920, Box A 5, File H, General Correspondence, United Church Archives, Vancouver School of Theology, University of British Columbia.

³⁵ *Rossland Fire Insurance Plan, 1897* and Mouat, *Roaring Days*, 31-33.

³⁶ Kutenai, *Summary*, 139.

³⁷ See Appendix 4, photo 1 for a portrait of Judge Forin.

³⁸ *The Miner*, Rossland BC, 30 October 1897.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1897.

⁴⁰ E.L. Affleck, ed. "The Memoirs of Lorrin E. Borden," 19, unaccessioned manuscripts, Nelson and District Museum (hereafter NDM).

⁴¹ "Preliminary Investigation, Rex v. Bertha Frazer, a.k.a. 'Birdie', February 8, 1923." GR1620 Box 9, File 18 Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC).

⁴² *The Nelson Daily News*, Nelson BC, 19 May 1925.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ "Re: Constable D., 1906," 13 July 1903 to 5 March 1905, GR0099, Vol 3, File 4, PABC.

⁴⁵ *The Miner*, 25 May 1899.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 21 May 1899.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25 April 1899.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *The Tribune*, Nelson BC, 28 May 1898.

⁵⁰ Ibid., April 11, 1900.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Russell Potter, City of Nelson Engineer in 1934, "Rosie's House," in *The Islander*, Victoria BC, 7-8 February 1982.

⁵³ Ibid. See a drawing and a photo of Rosie's house in Appendix 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Wilf Hall Memoirs," unaccessioned manuscript, NDM

⁵⁶ City of Rossland, *Daily Police Report*, 14 December 1900 and *Rossland Fire Insurance Plans*, 1897 and 1912.

⁵⁷ City of Rossland, *Daily Police Report*, Rossland, 22 to 24 December 1900.

⁵⁸ *The Nelson Economist*, Nelson BC, 19 December 1900.

⁵⁹ Jeremy Mouet, "The 1901 Census of Rossland: Ethnicity and Women's Presence on the Resource Frontier," unpublished paper prepared for the Conference on the Use of Census Manuscripts for Historical Research, Women's Work in Western Mining Communities, University of Guelph, 5 March 1993.

⁶⁰ Ibid. If that was the case, prostitutes in Rossland were grossly under enumerated, as 1901 police records show forty-five different women either charged with prostitution-related offences or identified as brothel residents when summoning the police for assistance in handling rowdy customers, *City of Rossland, Daily Police Report, November 13, 1900 to January 15, 1903*, unaccessioned records, RMA.

⁶¹ *Rossland Miner*, 23 September 1897, quoted in Mouet, "1901 Census," 13

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "Mrs. Welsh Fined for Running a Bawdy House, 1899," GR0429, Box 5, File 2, Document 4540/99, PABC.

⁶⁴ City of Rossland, *Police Court, October 1, 1902 to June 28, 1907*, entries on 3-4 June, 1905, unaccessioned records, RMA.

⁶⁵ *Police Court*, 23 June 1905, Irene, Winnifred, and Catherin were all charged with similar offences on the same day, suggesting a disturbance in which they were all involved.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 25 August 1905.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7 September 1905.

⁶⁸ Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 117.

⁶⁹ City of Rossland, *Police Court, January 30, 1904 to August 29, 1904*, unaccessioned records, RMA.

⁷⁰ The details of Brothier's trial are found in *The Daily News-Advertiser*, Vancouver, 10, 11, 12, 15 March 1904 and in the *Vancouver Province*, 2, 13 June 1906, 5 October 1906. The women's activities in Hedley are described in a letter to the Chief of the Provincial Police, Victoria, 28 July 1906 and in reports from the Hedley constable to Superintendent Hussey, BCPP Victoria, 5 September 1906 found in GR0429 Box 13, File 3, PABC. Blanche may have returned to Vancouver the next year as a prostitute named Blanche, using the same last name as Brothier's brother-in-law, is found in Vancouver's *Prisoner Record Book*, 5 March 1907, City of Vancouver Archives, hereafter CAV, although it is difficult to tell as all the women connected with Brothier, including his sister, used a number of pseudonyms throughout the trial. The constable in Hedley believed that the Blanche and Louise, a.k.a. Bernice or 'Mrs. Brothier' in the brothel were the same women who worked for Brothier in Vancouver.

⁷¹ Welsh to E.V. Bodwell, Barrister, Victoria, 29 September 1899 in GR0429, Box 5, File 2, PABC

⁷² *The Tribune*, Nelson, 26 September 1899.

⁷³ Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 128-9.

⁷⁴ Superintendent South, Children's Aid Society to Provincial Secretary, Victoria, July 1, 1905, in GR0429 Box 13, File 1, PABC.

⁷⁵ Thomas H. Long, Chief of Police, Rossland to C.J. South, June 26, 1905, in GR0429, Box 13, File 1, PABC.

⁷⁶ Golden BCPP, *Letter Book 1913*, 5 September 1913, unaccessioned records, Golden Museum (hereafter GM).

⁷⁷ Golden BCPP, *Police Diary 1906*, 11 August 1906, unaccessioned records, GM.

⁷⁸ Names have been truncated in this account to protect anonymity, but Emma's unusual surname suggests that she is the same woman referred to in the letter.

⁷⁹ Marcella to Desire Brothier, 1 November 1904, in French, trans. Unknown, GR0429 Box 11, File 3, Document 1132/04, PABC.

⁸⁰ Provincial Constable, Grand Forks to J.A. Fraser, Chief Provincial Constable, Greenwood, 28 June 1912, BCPP Grand Forks, R.A. Atkinson Museum, (hereafter RAAM).

⁸¹ *Revelstoke Herald and Railway Men's Journal*, Revelstoke, 20 April 1905. This case is discussed in more detail on pages 44–45.

⁸² Rosen, “Go West,” 95.

⁸³ City of Rossland, *Daily Police Report, November 13, 1900 to June 17, 1903*, entry for 20 March 1901, unaccessioned records, RAAM.

⁸⁴ *Rossland Miner*, 21 March 1901.

⁸⁵ *Daily Police Report*, 21 March 1901.

⁸⁶ Mouet, “1901 Census,” 14.

⁸⁷ *Daily Police Report*, 22 March 1901.

⁸⁸ *Rossland Miner*, 23 March 1901.

⁸⁹ Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

⁹⁰ City of Rossland, *Daily Police Report, 13 November 1900 to 17 June 1903*, unaccessioned records, RAAM.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 2 April 1901

⁹² *Boundary Creek Times*, Greenwood BC, 7 November 1896.

⁹³ BCPP, *Letterbook Grand Forks Office, 1896–98*, Kettle Valley Museum, accessioned P982.7.1.

⁹⁴ Report of Wm. H. Bullock-Webster, BCPP Chief Constable, Kootenay District, Nelson, to Deputy Attorney General, Victoria, 1 May 1905, GR0429, Box 12, File 1, PABC.

⁹⁵ Bird, Brydon Jack and McCrossan, Barristers, Vancouver, to Attorney General, Victoria, 28 July 1905, GR0429, Box 12, File 3, PABC.

⁹⁶ Bullock-Webster to Deputy AG, 3 August 1905, GR0429, Box 12, File 2, PABC

⁹⁷ See for example the section on prostitution in Greg Marquis, “Vancouver Vice: The Police and the Negotiation of Morality, 1904–1935,” in *Essays in the History of Canadian Law, Volume VI: British Columbia and the Yukon*, ed. Hamar Foster and John McLaren, (Toronto: The Osgood Society for Canadian Legal History, 1995), 252–261.

⁹⁸ Constable M. Fernie to Superintendent BCPP, Victoria, 19 February 1901, GR0429, Box 6, File 5, Document 663/01, PABC.

⁹⁹ Government Agent and Stipendiary Magistrate, Fort Steele to Attorney General, Victoria, 18 February 1901, GR0429, Box 6, File 5, Document 626/01, PABC.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to Chief of Provincial Police, Victoria, 28 July 1906, GR0429, Box 13, File 3, PABC.

¹⁰¹ Statement of B. re: inquiry into Constable H., 30 November 1906, GR0099, Volume 3, File 5, PABC

¹⁰² Hussey, BCPP Superintendent, to MacLean, AG, Victoria, 14 September 1906, GR0429, Box 13, File 3, PABC

¹⁰³ Constable D.'s reply to Superintendent Hussey, Victoria, 20 February 1907, GR0429, Box 14, File 1, Document 526/07, PABC.

¹⁰⁴ Shapiro, "Working Girls," 97.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, *Women on the Line*, 95.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰⁸ Shapiro, "Working Girls," 97.

Reforming Urban Spaces: Vancouver and Victoria, 1906-1917

Although boosters in regional centres like Nelson, Cranbrook, Kamloops, and Prince George would have preferred it otherwise, the coastal cities of Vancouver and Victoria were clearly the dominant urban centres in British Columbia by the turn of the century. As such, both sought to establish hegemony over the ‘hinterlands’ of the interior regions of the province. But transportation routes across the vast mountain ranges that separated urban centres from the developing fruit-growing region of the Okanagan, and from logging and mining activity in the northern and southeast regions, restricted the cities’ economic influence in the province’s early years.

In the colonial period, Victoria dominated the Pacific Northwest as the fur-trading headquarters for the district of New Caledonia and then the seat of the colonial government. With British Columbia’s entrance into confederation, Victoria became the provincial capital by the turn of the century and settled into a pattern of staid development. Vancouver initially boomed with an astounding influx of 12,709 people in its first five years of existence with the establishment of the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway at the mouth of False Creek.¹ Economic downturns in the 1890s slowed that growth to some extent, yet between 1901 and 1911 the population increased by 271.7 %. By 1911, Vancouver contained 31% of the province’s population.² The rapid increase in population had long-term effects on the development of the city. Patricia Roy notes that “Vancouver had no formal town plan.” Thus, the city’s layout was haphazard at best and “no one seems to have paid conscious attention to the distribution of activities within the city.”³ Yet, a discernable pattern of land use did eventually emerge from the chaos. By the period 1906 to 1917, the city was clearly divided by socio-economic and ethnic

lines in an east and west direction, and the low-income residential and business districts of the East End in which Chinatown developed became the natural location for vice districts.

The location of red-light districts in Vancouver and Victoria is significant, as it became the issue that connected many of the reform groups examined in this chapter. Church reform councils, women's and citizens' groups, politicians and police, all wanted a say in the location and regulation of prostitution in their cities and in their neighbourhoods, and their attempts to regulate or suppress prostitution had far-reaching effects on the structure of the sex trade. Although concern over vice in the urban landscape may have connected these groups, as their ideological backgrounds and national or international affiliations differed, so did their agendas. Thus, different groups voiced a variety of demands and were often at variance with one another over the meaning and significance of prostitution.

The conflict and actions of reform groups are in no way unique to this period. Throughout the last century, concerns about the location of prostitution may be found in newspaper accounts in any city in Canada. What is unique to the period is the raucousness of reformers' voices and the extent to which they were willing to go to take action to ameliorate or abolish the sex trade in their area. The social reform movement in Vancouver and Victoria had direct ties to the winds of reform that swept across the world in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and "initiatives taken in British Columbia, while often responding to events on a local level, were influenced by larger circumstances."⁴ Jean Barman notes that the social reform movement in BC developed as a "parallel strand" with agitation to improve work conditions, but was "primarily concerned with life beyond the workplace."⁵ In the debate over prostitution, it is ironic that social reformers may have wished to focus on the moral aspects of the sex trade in accordance with Christianity's impetus to "restrain the human impulse for evil and guide the

individual towards salvation.”⁶ But their attempts to reform prostitutes’ moral condition had a direct influence on the women’s economic conditions and working life.

In general, the reform groups that sprang out of the Victorian social reform movement can be divided into three groups: social scientists who collected empirical facts on the public menace of prostitutes, the middle and upper-classes who feared prostitutes as disease-ridden, disorderly representatives of the lower-class masses, and social reformers who represented prostitutes as fallen victims worthy of reform. All three types of reformers may be found in British Columbia in the first decade of the twentieth century. As each city was settled, formal organizations like the National Women’s’ Council (NWC), Women’s Missionary Society, Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and the Reform Councils of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, all with ties to large national organizations, quickly became established. Less formal groups, like the Mount Pleasant Citizens’ Council, formed in response to specific events in their locale. The Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, and labour unions were formed primarily for economic purposes, but they too became involved in the debate over prostitution when it appeared to infringe upon the well being of their membership.

The ‘White Slave Trade’

Despite differing agendas, when discussing prostitution in general from 1906, the reform groups in Vancouver and Victoria tended to connect prostitution in their cities to an international ‘white slave trade,’ although specific examinations of the trade never substantiated the claims that young virtuous white women were sold into sexual slavery in the brothels from which they could not escape. If anything, the ‘white slave trade’ was a complete misnomer, as reformers’ investigations did turn up evidence of an international traffic in women, but found that it

involved the importation of Asian women as household slaves, some of whom were forced into prostitution. Yet, the rhetoric persisted well into the 1920s, and may be explained by the ideological origins of BC's reform groups that were connected to the British social reform movement of the mid-Victorian period.

In the mid-nineteenth century, female social reformers from Great Britain's middle-classes went into the poor areas of the cities and were exposed to prostitutes. This contact led to new conceptions of prostitutes as passive and suffering victims, "ennobled by suffering and [a] sad life."⁷ In order to generate concern for their cause, reformers posited the existence of an organized trade in white women, in which evil villains enticed young women, virtuous yet naïve, into a life of infamy through the administration of drugs, kidnapping, and forcible confinement. The rhetoric surrounding the white slave trade played upon the fears of the middle-class populace, while denying the social and economic circumstances that drove most women into prostitution.

Much of the controversy surrounding the white slave trade in the early 1900s can be traced directly to a story that broke in 1885 in a London newspaper. The publisher, W.T. Stead, had a history of agitation for women's rights. When Stead met Josephine Butler, a middle-class feminist who had been actively involved with helping destitute prostitutes in France, she convinced him of the need for an exposé in the newspaper about poor girls from London's low-class neighbourhoods who were sold into prostitution. This was an inverted version of the white slavery story, because in Butler and Stead's version of events, the girls were reportedly sold by their own families and not kidnapped by evil men. The sensational "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," was a highly successful exposé of the 'labyrinth' of London's underworld and had a

lasting effect on the regulation of women's sexuality, resulting in legal and political initiatives against nonmarital, nonreproductive sex.

In her study of the 'Maiden Tribute' controversy, Judith Walkowitz argues that Stead imposed a narrative logic on the story of prostitution that exaggerated the role of children in the socio-economic environment of prostitution and misrepresented the way young girls were recruited into the trade – in essence emplotting the narrative to suit his own ends. She examines how Stead employed a number of discursive strategies to authenticate his story, including: 'realistic' discourse of the newspaper account that purported to relay objective facts to the reader, the discourses of science and medicine that use a documentary style to authenticate themselves, heightened sexual discourse relayed as "sex crime reporting" that was intended both to titillate and to scare, discourses of class and gender criticism, and literary discourses that included melodramatic conventions of hero and heroine and mythic elements of beauty and beast. Stead's insistence on authentication led him to actually purchase a young innocent girl in order to demonstrate how easily it could be done. Ironically, his actions led to a trial in which Stead, the procurer, and the midwife who had certified the girl's virginity, were all tried and convicted under the age-of-consent legislation that Stead's exposé had engendered.⁸

Victoria's Chinese Rescue Home

The contradictions inherent in Stead's representations of prostitutes are consistent with later views of prostitutes as both the evil carriers of disease and the innocent victims portrayed by different groups of social reformers. A Methodist minister, who became concerned over the plight of Chinese women brought to Victoria as household slaves, and then sold into sexual

slavery, adopted the latter view of the women as innocent victims in his bid to establish a refuge home for 'rescued' Chinese women in the late 1880s.

J.E. Gardner was born in China, the son of an American Presbyterian missionary and was offered a post as an interpreter for the customs department in Victoria, as he was fluent in several Chinese languages. In the course of his duties, he reported coming across a "young girl only 9 years of age [who] had had her wrists broken, her back whipped until it ran sores and the sores irritated and burned with lighted tapers by an old hag of a procuress because the girl failed to bring in as much money by soliciting and prostituting herself as her procuress or keeper thought she should."⁹ With the help of Victoria police, Gardner rescued her and another girl from "sexual slavery," and thereafter opened up the Chinese Rescue Home with financial support from the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) who were part of the national organization of Methodist Missionaries, based in Toronto. At the time, the WMS were engaged in mission work in Japan and also supporting work with First Nations across Canada, and thus embraced the opportunity to do what seemed charitable and necessary work in British Columbia.¹⁰ When the women's group became more involved in the daily operation of the home, they eventually set up a local branch of the WMS with the dual roles of operating the home and educating the rescued girls, and establishing a Christian mission that visited Chinese homes, offering the women the teachings of the gospel and the chance to learn English.

The objects of the Home, as conceived by its founder, were fourfold: "to break up [the] villainous traffic...to Christianize and convert the girls rescued...to prepare them for household duties in case of marriage...[and] to train and educate...these girls to become Bible Women among the Chinese women either here [Victoria] or in China."¹¹ While the first three agendas were realized in the early years of the Home's existence, the matron, Annie Leake, quickly

learned that missionaries in China disliked the idea of returning the girls to their homeland, and “advised keeping them here and making them as useful as possible in the [mission] work at home.”¹² But this also proved unfeasible because of the stigma attached to the girls when they ran away from their positions and entered the Home. While undoubtedly some of the girls who resided in the Home were rescued from a life of enforced prostitution, most ran away from positions as household slaves into which they had been sold according to Chinese custom. “It was not uncommon for an impoverished Chinese family to sell a girl to be reared as an adopted daughter or servant,” but if the girl did not like her position in the family, she was assured a welcome in the Home if she was prepared to adopt Christianity.¹³ The stigma attached to the girls who entered the Home is in direct opposition to Lucie Cheng Hirata’s findings in a study of Asian prostitution in San Francisco. Hirata’s work demonstrates how different societal perceptions of prostitution led to less stigmatization of Chinese prostitutes because “prostitutes were not seen as ‘fallen women’ but as daughters who obeyed the wishes of the family.”¹⁴ Possibly, the Chinese Rescue Home girls’ experience was different because the local Chinese population viewed them as runaway slaves who were disobedient to the strictures of their culture. Eventually, the matron and WMS executive decided that the best course was to encourage the girls to marry Christianized Chinese men, preferably in the interior, away from their former homes.¹⁵

The WMS wished to move the girls out of the Victoria area because their former Chinese owners often accosted the girls or sent intermediaries to the Home to persuade them to return to their positions.¹⁶ Chinese owners also took to the courts to demand the return of what they viewed as their ‘legitimate property,’ and often won, to the consternation of the missionaries. Only if the representatives of the WMS could persuade the court that the girl had entered the

country illegally, or if it was found that she had entered legally, but there was proof that she had been forced into a life of prostitution, would the WMS be awarded guardianship. Yet the mission did not always succeed, and in 1900, Matron Ida Snyder was upset by a case in which the “[customs] collector decided that they [two Chinese girls] must be allowed to pass on their claim of being wives. All in the room were quite satisfied that they were not, and their lives since then have proved that we were right.” She cautioned that “haste in our work often means failure, as it is useless to attempt rescue until the girls themselves wish for it.”¹⁷

In 1904, the traffic in women from China was described as both on-going and profitable for Chinese procurers, and missionary sources estimated that “Canada was receiving annually from one hundred to two hundred enslaved Chinese women and girls for purposes of shame.”¹⁸ As the girls were valued between \$250 to \$1500 each, “the owners fiercely oppose[d] all efforts to rescue them. Someone [was] always ready to claim the victim as his wife,” and the missionaries reported that Chinese owners were “willing to spend money lavishly...in buying witnesses to swear such evidence as he thinks necessary in order to regain his chattel.”¹⁹ To avoid the charge of selling slave girls, which was illegal in Canada, the Chinese made it appear “that the purchaser does not buy the girl, but that he only repays or reimburses the owner the amount expended by him in importing or bringing the girl to Canada and maintaining her.”²⁰ The WMS documents include a contract, allegedly a translation of an original bill of sale, in which the woman, “agreeing of her own free will to prostitute herself for the benefit of [her owner],” to discharge a debt of \$1500, incurred by the owner for bringing her from China to Victoria. The contract provided the following restrictions:

Her help is limited to four years, at the expiration of which time she may take to a man. Before the expiration of which time she cannot take a man nor can she secretly run away. If she runs away secretly and [the owner] should get her back again the expenses much or little shall be charged [sic] to [the woman]...Should she be taken with the four great

diseases the money shall be paid back to [the owner]...Such days as she should be sick or pregnant with child shall be reckoned up and be made good...²¹

Although this document was clearly intended to force the woman into prostitution for a set period, the Chinese viewed such a contract as equivalent to that of an indentured servant, described by Lucie Cheng Hirata as the Chinese contract coolie system that involved body service for a specified period of time in return for travel to North America.²² A letter by Chinese Christian merchants in Victoria to customs officials provided details of the trade: "The wives of some of our merchants and other Chinese residents are sent back to China on a visit, and while there they buy one or more young girls and bring them back here declaring them to be their own children and thus obtaining free entry for them. The girls are kept such time as they can be sold in marriage."²³

Despite the wide-spread practice of indentured labour at the time in Chinese culture, in opposition to popular sentiment in Victoria's Chinatown the WMS adopted the position that even if there was no proof of sexual slavery, any girl coming to them for help would be assisted, as "the buying and selling of female children under 18 years of age should be made an offence."²⁴ Although they were well aware that it was against the law to trade in women in Canada, the WMS saw many cases where "justice miscarries," and vowed to continue their struggle to have the laws enforced. Yet by 1905, the matron of the Home was feeling the wrath of the community and finding that the rescue missions were increasingly interfering with the mission's evangelistic work. As early as 1903, Margaret Sherlock found that in the home visitations, "several of the homes refuse me admittance principally because they keep slave girls. But many of these girls are quite as well cared for, if not better treated, than many domestics in European homes."²⁵ In 1904 she reported that a great number of Chinese girls in Chinatown between the ages of 5 and 12 were receiving no instruction because: "I would gladly teach them, but because of the rescue

work they are afraid of me and will run to get out of my way. I am not permitted to enter homes in Victoria where there are slave girls, the remaining ones having been closed because of the last rescue.”²⁶ In 1905, Matron Snyder reported that the \$500 “capitation fee” or “head tax” on immigration has “checked the importation of prostitutes,” and the focus of the Home changed from aggressive intervention to prevention.²⁷

A few rescue cases still appeared in the records of the Home after 1905, but the emphasis had changed as they began to take in both Chinese and Japanese women for short-term stays. Instead of being connected with the sex trade, these women tended to stay in the Home when their husbands were unable to provide for them for short terms, although they were expected to eventually provide payment. Customs officials began to send groups of immigrating Japanese women to stay at the Home for short periods when they were either sick upon arrival or were waiting to be picked up by Canadian relatives. The few rescue cases that were accepted were taken in cautiously, and one domestic slave who had run away several times, been caught, and punished was finally refused entry because “she proved not amenable to authority, [and] we were unable to retain her.”²⁸ In 1908, the name of the Chinese Rescue Home was changed to the Oriental Home and School to reflect the change in emphasis.

The National Reform Movement

Ironically, changes to the Rescue Home came at the same time that the national organization of Methodists assembled a Morality Department, headed by Dr. Chown, which spearheaded a campaign to combat the white slave trade. This initiative stemmed from the highly publicized anti-prostitution campaigns in the United States, in which “Muckraking journalists exposed the web of corruption between police, politicians, and vice magnates. Novelists and filmmakers

sensationalized the traffic in women in lurid tales of abduction, rape, and sexual slavery.²⁹ Much of the American material, estimated at as much as one billion pages over the period, was incorporated into Canadian publications, with the Methodist Church's Department of Temperance and Moral Reform leading the way in generating numerous pamphlets that were disseminated in speaking tours across the country. One Methodist publication, *Canada's War on the White Slave Traffic*, upheld American estimates that "15,000 foreign girls, and 45,000 native born are the victims every year in the United States and Canada."³⁰ To substantiate reformers' claims that the traffic in women was occurring in Canada daily, just as it occurred throughout the world, they cited Canada's signature on the international "Treaty for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade."³¹ The pamphlet conveniently does not comment on the unwillingness of the federal government to become involved in the international initiative.³²

The main target of the Methodist tracts were local governments and authorities whom they claimed were responsible for perpetuating prostitution by allowing "segregated" vice districts in the cities, arguing that "victims of the Trade are reported almost exclusively in Canada from those centres where the business of vice is permitted."³³ In a study of American progressive reform movements, Barbara Hobson found that in the "general ideological current in the campaign" against white slavery in the United States, the dominant belief was that "the state should create a net to catch those fallen outside its protection and should suppress rather than manage the business of prostitution."³⁴ Rhetoric in the reformer tracts increasingly focussed on the debate over segregation versus suppression in restricted districts across Canada.

Although their activities in western Canada were very public because of their methods of distributing their pamphlets, the Methodists were only part of the national campaign against the white slave trade. Women's groups, such as the National Council of Women, also took a leading

role in the campaign. Throughout the period, women's groups had an active involvement in the debate over prostitution, but initially tended to be fairly restrained in their actions.

Characteristically, groups would bring up motions calling attention to the problem of the "social evil" and occasionally forwarded a letter to their local government representatives, which often appeared in local newspaper editorials.³⁵ Sometimes, they circulated a petition, such as the one in Cranbrook, "humbly petitioning [the Attorney General] to use the power vested in you and cause that this immoral and criminal element be removed from town."³⁶ But after an emotional meeting of the National Women's Council in 1909, which was addressed by speakers from North America and Europe "who underlined in often dramatic terms the vast dimensions and ubiquity of the problem, the immense social cost in deaths and broken lives," a committee was convened by Mrs. F.H. Torrington, President of the NCW.³⁷ This early committee eventually became the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada, and included representatives from the Catholic Church of Canada, the WCTU, the Dominion Young Women's Christian Associations and the Men's branch of the same organization, as well as the NCW.³⁸ John McLaren notes that "both the tone and focus of the NCW discussions of the white slave trade changed after that meeting [in 1909]. The tone became more emotional, even strident, and the focus turned increasingly to a policy of legal suppression."³⁹

This rhetoric increasingly became focussed on Canada's prostitution laws. By 1913, after several amendments, the indictable offence of procuring carried a maximum penalty of up to five years with whipping added upon subsequent convictions. While it may appear that the severest penalties were directed at the exploiters in order to protect prostitutes, the reverse was true, and many provisions in the code were denied to common prostitutes or women "of known immoral character."⁴⁰ Other changes to the original 1892 code perpetuated the injustice of punishing

prostitutes while ignoring their customers. In 1907, the definition of keeping a common bawdy house was expanded to include single women working out of rooming houses and being an 'inmate of' a bawdy house was raised to an indictable offence from its former status as a summary conviction. This law became especially important to vice regulation in Vancouver when the dispersal of prostitutes out of the red-light districts caused many to take up their trade in rooming houses across the city. Conversely, a new crime of 'being found in' a bawdy house replaced the original offence of 'frequenting' and continued as a summary conviction, to a large extent protecting male customers.

Reforming Vice Districts

On the streets of Vancouver and Victoria, reformers increasingly went into the vice districts to prove that the official toleration of prostitution was ineffective, immoral, and contributed to vice instead of restraining it. Thus, a number of 'vice commissions' toured the red-light districts, making recommendations to police departments that usually demanded complete suppression of the trade. Typical is this resolution by the Vancouver Moral Reform Association, generated after a tour of the disorderly houses on Chinatown's Dupont Street in 1906:

Whereas the social evil is one which in our opinion cannot in any way be sanctioned, being contrary to the laws of decency and morality; Be it therefore resolved that this association do hereby protest against the recognition of the evil as a necessary by allotting it any district whatsoever or in any way tolerating it or recognizing it; Be it further resolved that instructions be given to the police to eradicate this evil...⁴¹

This tour had dire consequences for the women of Dupont Street as it incited public opinion against their fight to have a municipal order to vacate their premises rescinded.

As early as 1903, growth in the downtown area made the brothels on Dupont too visible for the comfort of Vancouver City Council. Council decided to force the women to leave and

Mayor Neelands defended the decision as follows: "The location of these houses is far too central to be allowed to remain, now that the city is showing such a tendency to grow in that quarter. When Pender street is opened...Dupont street will be then one of the main thoroughfares, and I think it would be a disgrace to the city to allow the resorts in question to remain."⁴² However, council could not decide where to move the women, most of whom owned their properties, and therefore let the matter rest for almost three years, until moral reformers increased their activities in 1906.

The fight between the prostitutes of Dupont Street and city council began in earnest in 1906 with a letter from a resident of the area to the mayor, claiming that the police chief, reportedly for "mercenary" reasons, had ignored his complaints about a brothel on Dupont. He claimed that the brothel was "conducted by two colored girls, whose conduct is in the extreme reprehensible...they harbour white girls who are visited and debauched by colored men and chinamen who induce them to smoke opium and indulge in many un-natural practices."⁴³ This inflamed public opinion about the brothels on Dupont as the complainant focussed on their multi-racial nature in an era when racism, and especially anti-Chinese sentiment, was already heightened in the city by anti-Chinese legislation and labour disputes.⁴⁴ The allegation that Chief North was profiting from the presence of the red-light district caused an investigation that resulted in his suspension in June 1906.⁴⁵

The city council passed a bylaw, under its power to "pass regulations for the suppression of vice," which made it illegal to use a property within the city for immoral purposes. The women of Dupont Street immediately hired a lawyer to fight the first prosecutions under the bylaw, alleging that 'keeping a bawdy house' was a criminal offence, "and as such, could not be legislated upon by the Provincial Legislature [or under its distribution of powers by municipal

governments], but was wholly in the purview of the Dominion Government.” Thus, the bylaw was *ultra vires*, enacted without lawful authority.⁴⁶ Although the court initially reserved judgement, by August, the new Chief of Police, Chisholm, sent out a letter to “all the owners of property now being used for immoral purposes.” It stated: “Any person or persons, who shall be found guilty of keeping or maintaining, or being an inmate or habitual frequenter of, or in any way contribute to the support of any disorderly house or house of ill fame or other place for the practice of prostitution...shall be subject to the full penalties of this by-law,” and allowed for fines up to \$100.⁴⁷ The women were given ten days notice to vacate their premises, and newspaper reports from August through October suggest the women were following the order and moving to the lower end of Harris street, despite complaints by citizens of that neighbourhood.⁴⁸

Although it appeared to the public that Chisholm’s ultimatum was being adhered to, internal police records suggest that this was not the case. On 31 October 1906, a Vancouver Police Sergeant was suspended for “gross neglect of duty.” When the Sergeant returned to night duty on Dupont Street after a leave of absence in October, “Dupont Street was practically free of prostitutes, with the exception of those who are Owners and Tenants renting Houses, but on the 25th of Oct. it came to my [Chief Chisholm’s] knowledge that a large number had returned, and that the Houses were running full blast.”⁴⁹ The Sergeant responded that he did not realize that it was now his job to “visit those houses on Dupont,” as “in the past this matter has been left in the hands off [sic] the Detectives.” He claimed that he did not usually visit the area unless on a call, although he admitted to knowing the women as “many of the inmates are known to one by name.”⁵⁰ The Sergeant resigned, and the Chief recommended, “that his resignation be accepted,” and suggested that “the Commissioners have nothing further to enquire into.”⁵¹

Possibly, the Chief did not want the commissioners to investigate too closely into where the women had gone when they followed his orders to vacate Dupont. In an interview in November 1906, Chisholm said he could not respond to the question of the dispersal of the women: "My instructions were to clear the street, and I have obeyed those instructions." When questioned if they would "flit again to respectable sections of the city," Chisholm said: "I make no concealment of my view...that ultimately one place, one district remote from respectable streets and centres, will have to be set aside for these dames."⁵² But this sentiment was in direct opposition to the reform agenda of suppressing vice altogether, and Chief Chisholm did not last any longer as Chief of Police than his predecessor, North.⁵³

Many of the women who left Dupont moved to Shanghai and Canton streets, also in Chinatown, and by the end of 1906, the whole process began again. First, Chinese merchants began a petition requesting that police "prevent an invasion of undesirable women."⁵⁴ Then, moral reformers and aldermen toured the district, finding that "conditions in [the] Restricted District are [the] worst in city's history."⁵⁵ The allegations were brought before the police board, extra police were put on duty in the area, and the brothels were raided regularly.⁵⁶ Despite these actions, by December 1907 a police "census of the new Canton Alley restricted district in Chinatown...found 180 sporting women recently settled there."⁵⁷ Fortunately for the police, they found that all but five of the women came from the United States, and thus involved immigration inspectors in the deportation of over 150 women.⁵⁸ Yet throughout 1908 and 1909, reports of prostitution on Shanghai and Canton streets continued to reach the public, although the lurid accounts of White women beholden to Chinese slave masters appears more geared towards titillation than earlier accounts, which were rather dry, factual statements of the sex trade.

For example, in an article titled "Woman Tells of Rescuing Sister," a prostitute who had been deported to Seattle was found in a Vancouver opium den in February 1908, and claimed she was there to rescue her sister from sexual bondage. She said that she had to "take up the opium habit, wear Chinaman's clothes and serve as a serf to her captors before she could secure the release of her sister." She was initially charged with vagrancy, but her story secured her release.⁵⁹ A similar story in August was not looked upon so kindly by the magistrate, who not only deported the woman found in the opium den, but "regretted that he could not send [her] down for six months, as it would be a good thing for her."⁶⁰ Far from being painted as victims of the white slave trade, in the final case in 1908, two women were reportedly described by the police court judge as "haggard-looking female denizens of the underworld" who were charged with vagrancy "in its worst possible form within the covers of the code, the painted, powdered visitors of the worst opium den in Chinatown."⁶¹ This change in judicial attitude towards prostitution may be connected with an increasing intolerance of all forms of the sex trade throughout the city. But it may also be connected to a broader tendency to view women involved in prostitution less as victims of a 'white slave trade' and more as willing and active participants in the trade.

In 1911, the red-light district moved to Shore Street, where the proprietors of a new large theatre sought legal action against Vancouver City Council and the Police Commissioners for "allowing such a condition of affairs to obtain in this City," claiming damages for "breach of duty" if the area was not cleaned up immediately. Police responded by sending out private investigators to determine if the theatre's claim of "swarms of men going to the houses on Shore Street as if to a baseball match...until nearly five o'clock [sic] in the morning" was true, and found that this was indeed the case.⁶² The police board decided the best course of action was "to

notify all keepers and inmates of resorts on Shore Street to vacate their premises within three months from August 1, 1911.”⁶³ By early 1912, the restricted district had moved to Alexander Street.⁶⁴

Moral reformers were not content to stand by quietly while police moved the location of the restricted district every year or two. The main agenda of the Moral and Social Reform Council was the complete suppression of prostitution. In a pamphlet “submitted to the citizens of Vancouver in order to arouse the conscience of our city,” the Reform Council charged the Police Commissioners with failing to “abolish the segregated area” despite the impatience of “a large and spirited delegation” at police board meetings.⁶⁵

Greg Marquis argues that the anti-vice campaigns of moral reformers “assumed that the toleration of red-light districts was accompanied by widespread police corruption,” and notes that between 1904 and 1935, the years of available records, “a series of police chiefs and detectives were victims of the social evil’s political fallout.”⁶⁶ Despite the lack of evidence of widespread police corruption, reformers continually connected the existence of American-style ‘political machines’ with the continual tolerance of vice districts. This resulted in a series of police commissions that investigated allegations of corruption. In Vancouver, investigations resulted in the replacement of Chief North in 1906 with Chief Chisholm over allegations of graft in his failure to remove the women of Dupont Street, discussed above. In Victoria, charges of ‘Tammany’ style politics transplanted to Victoria City Hall resulted in an investigation into the police board’s ‘licensing’ of Chinese-owned brothels in the restricted district.⁶⁷ In an editorial, the *Victoria Daily Times* claimed that it had “been given to understand that the ownership of houses of prostitution is now practically in Chinese as a result of a process of practically compulsory elimination that has been going on for years.” The editorial suggested that the

commissioners preferred Chinese brothel owners over White because "...the yellow element is more amenable to the demands of the political machine, more accustomed from ancient usage and established practice in the Flowery Kingdom..." to graft and bribes.⁶⁸

A few weeks after the appearance of the editorial, Peter Secord Lampman was given a commission to inquire into the actions of the Victoria Police Commissioners. His report exonerated the commissioners of personal corruption, but found that the rents in the restricted district, established in 1907, were so high that they had forced out individual female owners. He found that Chinese, who "saw their opportunity and since have been reaping a golden harvest," had purchased the properties⁶⁹ Lampman concluded that the commissioners had been at fault for countenancing the operation of 'common bawdy houses' as they were clearly against the law, but understood that in Victoria, as in other cities across Canada, "such houses have always been allowed." Thus, they must be considered a "necessary evil" and be permitted to remain as long as "there is no secrecy about it [the system of regulation] – no deception."⁷⁰ Lampman considered the alternatives, but believed that "suppression by one full swoop would only result in scattering them all over the city. These women are too old to be reformed and even if they could be reformed, who is going to undertake the task? They cannot be imprisoned the rest of their lives..."⁷¹

Lampman was correct that suppression of restricted districts would result in scattering the women throughout the city. In Vancouver, forcing the brothels to close down and move to a new district every few years had the undesirable result of scattering many of the women who could not afford to buy new houses every time they were forced to move. With each relocation, more women ended up moving into rooming houses across the city. Police thus found it increasingly difficult to regulate the women, and police records correspondingly show a decrease in large

groups of monthly fines that were collected from the madams and inmates of brothels as police went house-to-house. Individual charges for streetwalking increased throughout the period, as did charges for 'keeping a bawdy house' that were collected from single women in rooming houses.⁷²

Despite temporary setbacks like the findings of the Victoria Police Commission and the evidence that suppression was causing significant changes in the structure of prostitution, across the province moral reform groups continued to work towards the suppression of the sex trade. In Kelowna in 1912, the Ministerial Association pressed the Chief Constable to close down a brothel near the city. When police threats and a charge of illegally selling liquor were ineffective, the Chief Constable gave the following instructions to the local constable: "Please see that she is removed. If necessary employ some stranger to get the evidence...if you cannot remove these women in any other way, place a constable there to take the names of all frequenters, and where you have sufficient evidence prosecute."⁷³ In Golden, a 1913 letter to the BCPP Superintendent outlined a group of Italians' complaints about a red-light district operating in their neighbourhood and driving property values down. The Golden constable found he was in the same position as the Vancouver City Police, in that he wanted to accede to their demands, "but where to send them [the women] is the question."⁷⁴ Nelson reformers failed repeatedly to get the restricted district closed down, despite numerous publications from the well-organized Ministerial Association.⁷⁵ Occasionally, reformers, frustrated at their inability to effect change, took extreme measures, such as the 'burning of the tenderloin' in Cranbrook in 1930, allegedly started by "upright businessmen" of the city, frustrated with the visibility of prostitution in the main approach to the city.⁷⁶ However, the rhetoric surrounding suppression of the sex trade was usually more restrained and increasingly became more widely accepted by the general public.

The discourse surrounding the fear of venereal disease, which was connected to prostitution by the medical profession, contributed to this acceptance and will be examined in the next chapter.

¹ Population increased from 1,000 in 1886 to 13,709 enumerated in the 1891 census. "Table 1, Statistical Tables," in Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, (Toronto: Lorimer & Company and National Museum of Man, 1980), 168.

² Population of the areas of Vancouver that were incorporated as a city increased from 27,010 in 1901 to 100,401 in 1911, Roy, *Vancouver*, 168.

³ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

⁴ Jean Barman, *West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 203.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Walkowitz, *City*, 89.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹ Reverend J.E. Starr, Victoria, to Mrs. Strachan, President Women's Missionary Society (WMS), 8 September 1887, 1-2, "Records of the Oriental Home and School," United Church Archives, Vancouver School of Theology, University of BC (hereafter UCA).

¹⁰ Martha Cartnell's appeal to the WMS to fund the work in Victoria is found in the *Christian Guardian*, 21 September 1887. In their annual fall meeting, the WMS decided to run the rescue home, *Annual Reports of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1886-87* "Methodist Missions At Home and Abroad," UCA.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹² H.L. Platt, *The Story of the Years: A History of the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Canada from 1881-1906*, Volume 1, (NP: Annie L. Ogden, 1908), 109, UCA.

¹³ Marilyn F. Whitely, *The Life and Times of Annie Leake Tuttle: Working for the Best*, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1999), 67. Annie Leake was the first matron of the Chinese Rescue Home, 1887-1893.

¹⁴ Lucie Cheng Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs*, 5:11 (1979), 19.

¹⁵ F. Kate Morgan, Superintendent of Work, reported in 1900: "We [must] remember that the work in the past has been the means of lifting our marriageable girls into the pure, sweet atmosphere of home-life, of giving them a love for things that are true and elevating, which they in turn impart to their little ones." "Report of School and Evangelistic Work Among the Chinese and Japanese Women in Victoria," *19th Annual Report of the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, 1899-1900*, xci-xciii, UCA.

¹⁶ The slave girl of a Chinese merchant and her friend escaped to the Rescue Home in the middle of the night 19 June 1902. "The Chinese men were at the home just four minutes after they arrived. The next week was spent in long talks with Chinese men and women and the girls were coaxed and tempted to return to their master but remained firm." *A Register of the Chinese Girls' Names, Ages, When Admitted, and When they Leave the Home, Victoria January 1888*, "Records of the Oriental Home and School," UCA.

¹⁷ "Report of Girl's Home," *20th Annual Report of the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, 1900-1901*, xcvi-xcvi, UCA.

¹⁸ Platt, *Story*, 106.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁰ "Other Records – Misc" circa 1911, "Records of the Oriental Home and School," UCA.

²¹ Starr to Strachan, attachment to letter, titled "Herein Lies My Wealth," "Records of the Oriental Home and School," 8 September 1887.

²² Hirata, "Free," 9.

²³ "Chinese Merchants" to Collector of Customs, Victoria, 2 January 1906, GR0429, Box 12, File 1, PABC.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ "Report on Evangelistic Work," *23rd Annual Report of the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, 1903-1904*, lxxvii, UCA

²⁶ "School and Evangelistic Work in Victoria," *24th Annual Report of the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, 1904-1905*, lxxxii, UCA.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ "Report of the Chinese Girls' Home," *27th Annual Report of the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, 1907-1908*, xciii, UCA.

²⁹ Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1987), 140.

³⁰ Rev J.G. Shearer & Rev. T. Albert Moore, *Canada's War on the White Slave Traffic*, (Toronto: The Department of Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church, 1912), 2-3, "Rev. Hugh W. Dobson Papers 1912-26, Western Field Secretary for Evangelism and Social Service," Box A3/File G, UCA.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² Canada. Immigration Department, "White Slave Traffic," RG 76 Vol 570 File 813739, Part 2 to 6, B01242, In 1931, "under the National Convention [of the League of Nations] dealing with the suppression of the traffic in women and children, the RCMP have been named the central authority, [but] it would appear that the matter has not been one of major interest to them." Under Secretary of State for External Affairs to Director of Immigration, Department of Mines and Resources, 21 April 1931.

³³ Shearer, *Canada's War*, 8.

³⁴ Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue*, 140.

³⁵ The WCTU sent a letter to Victoria City Council "calling the attention of the city council to the social evil being apparently greatly on the increase in the city," "City Council Report," *Victoria Daily Times*, 15 April 1908, 3.

³⁶ Petition to Attorney General, signed by 260 Cranbrook Women, 14 April 1905, GR0429 Box 12, File 1.

³⁷ McLaren, "White Slavers," 74.

³⁸ Shearer, *Canada's War*, 18.

³⁹ McLaren, "White Slavers," 75.

⁴⁰ McLaren points to *Criminal Code*, S.C. 1892, ss. 269, 281-284, 181-184, 186, 187 as sections that denied legal protection to prostitutes, "The Canadian Magistracy," n 12 at 350.

⁴¹ "Would Take Names of Frequenters," *The Daily Province* (Vancouver), 26 June 1906, 14.

⁴² "Mayor Says They Must Be Moved," *The Daily Province*, 18 August 1903, 1.

⁴³ "A Citizen," to The Mayor, Vancouver, 2 February 1906, in Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners General Files Correspondence 1905-37, 75-A-5, File 13, "Petitions," City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CAV).

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- ⁴⁴ John McLaren, "The Early British Columbia Judges, the Rule of Law and the 'Chinese Question': The California and Oregon Connection," in *Law for the Elephant, Law for the Beaver: Essays in the Legal History of the North American West*, ed. John McLaren, Hamar Foster, Chet Orloff, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1992), 237-273.
- ⁴⁵ "Alexander Selected for Police Inquiry," *The Daily Province*, 23 June 1906, 1.
- ⁴⁶ "Big Legal Fight Against By-Law," *The Daily Province*, 7 March 1906, 1.
- ⁴⁷ "Chief Gives Notice to Owners," *The Daily Province*, 9 August 1906, 7.
- ⁴⁸ *The Daily Province*, 13, 15 August, 7, 11, September, 31 October, 3, 5 November, 4 December, 1906.
- ⁴⁹ Chisholm to The Board of Police Commissioners, Vancouver, 31 October 1906, "Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners General Files, Correspondence 1905-1937" 75-A-5 File 4, CAV.
- ⁵⁰ Sergeant F. to Chisholm, Internal Memo, 29 October 1906, "Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners General Files, Correspondence 1905-1937" 75-A-5 File 4, CAV.
- ⁵¹ Chisholm to Police Board, 31 October 1906.
- ⁵² "Lottie Mansfield the Only One Left," *The Daily Province*, 3 November 1906, 3.
- ⁵³ "Alexander Selected for Police Inquiry," *The Daily Province*, 23 June 1906, 1.
- ⁵⁴ Chisholm to Police Board, 3 September 1906, "Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners General Files, Correspondence 1905-1937" 75-A-4, File 13, "Petitions," CAV.
- ⁵⁵ *The Daily Province*, 19 November 1906.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20, 21 November, 24, 28 December 1906, 16 March 1907.
- ⁵⁷ "Vancouver's Restricted District," *Victoria Colonist*, 6 December 1907, 14.
- ⁵⁸ "Departing From Restricted Districts," *The Province*, 23 January 1908, 8.
- ⁵⁹ *The Province*, 13 February 1908.
- ⁶⁰ *Victoria Daily Times*, 29 August 1908.
- ⁶¹ *The Province*, 30 September 1908
- ⁶² Bird, Macdonald & Bayfield, Barristers to The Board of Police Commissioners, Vancouver, 29 March 1911, and "Confidential Report" 8 May 1911, "Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners General Files, Correspondence 1905-1937" 75-A-6, File 4, CAV

⁶³ Vancouver Police Commission, "Minutes of the Board," 11 August 1911, 10 February 1909 to 4 June 1912, 75-A-1, File 2, CAV.

⁶⁴ Father J. Alban to unnamed correspondent, Vancouver, "Re: Alexander Street," "Vancouver Board of Police Commissioners General Files, Correspondence 1905-1937" 75-A-6, File 9, CAV. "Early in 1912, however, it became only too evident that another vice colony was being established on Alexander street in the 500 and 600 blocks." Moral and Social Reform Council of British Columbia, *Social Vice in Vancouver: Report Issued by the Moral and Social Reform Council of British Columbia June, Nineteen Hundred and Twelve*, (Vancouver: James F. Morris Co, 1912), 2, SPAM 17194, University of British Columbia Archives.

⁶⁵ Moral and Social Reform Council, *Social Vice*, 4

⁶⁶ Marquis, "Vancouver Vice," 252-3.

⁶⁷ "Tammany Transplanted," *Victoria Daily Times*, 10 March 1910, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* See Appendix 5, political cartoon on the front page of the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, the first day of the inquiry, 24 March 1910.

⁶⁹ BC Commission on Victoria City Police Commissioners (1910), 4, GR0784, File 1, PABC.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷² "Says Women Must Not Scatter, Mayor is Indignant," *The Daily Province*, 15 June 1906, 1

⁷³ BCPP Superintendent to Chief Constable J.A. Fraser, Vernon, 30 January 1913, 7 March 1913, "Prostitution – Kelowna and Vicinity 1912-1913," GR0057, Box 4, File 1, Document 219, PABC.

⁷⁴ BCPP, *Letter Book May 16 1913 to July 7 1913*, 6-7, unaccessioned records, GM.

⁷⁵ The Ministerial Association of Nelson, *The Situation in Nelson, B.C.*, November 1912, pamphlet files, NDM.

⁷⁶ See Appendix 6, photo of the burning of Cranbrook's red-light district.

Constructing the Prostitute Body: The Regulation of Women in Alert Bay

Moral reformers in British Columbia used a number of rhetorical strategies to suppress female prostitution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These strategies were derived in part from a larger movement in Great Britain which increasingly focused on women's bodies as a site of observation, and resulted in the implementation of the Contagious Diseases Acts (CD Acts) in the 1860s. While the rhetoric was more subdued in BC, missionaries, government officials, and the public also represented prostitutes' bodies as disease-ridden and thus in need of reformation - by force if necessary.

The British Context

As a group, prostitutes' bodies were subjected to intense criticism – their choice of clothing, lifestyle, mobility, and health all came under increasing scrutiny. In a study of venereal disease (VD) as seen by the medical profession in Great Britain, Mary Spongberg calls this process the “progressive pathologization” of the prostitute, defined as the connection between the terms ‘social disease,’ referring to syphilis and gonorrhoea, and ‘social evil,’ referring to prostitutes, which came to be used interchangeably in medico-legal discourse.¹ Thus, in this construction of the prostitute body, “prostitutes were seen as both physically and morally responsible for the spread of venereal disease. They were seen not merely as agents of transmission but as inherently diseased, if not the disease itself.”²

The strong connection between disease and prostitution was a distinct change from medical knowledge in the early nineteenth century that believed all women might carry some taint of venereal disease.³ Uncertainty over the causes and routes of transmission of syphilis and gonorrhoea led some doctors to believe that it was possible for even virgins to transmit VD.

“Throughout the nineteenth century, treatment of VD was not very different from medical treatment of cholera or typhus.”⁴ In the absence of specific medical knowledge about VD, it came to be argued that to control the disease it was necessary to control women’s bodies.⁵ Prostitutes’ bodies were the most visible and the easiest to control because of their public activities. Therefore, doctors increasingly focused on prostitutes and their identification as the source of contagion.

The awareness that prostitutes could engage in sexual activities without any outward display of disease struck fear at the very heart of the medical profession. Hence, prostitutes became a cause of ever-greater concern in medical literature in Great Britain from the 1830s onward. This change in attitude “created a gulf between the upright woman and the fallen woman...Doctors began to look for physical anomalies to distinguish prostitutes from other women.”⁶

As the connection between prostitution and disease became increasingly entrenched in medical journals and moved to the popular press, this discourse resulted in calls for the state regulation of prostitution. But no action was taken until the medical fiasco of the Crimean War (1854-6), in which the British army suffered more casualties in the hospital than on the battlefield. The ‘social evil’ was viewed as decimating England’s troops and thus her strength to defend her empire. As a result, medical reports led to the legislative enactment of the first CD Act in 1864, which provided that a woman identified as a diseased prostitute could be detained in a lock hospital for up to three months.⁷

In 1869, the first organized public opposition to the CD Acts was mounted in response to efforts to extend the acts to the North of England, beyond the garrison and port towns, to which it had previously been confined. Repealers attacked the acts on a number of fronts – arguing that

they were the result of a group of doctors who forcibly inspected “virtuous wives and daughters of workingmen falsely accused of being prostitutes.”⁸ Although repealers brought the controversy into the realm of class conflict and eventually overturned the CD Acts, they never argued against the threat of miscegenation raised by the spectre of interracial sexual relationships.

Advocates for the regulation of prostitutes frequently used racial categories tied to differences in the severity of disease to aid their attempt to suppress prostitution. In Victorian Britain, many in the medical community argued that VD was an ‘imported’ or ‘foreign’ disease, and as the health of the armed forces was intricately linked with its ability to defend home soil, threats that appeared ‘foreign’ in origin related to a wider discourse of disease as a threat to empire. So, those who failed to meet the accepted standard of morality were seen as less than White, less than British.⁹ Bracebridge Hemyng, a London journalist, “added a particularly racist dimension when he stated that the disease communicated by prostitutes who cohabit with ‘the Malays, Lascars, and Orientals; was the ‘most frightful form of lues [lesions] to be met with in Europe.’”¹⁰ This ideology was derived from Social Darwinist theories that placed different races hierarchically along a ‘Great Chain of Being.’ Historians of science and medicine have shown that such theories were highly influential in creating notions of sexual difference that were imbedded in a racial hierarchy.¹¹ Belief in a racial hierarchy underlined the colonial treatment of British Columbia’s Aboriginal women: “To be Native was uncivilized; to be female was inferior; but to be a combination of the two was particularly base.”¹²

'Progressive Pathologization' in Alert Bay

The racialized colonial discourse that connected Aboriginal women's sexuality with disease and degeneration is the focus of the following survey of women deemed as prostitutes in Alert Bay, British Columbia. Few 'hard facts' are available to actually determine the extent of prostitution among Kwakwaka'wakw women, and the spread of disease is similarly impressionistic – earlier reports stem from traders' and explorer's journals, while later reports are based on missionary's and government official's reports. Since these sources are extremely biased, and all reporters had their own reasons for including discussion of sexually transmitted diseases and the reportedly immoral conduct of Aboriginal women, the sources must be treated with caution.

Given the sources used, women are viewed through the lens of the colonizer, and this lens distorts more than it portrays the 'real' or the 'actual.' Yet, these filtered accounts are all that are available, and so they necessarily have become the focus of this study. In the following account, the terms 'prostitute' and 'Native' or 'Aboriginal' woman are not used lightly or interchangeably. I am very aware of the power of naming to vilify while classifying and categorizing, and have tried to follow the terminology used in the sources. The fact that the terms are used interchangeably in the sources suggests the extent to which stereotypes resonate in the historical record.

Discourse about venereal disease and concerns about prostitution are found in the earliest European documents about the region. The Kwakwaka'wakw, more commonly known as the Southern Kwakiutl, may be among the most investigated groups of all the Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations. They were first brought into the consciousness of western Europe by Captain Cook who visited a village at the mouth of the Nimpkish River, directly across from Alert Bay in 1778.

Cook provides a glimpse into early concerns about venereal disease and its possible impact on Aboriginal peoples. In his first trip to the area in 1778, Cook issued a “severe injunction” against sexual intercourse between his crewmen and Aboriginal women as no women were to be admitted to the two ships, and none of the crewmen who had recently been cured of, or was undergoing treatment for, VD was to be allowed ashore, since Cook was determined “to prevent our contaminating an innocent People with that greatest plague that ever the human Race was afflicted with [VD].”¹³ Cook’s attempt to protect First Nations failed. Despite the commander’s injunction, some of his men did make sexual contact with women ashore, and some Aboriginal women did manage to board the ship, *Discovery*. When the expedition returned to Vancouver Island in the autumn of the same year, Cook’s journals reported the disease as “pretty universal among them [First Nations]” and even “raging.”¹⁴ Implicit in Cook’s journals is the attitude towards Aboriginal sexuality that became entrenched in later years – the view that Aboriginal women were highly immoral and inherently sexualized

By 1792, Spanish traders at Nootka Sound noted that “The natives are already beginning to experience the terrible ravages of syphilis.”¹⁵ Like the missionaries and social reformers who came to the area in the nineteenth century, traders tied the spread of disease to the excessive use of alcohol with the belief that “grog promoted sexual promiscuity, which in turn spread venereal disease, which in its own turn caused sterility and death.”¹⁶ The focus of these comments is very different in the two journals. Cook’s journal suggests that much of the fault for the spread of disease lay with his own men, while the Spanish trader suggests that the fault lay with the conduct of Aboriginal women. This shift in discourse was very similar to the shifting discourse in mid-Victorian Great Britain that allowed the blame for VD to be placed squarely on the shoulders of prostitutes.

Disagreement amongst social reformers and medical reformers as to the best means of curbing the incidence of venereal disease is apparent in the records throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Some Indian Agents took a pro-active approach to the regulation of prostitution and VD, such as R.H. Pidcock, Indian Agent for Alert Bay from 1886 to 1902, who decided to take the law into his own hands. In 1889, Pidcock restrained “a number of Indian women [who] had been waiting at Alert Bay to go down on the [Steamer] “Sardonyx” some of them with the avowed purpose of prostituting themselves in Victoria and other places.”¹⁸ Pidcock justified his actions because he had “previously been requested by numbers of the young [Aboriginal] men [of the Agency] to prevent if possible their wives and sisters from going to Victoria, who they know seldom return except in a diseased or dying condition.”¹⁹ However, Pidcock was just one member of an organization that did not officially share his pro-active approach to moral regulation. Thus, when the steamboat company’s lawyer complained that Pidcock had interfered with the Captain’s ability to conduct his normal business and transport passengers from Alert Bay, the Department of Indian Affairs Superintendent reprimanded Pidcock.²⁰

Occasionally, missionaries and government officials worked together to combat perceived immorality. Reverend Hall, the Christian Mission Society missionary in Alert Bay from 1878 to 1913, wrote Ottawa in support of Pidcock’s petition to institute a pass system for women leaving the reserve. He suggested that Pidcock had failed in his “righteous crusade” to “save the wretched women who cannot or will not save themselves” only because Indian Affairs had not supported Pidcock’s actions.²¹ Hall further justified his statements by providing evidence that women who left Alert Bay came back diseased:

The last steamer brought one [woman] back who was carried on a litter to her cabin and died in four days. On her return trip to Victoria, this steamer took away two sisters in the prime of life who went away without the consent of their husbands. Last week when

visiting a neighbouring village I saw a canoe with a young women in it who was in a dying condition and on her way home from the south.²²

By writing in support of the Indian Agent's actions, Hall clearly agreed with Pidcock. But consensus over the moral regulation of Aboriginal women was not always the case.

Other Indian Agents claimed that "the practice of Indian women leaving their Reserves for the purpose of leading immoral lives elsewhere is not common."²³ In opposition to Pidcock, Harry Guillod, Indian Agent in Ucluclet claimed: "I do not know of a single instance on this Coast where a young girl has been taken to Victoria or elsewhere for purposes of prostitution."²⁴ These competing discourses within the Department of Indian Affairs suggest that there was little consensus amongst department officials as to the best means of dealing with women perceived as immoral or diseased.

While the medical community debated the cause and treatment of VD, and public officials, missionaries, and social reformers argued about the best means to combat the spread of disease amongst First Nations, most observers agreed that control of Aboriginal women's bodies was critical to the containment of disease. The Indian Agent from the Kwawkewlth Agency based in Alert Bay from 1906 to 1932, William Halliday, characterized the stereotypical attitude towards miscegenation in his consideration of the improvements in Aboriginal health and population during his time as Indian Agent.

Halliday believed that an "infusion of white blood" had caused a perceived population increase among the Kwakwaka'wakw of Alert Bay, allowing recovery from near extermination wrought by disease in the 1870s.²⁵ Halliday's comments fit quite well with Canadian eugenicist and Social Darwinist theories of the day, in which declining birth rates, infant mortality rates, and racial mixing in the British colonies were all feared to be on the increase.²⁶ To combat the

rise of the 'racially unfit,' eugenicists sought to pre-empt 'natural selection' by programmes of controlled breeding, promoting 'eugenic marriages, and encouraging the 'well-born' to procreate and discouraging 'the unfit.'"²⁷ In the racialized hierarchy of eugenic theory, Aboriginal women were clearly believed to be 'unfit,' and the offspring of interracial unions were stigmatized by their mixed-blood.²⁸

Halliday further qualified the gradations among different classes of 'White' people and moral progression: "A very large percentage of the Indians to-day [sic] are not of pure Indian blood, but have a large admixture of white blood, and, as one can imagine, it is not the better class of white men who have thus degraded themselves by intermingling with the Indian women, so that the result morally is not so great as the result physically."²⁹ Here, Halliday suggests that some 'white blood' is better than none, but that miscegenation has only had a limited, physical effect in the colonial agenda of assimilation: "hasten[ing] the time when the Indians as such will be no more, but will be absorbed into the white race." He may have been equating the supposed libertine behaviour of First Nations with that of the 'lower-class white men,' who are the only people he deems low enough to 'admix' with Aboriginal women. But he was ignorant of British Columbia's recent history. In fact, in western Canadian fur trade society, interracial marriages and relationships between both low- and high-born fur traders were quite common, and such British Columbian luminaries as the first colonial Governor, James Douglas, married a Métis woman, something Halliday clearly did not take into account.³⁰

Other groups dealing with First Nations in BC also had competing ideas about the best means of controlling Aboriginal women's sexuality. Of all the moral reformers involved in regulating women, missionaries arguably may have used the most invasive techniques. They were involved in more facets of Aboriginal life than almost every other group, as they organized

schooling and health care on many reserves. Kelm traces the role of missionaries in the construction of stereotypical images of Aboriginal women in BC, arguing that their impact on the health of British Columbian Aboriginal bodies was overwhelmingly negative. Missionaries actively and openly used perceptions about Aboriginal disease to justify massive medical, cultural and social intervention to help a reportedly ‘dying race.’ Women were at the centre of missionary attempts to reform diet and nutrition, living spaces and sanitation, and infant mortality.³¹ According to missionaries, Aboriginal women were to blame for the ill health of their communities because they were seen as the least willing to accept moral and sanitary reforms.³² The biological determinism that Kelm describes as justifying the proselytizing agenda of BC missionaries is very similar in tone to much of the rhetoric surrounding the suppression of prostitution and medical discourse among early British feminists.

Euro-Canadian women’s roles in the construction of prostitutes’ bodies were also significant. In *Capturing Women*, Sarah Carter traces the development of stereotypical images of Aboriginal women to the need to protect the ‘virtue’ of White women in the aftermath of Native uprisings. “In the years immediately following the 1885 crisis, assiduous efforts were made to cast Aboriginal women as dangerous and immoral, as a threat to the emerging non-Aboriginal community...they were presented as the complete opposite of white women; they were agents of the destruction of the moral and cultural health of the new community.”³³ In a similar construction of a category of ‘otherness,’ Mariana Valverde traces the role of early British feminists in perpetuating stereotypical images of ‘women of colour’ as either victim or corrupters, even while they professed to speak for all women.³⁴ Mary Spongberg similarly argues that by laying claim to their own bodies and demarking the difference in terrain between categories of purity and impurity, morality and immorality, control over one’s own body became

a middle-class Anglo-Saxon woman's issue at the expense of women of other classes or races.³⁵ At the time of widespread Euro-Canadian settlement in BC, the categorization of Aboriginal women as 'immoral and sinister,' tied to the old ways and thus responsible for moral depravity and disease, quickly became entrenched in the rhetoric of the early social reformers.

Battling Disease – The War on Prostitution

Discourse about the immoral conduct of Aboriginal women and venereal disease diminished in British Columbia with the beginning of World War One. Concern over the spread of VD found a broader forum in Canada when it seemed that the safety of the country was at stake. By 1916, Canadians became aware of the high incidence of venereal diseases among the army. In a study of VD and health reform in Canada, Suzann Buckley and Janice Dicken found that "women, doctors, and military authorities set out to deal with a problem that threatened the national defence by incapacitating Canadian manpower."³⁶ Just like the process that led to the CD Acts in Great Britain in the aftermath of the Crimean War, in Canada, fear about the spread of disease led to a 12 June 1917 provision to the Defence of Canada Order making it illegal for any woman suffering from venereal disease in a communicable form to have sexual intercourse with any member of His Majesty's forces. If charged with such an offence, the woman could be remanded for a period of not less than a week for a medical examination.³⁷ Clearly, the focus of suppression remained with the woman, even though much of the discussion centred on the fear that the troops would bring home the dreaded disease and infect innocent women and children. Finally, in the war era, men came to be viewed as the perpetrators of disease, but they were never censured. The blame was still placed directly on the prostitute.

Moral reform groups seized the opportunity to become involved in the medical discourse that surrounded prostitution. A Methodist pamphlet published during the war encouraged the public to “work with the War Department for the present and future welfare of the nation.”³⁸ It claimed that officially tolerated red-light districts close to military training camps caused regiments to “sustain greater casualties from Venereal Disease” in camp than on the battlefield, “in one of the bloodiest battles of the war.”³⁹ The tract connected the reformers’ traditional attack on segregated districts with the spread of VD, using the language of battle to argue that diseases “have their widest opportunity to spread, insidiously as a poison-gas attack, and wreak greatest havoc” in segregated districts. Reformers also used the language of patriotism to urge the public to work with them to “smash” the red-light districts, as “every member of a community is commissioned by a national as well as a civic responsibility to become an active factor in the elimination of Segregated Districts.” During the war, reformers sought “constant and persistent repression with annihilation as the ultimate aim” to fight prostitution and its concomitant evils. However, unlike the earlier period, when reformers had little hope of effectively closing down the red-light districts in many urban centres in BC, during the war years it appeared that they might finally be successful.⁴⁰

While the battle against prostitution appeared to reach a peak during World War One, post-war discussion of the sex trade is almost non-existent. Reformers may have believed that they had finally won their battle to shut down the restricted districts. In the urban centres, brothels had effectively been closed down. By the end of the war, no single area can be considered a restricted district in either Vancouver or Victoria. Police commissions, public sentiment, and reformers eventually convinced police and municipal governments that it was not in their best interests to openly tolerate restricted districts within their cities. But they had only

driven prostitution underground. In some cases, prostitutes worked out of rooming houses or in the streets, and thus the sex trade was dispersed throughout the cities. Many women decided to leave the urban environment altogether and moved to areas in the interior of the province where prostitution was more tolerated. This can be seen in the next chapter, which examines the informal regulation of prostitution in the small remote towns of the Similkameen region throughout the 1920s.

¹ Mary Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 6

³ This belief was strengthened when the results of Philippe Ricord and Alexandre Parent-Duchatelet's works were published in Paris in the 1830s that demonstrated that "it was often impossible to tell the difference between the vagina of a hardened prostitute and that of a virgin." Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease*, 40

⁴ According to the 1821 *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*, syphilis is a "contagious disease which can be caught in so many ways, and which manifests itself in forms that are so varied and numerous, that it defies philosophical definition." The French venereologist, Ricord distinguished syphilis from venereal papillomae, balanoposthitis, and gonorrhoea, although there was a tremendous amount of confusion as to symptoms and diagnosis until the early part of the twentieth century. Claude Quézel, *History of Syphilis* Trans. Judith Braddock and Brian Pike (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 109, 111.

⁵ Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease*, 42

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 74.

⁸ Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease*, 108-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹ For more on gender, racism, and science, see Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston, 1993) quoted in Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease*, 38, n70.

¹² Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2000), 139.

¹³ James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast 1785-1841* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 285.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ For an overview of venereal disease in North America see Jay Cassel, *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) and Allan M. Brandt: *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹⁸ R.H. Pidcock to I.W. Powell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Alert Bay, 3 April 1889, National Archives of Canada (NAC), Record Group 10 (RG10), Records of the Department of Indian Affairs (D.I.A.), Vol. 3816, File 57045-1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ A. Hall to A.W. Vowell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Alert Bay, 5 October 1889, D.I.A, RG 10, Vol. 3816, File 57,045-1.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ W.L. Meason to A.W. Vowell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Alert Bay, 4 August 1890, D.I.A, RG 10, Vol. 3816, File 57,045-1.

²⁴ H. Guillod to A.W. Vowell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Alert Bay, 22 August 1890, D.I.A, RG 10, Vol. 3816, File 57,045-1.

²⁵ W.M. Halliday, *Potlatch and Totem and the Recollections of an Indian Agent* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1935), 226. Halliday's figures do not agree with recent population statistics collected by Robert Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775-1920: A Geographic Analysis and Gazetteer* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994) which shows a population decrease from 2271 for all Kwakwaka'wakw tribes in 1881 to 1039 in 1924.

²⁶ Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁸ Jean Barman, "Invisible Women: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed-Race Daughters in Rural Pioneer British Columbia" in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 176.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 226-7.

³⁰ For a comprehensive treatment of marriages between fur-traders and Native women, see both Sylvia Van Kirk *'Many Tender Ties': Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada. 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, Watson & Dwyer, 1980), and Jennifer Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1980).

³¹ Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998) 62-89.

³² *Ibid.*, 62.

³³ Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 8-9.

³⁴ Mariana Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race is Free': Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992), 6.

³⁵ Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease*, 174.

³⁶ Suzann Buckley and Janice Dickin McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 63 (1982), 338.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

³⁸ The Department of Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church, "Which Side Are You On?" (NP: ND, circa WWI), Reverend Hugh Dobson Papers 1912-26, Box A3, File N, UCA.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ See the peaks in convictions for prostitution-related convictions during the war years, Appendix 1 and 2

Policing Prostitution in the Similkameen: Informal Systems of Regulation in the 1920s

In the central interior of British Columbia, nestled within the valleys of the heavily forested eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains, the small towns along the Similkameen River were remote from each other and difficult to access from the rest of the province. In the 1920s, the Similkameen had stronger connections to the dry, fruit-producing regions of the Okanagan to the east, than to the urban areas of the west coast. Although gold was found in the region by the 1880s and the boomtown of Granite City grew overnight, little significant development occurred in the region until a number of large companies began coal, copper, and gold mining operations in the late 1890s. Although the area did contain some large ranches and farming areas on the flatlands to the east and north, the towns were mainly dependent upon the hard rock mining activity. The economy and population of the Similkameen region fluctuated according to the activities of the mining companies. Census data for 1921 and 1931, recording 7743 and 11059 in the Similkameen respectively, does not demonstrate the degree of population mobility experienced by the region throughout these years.¹

Mine shutdowns, strikes, and disasters affected growth and development. The region experienced many economic downturns throughout the 1920s. One of the larger employers, the Hedley gold mine, closed in the winter of 1920-21 and between 1930 and 1932, reportedly throwing “the entire population into dependence on relief work.”² A strike in 1923 led to the Princeton Collieries’ takeover of a large coal mine on the mountains overlooking Princeton, but the mine was abandoned in 1924 when internal fires made operational costs too high. The mine reopened in 1925 and rehired its original employees. Allenby Copper Company was incorporated in 1923 and operated through that year at Copper Mountain. In 1925, the Granby Consolidated Mining and Smelting Co. Ltd. took over the copper mine and was successful until the fall of

copper prices in 1930, when it shut down.³ The activity of the mining companies had a direct influence on the area's population. For example, when Copper Mountain was about to recommence operation in 1925, the police constable reported a huge increase in population: "at present there are 140 men at Allenby and about 35 at Copper Mountain, [where] three months ago there were 4 or 5."⁴

These economic fluctuations caused considerable instability in the area. While gender ratios were gradually levelling out in the province by the turn of the twentieth century, the Similkameen still had a distinctly gendered character throughout the 1920s, with approximately 13% more men than women recorded in the 1921 census, at the same time that urban centres were reporting a one to three percent difference.⁵ In Adele Perry's study of gender and race in BC's colonial history, she finds that throughout the province when men worked in an unstable, resource-oriented economy, "In [the] interior towns and urban enclaves – especially in the off-season – young, white, working men were a loud and sometimes disturbing presence."⁶ When diversified economies developed and skewed gender ratios levelled out, the rough male working culture that Perry describes eventually dissipated and was absorbed into middle-class society. In the remote areas of the Similkameen, while a more settled society was gradually evolving, male working class culture was still a distinct entity, evidenced by the large number of saloons in the small towns and by the 'wide-open' attitude towards all forms of vice, including alcohol use, gambling, and prostitution.

Community Toleration

The community acceptance of prostitution in the town of Coalmont is clear in the newspaper reports of the death of a well-known prostitute in November 1920. Hattie McBride had lived in

Coalmont for eleven years and owned three lots upon which she built her own house and two rental houses assessed at \$1500.⁷ She was reportedly “a woman of considerable means, owning \$15,000 worth of bonds,...[and] \$5000 in Victory Bonds” and had approximately \$5000 in the bank.⁸ On 26 November 1920, the *Princeton Star* reported: “House and Body of Coalmont Woman Burned Under Suspicious Circumstances.”⁹ A large cache of bills and silver coins was found in the burned house, ruling out robbery as a possible motive and “no other suggestion [was] forthcoming to explain why her life should have been taken.”¹⁰ The coroner’s jury returned a verdict that McBride “came to her death by foul play at the hands of some person or persons unknown and afterwards burned with her house.”¹¹

Senior Constable Fryer of the Princeton detachment of the British Columbia Provincial Police (BCPP) reported that “the fire couldn’t have been hot enough to have burnt the body such as it was found” if the fire had not been started under McBride’s body.¹² Despite the reports of the coroner, a doctor, and the constable, the case was never investigated and no suspects were ever charged -- not from lack of evidence or suspects, but because Hattie McBride was a known prostitute and a suspected “dope fiend.”¹³

Although the police decided not to investigate McBride’s death, the citizens of Coalmont were upset with the lack of official response.¹⁴ On a visit to Coalmont a month after McBride’s death, the Chief Constable described the residents as “panic stricken since the death of Hattie McBride”, and suggested to the Superintendent that the BCPP “would be justified in putting in a constable...as they [the residents] fear[ed]...the town [would] not be safe without Police protection, for even a single night.”¹⁵ Their panicked response, concerns for their own safety, and demands for justice after McBride’s death suggest that, despite her profession, the citizens of Coalmont had accepted Hattie McBride as a member of their community. Although McBride

had no relatives in the area, her funeral was well attended by many friends from Coalmont and Princeton.¹⁶

The different responses of the citizens of Coalmont and the police to McBride's death are indicative of varying reactions to prostitutes and their profession in the Similkameen region in the 1920s. Evidence in the BCPP files from the Greenwood District, which included Coalmont and Princeton in the Similkameen, suggests the existence of tolerant attitudes towards prostitution by both police and local citizens that eventually changed to a system of informal regulation of an established red-light district. But the records also demonstrate that the laws against prostitution were not evenly applied, and that not all prostitutes were treated equally over the period. Itinerant prostitutes were frequently charged with various offences to force them to leave a community, while prostitutes who owned property or were long-time residents of a community were more accepted. Treatment by the police tended to depend on the community's view of prostitution. At different times, the public viewed prostitutes either as desirable citizens who contributed economically to their community or as menaces to society. These opposing views influenced police responses, depending upon which was more vocal at the time.

Of the forty-five known prostitutes who had contact with the BCPP in the Similkameen between 1918 and 1930, thirteen were long-term residents, residing in the district from four to nineteen years, eighteen were convicted for prostitution only once or twice (most likely short-term residents), and fourteen were clearly transients. The police were most obviously concerned with the removal of transient prostitutes. These women usually traveled from the BC coast or from the United States to the interior, stayed for a short time in a local hotel or rooming house, and plied their trade from their rooms. The police were suspicious of all women who traveled alone, so they tended to keep a close watch on their activities. For itinerant prostitutes, this

intense surveillance usually resulted in charges within a few weeks of the woman's arrival as an 'inmate of a disorderly house' and the woman frequently left town immediately after appearing in court and paying her fine.¹⁷ For example, on 10 May 1924, a single woman named Phyllis booked into the Davenport Rooming House in Princeton. She was convicted of violating Section 229 on May 13, paid her \$25 fine, and left for Seattle via Vancouver on the same day.¹⁸ Her experience of police action was typical of the tactics police used to remove transient prostitutes from the Similkameen.

Occasionally, transient women were charged with a liquor violation (which also carried a \$25 fine), accused of being a prostitute, and ordered to leave town within a specified period. Ida was never convicted for prostitution. But a month after a liquor violation in Penticton was dismissed on 28 November 1924, she traveled to Princeton where she was suspected of selling liquor from her room in the Tulameen Hotel and warned to leave town because she was an "undesirable prostitute and a menace to society."¹⁹ She left the area for four years, but returned to Princeton and was charged on 22 January 1928 with "Unlawful Possession of Liquor," which carried a \$300 fine.²⁰ She left the area for the second time and did not return. Police also had the option of charging transient women with other violations such as vagrancy, theft, or false pretences.²¹ Many of the cases in the police files, in which a woman was suspected of prostitution but charged with other offences, suggests that once a woman was suspected of prostitution, any means that effectively removed 'undesirable' women from the community was deemed legitimate.

While the BCPP used many tactics to remove transient prostitutes from their communities, this was not the case with established prostitutes who owned property. By the 1920s, the Similkameen had a thirty-year history of prostitution and the profession was still

flourishing. Hattie McBride had been operating a brothel in Coalmont since 1909 and at least one brothel was still operating throughout the 1920s in each of Hedley, Copper Mountain, and Tulameen. In addition, two brothels operated in Granite Creek, and the red-light district on Princeton's Angela Avenue consisted of at least five brothels. For the most part, the brothels were operated by older women who owned the property, which gave them some protection from the law.²² Chief Constable Fraser excused Constable Fryer's inability to "clean-up" Princeton's prostitutes in a 1921 letter to Superintendent McMynn: "Now there are two other women there, who are generally known to be old prostitutes, but they own their own houses, and as they are situated in a back street in Chinatown, I was told that there was no complaint about them, and it would be a hard matter to remove them."²³ In the post-war period, the brothels expanded in Princeton. Whereas in 1920 there were two or three brothels, by 1924 there were five known houses of prostitution in the red-light district on Angela Avenue with approximately fifteen working prostitutes.

Though ownership of the brothels remained relatively consistent, there was a certain degree of upward mobility within Princeton's brothels. On 3 October 1922, Charlott bought a house on Angela Avenue from a man who had been using it as a residence.²⁴ She operated a brothel in the house for two years before selling the property to one of the prostitutes who had worked for her, a woman named Olga.²⁵ Olga continued to operate the brothel for four years, employing three prostitutes, a Chinese caretaker, and a local woman (reportedly 'respectable') who came in occasionally to clean.²⁶ Women like Olga made a successful career of prostitution in the Similkameen. The profession obviously allowed for some upward mobility as Olga moved from being a working prostitute to a property owner within two years of working for Charlott.

Olga was successful because she established strong economic ties with the community by employing others and buying property; ties that protected her from complaints and prosecution.

Brothel owners and workers who stayed in Princeton throughout the period remained because they had invested in their community. They stayed in Princeton through economic downturns due to mine closures and strikes, even though these events probably adversely affected their business. They stayed despite occasional community opposition. In 1921, a member of the Princeton Board of Trade complained to the Attorney General that the local constables were permitting prostitution “in the residential streets [where] the traffic [was] so apparent and openly carried on that its results are apparent in the younger generation of some of our citizens.”²⁷ The Attorney General took the man’s complaint seriously and directed the Chief Constable to investigate his allegations. The Chief Constable found that there was only one young transient prostitute in Princeton who was being run out of town, despite evidence to the contrary.²⁸ In 1920, the Princeton Hotel was built and its imposing brick walls hid the brothels on Angela Avenue from view, alleviating the concerns of some of Princeton’s more vehement citizens.²⁹ Therefore, as long as the prostitutes stayed in the red-light district, maintained economic ties to the community by owning properties and employing others and did not flaunt themselves too publicly, they were permitted to conduct their businesses without police intervention. This period of relatively peaceful coexistence ended in 1925 with the arrival of a new constable in the Similkameen.

Informal Systems of Regulation

Constable R.C.B. Foote was transferred to Princeton in 1925 with his wife and eight children. Upon Foote’s arrival, larger, more expensive quarters had to be provided to house his family. Previously, the Princeton constables had lived in rented rooms above the courthouse as Princeton

was the only community in the district that did not provide separate quarters for constables.³⁰ Shortly after his arrival, Foote requested that an extra man be stationed at the detachment to assist him because of an increase in the male population due to mining activity in the area. Both the larger quarters and the extra constable considerably added to the expenses of the Princeton detachment. The Sergeant in Charge of the Boundary District Headquarters in Penticton, John Macdonald, became concerned with the increased expenditures in Princeton and urged Foote to increase revenues.³¹ He improved revenues by placing increased pressure on the brothels and bootleggers in Princeton.

From 1925 to 1928, established Princeton prostitutes were subjected to a flurry of charges for prostitution and liquor violations, which eventually drove most of them to sell their houses and leave the area. Although police may have believed in 1920 that they could not easily get a conviction if a prostitute owned her house, with Foote's arrival in the Similkameen, property owners were frequently charged with either keeping a disorderly house or with liquor violations. Olga owned her brothel in 1924 but was not convicted under Section 228 and fined until 1926.³² She was placed under police surveillance for liquor violations on a monthly basis throughout 1927 and 1928.³³ Although the laws against prostitution remained the same throughout the period, police interpretation of those laws became more severe.³⁴

Whereas there were no charges against brothel owners for prostitution-related offences prior to 1925, over a three-year period, Foote collected \$700 in fines from prostitution charges directed against established prostitutes who owned property in Princeton. He also collected \$2250 in fines for liquor violations from those same women. These figures do not include the considerable amounts received in fines from men charged with bootlegging during the same period, nor the fines collected from transient prostitutes. Foote raised these sums through regular

raids on the brothels. From May 1925 to November 1926, Foote routinely gathered up all the madams and inmates in one night, and charged them with either prostitution or liquor violations. Throughout this period, only once did he catch a prostitute 'in the act' because she had left the bedroom window open, and charged her, the customer, and the brothel owner.³⁵ At times, Foote laid charges for liquor violations in the brothels without apparently seizing any liquor. Police were required to submit lists of liquor seized in raids because the illicit liquor was returned to the Government Liquor Agency for disposal. In a raid against bootleggers and brothels that netted \$2300 in fines on 23 August 1926, three madams, Lynn, Cleo, and Lucille, each received \$300 fines for "Possession of Liquor with the Intent to Sell."³⁶ Lynn was found with a part bottle of gin and Cleo with ten pints of beer, but no alcohol was reportedly seized from Lucille. Foote's attempts to charge the brothel owners and workers were not always successful. In May 1925, charges for prostitution against Joyce were dismissed despite the testimony of three witnesses, and in October 1928 charges for liquor violations against four madams were withdrawn on instructions from the Attorney General because Foote used a "stool pigeon."³⁷ Despite these setbacks, Foote was overwhelmingly successful in his raids on the brothels, increasing the detachment's revenues far beyond the expectations of his superiors.

The Failure of Regulation

Although tolerance of prostitution had changed to regulation with Foote's arrival, the success of the constable's raids was detrimental to the viability of prostitution as a profession in Princeton. Business in the brothels began to fall off and the almost \$3000 the women paid in fines must have cut into their revenues considerably. Foote was so successful in closing down brothels that some of the citizens of Princeton became concerned with his actions and wrote to Staff Sergeant J.A. Fraser, who was in charge of the district. Their letters resulted in Fraser traveling to

Princeton to investigate allegations that Foote was “too strict” with the prostitutes and the bootleggers and that his constant raids had hurt the Princeton economy.³⁸

Fraser interviewed two citizens, a doctor who had resided in the area since at least 1920, and J.A. Brown, the editor of *The Princeton Star*, who had spearheaded a campaign against Foote through editorials in his newspaper. They complained to Fraser that “the men from Copper Mountain were afraid to come in and spend their money for fear of being arrested” in one of Foote’s frequent raids.³⁹ Though they admitted that the constable did not arrest people without just cause, they “complained that Constable Foote was keeping such a close watch on the houses of ill-repute that the men would not go to them to spend their money, [and] as a result, the girls had no money to spend.”⁴⁰ When Fraser “asked them if Princeton had got to such a state that it had to rely on the avails of prostitution to keep it on the map,” the men replied “that was not the point but the money was going past them to other points.”⁴¹ In Fraser’s opinion, “the Constables of the Princeton detachment, Constables R.C.B. Foote and J.P. Brown [were] carrying out their duties satisfactorily and the public [had] no legitimate room for complaint.”⁴² Despite their failure to get Fraser to reprimand the Princeton constables, the fact that citizens’ complaints were brought before the head of the district suggests that the established prostitutes in Princeton were still tolerated by at least some residents as a vital component of the local economy.

Others in Princeton did not see prostitutes as desirable contributors to the local economy. Three weeks after Fraser’s visit to Princeton, he received anonymous letters from concerned citizens regarding the social conditions in the Princeton area. On 26 November 1926, a Coalmont citizen wrote to Fraser regarding the gambling, bootlegging, and prostitution in the town.⁴³ On November 28, another anonymous citizen wrote Fraser a letter that listed the names

of the owners and the addresses of “blind pigs” in Princeton and Coalmont, expressing concerns that “on a road back of the Princeton Hotel, known as Angel Avenue there [was] a cluster of six genuine prostitution houses, which of course also [sold] liquor. [The anonymous writer had] not been inside any of them but there [could] be no mistaking them and everybody knew about them.”⁴⁴ This second informer did not wish “to cast aspersions on [police] representatives, who from all accounts [were] very capable and attentive to their duties,” though the citizen was concerned “that for its size Princeton [was] well set up as regards prostitution houses and blind pigs.”⁴⁵ In a speech in Merritt reported in *The Princeton Star*, a citizen who had sold a property to a woman in 1925 that was purchased for a brothel claimed:

...more care must be exercised in choosing emigrants (sic). He could speak from careful observation on this matter, and had no hesitation in saying that there was a very undesirable element came from the South, a class of people that did not respect our laws and did not hesitate to violate them in their frenzy to grasp the almighty dollar.⁴⁶

Though the anonymous letter writers may have been genuinely concerned about prostitution in Princeton, this citizen was clearly hypocritical in his speech, as he had made a profit when he bought back the property from the madam when she was forced out of town. Therefore, although some citizens and businesses benefited when the brothels were permitted to operate without police interference, others benefited more when police actions drove brothel owners out of the community. Either way, one of the factors that determined how prostitutes were treated under the law depended upon which group of citizens had the most power at a given time.

Foote was never officially reprimanded, but the regular raids on the brothels ended after Fraser’s visit to Princeton. Despite repeated attempts by citizens to have him transferred, Foote remained in Princeton until 1931, but he only charged brothel residents for liquor violations three

times between 1927 and 1931. Therefore, his superior's visit and public criticism had a lasting effect on Foote's actions.

Although the raids stopped in 1927, they had a negative effect on prostitution in Princeton. Margaret, an Aboriginal woman who had run a boarding house in Princeton for five years and had been suspected of prostitution and charged several times with liquor violations, sold her property for a \$300 profit on 23 June 1926 and left town.⁴⁷ Lucille and Phyllis closed their brothel in January 1928 and left the area.⁴⁸ Olga closed her house and left it in the care of her Chinese caretaker in 1928.⁴⁹ Peggy and Marion continued to work for Joyce until they all left together in 1929, and Hattie remained in Lola's house until at least January 1929, although she eventually left the woman for whom she had worked for three years.⁵⁰ Though the majority left the area, the few women who stayed seemed to have again prospered under the relaxed police surveillance. Lola, a long-time madam in the area, died in Princeton at age 60 in 1937 without any further charges brought against her in the last decade of her life.⁵¹ Edith, a woman who had been convicted twice in 1927 of 'being an inmate of' a disorderly house, purchased properties in Hedley in 1930 and 1933, and Helen, a Black prostitute in Granite Creek in 1929, had the option of laying charges against the man who burned down a woodshed that she owned, but decided that she did not want to take any action against him.⁵² Although these few prostitutes remained, the era that witnessed the growth of a flourishing trade in prostitution under an informal policy of toleration was clearly over.

¹ Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, *Volume I - Population*, "Table 16: Population, Canadian, British, and Foreign Born, Classified by Sex for Counties or Census Divisions, 1921," 339. For a visual example of how Princeton changed in only 12 years, see photos Appendix 7.

² BCPP, "File No. 3318 Keremeos: Reports/Liquor," 31 December 1930, RAAM.

³ J.C. Goodfellow, "An Historical Gazetteer of Okanagan-Similkameen," *Okanagan History*. 22:124.

⁴ BCPP "Princeton Correspondence 1913-1925." File 40-3453, 20 July 1925, RAAM.

⁵ 4208 men and 3249 women are recorded in the 1921 census for the Similkameen. Comparable statistics for other areas show 1.6% more men than women in the Greater Vancouver Area census and 3.8% more men in the City of Victoria census. Sixth Census of Canada, "Table 16," 339.

⁶ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 16.

⁷ *Real Property and Wild Land Assessment Rolls, 1913-1918*. Coalmont District. McBride's land was assessed at \$1500 in 1913, the year she bought it, but the same land was assessed at \$500 in 1918 due to declining land values. Princeton and District Museum Archives, Princeton BC (hereafter PDM). See Appendix 8 for a photo of McBride's property and a map of Coalmont.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *The Princeton Star*, 26 November 1920.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² BCPP, "Princeton Correspondence 1913-25." File 40-3453. Letter from Senior Constable Fryer, Princeton detachment to William G. McMynn, Superintendent of BCPP, Victoria, 24 November 1920, RAAM.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ BCPP "Greenwood Correspondence Jan 1918-Dec 1919." File 40-3050. Letter from Fraser to McMynn, 17 December 1920, RAAM.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *The Princeton Star*, 3 December 1920.

¹⁷ *Revised Statutes of Canada, 1927*. Section 225. In the Criminal Code, 'disorderly houses' included 'common bawdy houses,' 'common betting houses,' and 'common gaming houses,' but police in the interior used the term consistently to refer to 'bawdy houses' throughout the 1920s. Section 229 covered 'being an inmate of' and section 228 was for 'keeping a bawdy house.'

¹⁸ BCPP "Princeton Reports/ Crime: Sex Offences 1924-26." File 40-3472. 14 May 1924, RAAM.

¹⁹ BCPP “Fairview Reports / Liquor: General Correspondence Sep 1923-Apr 1925.” File 40-2873, 28 November 1924 and “Princeton Reports / Liquor: Aug 1923- Feb 1931.” File 40-3480, monthly report 31 December 1924, RAAM.

²⁰ BCPP “Penticton Reports / Crime: Liquor Violations.” File 40-3413, 22 January 1928, RAAM.

²¹ BCPP “Keremeos Jail Calendars.” File 40-3253, 24 May 1923, RAAM. Edith was found with three men and all were charged with vagrancy. She received three months at Oakalla, while the men were fined ten dollars each and released. *Nelson Provincial Gaol Records*, 1 September 1935, Selkirk College Archives. Ruth, who had several previous charges for prostitution, was charged with theft and false pretences and sentenced to 18 months hard labour at Oakalla. “Grand Forks Correspondence Apr 1912- Dec 1923.” File 40-2892, 08 September 1921, RAAM. An unnamed woman who worked as a maid at a local home and rented a ‘shack’ for illicit purposes was suspected of stealing a wristwatch based on her bad reputation. The constable intended to “watch her ... and have her watched” with the intent of catching her wearing the watch so he could charge her with theft and hopefully remove her from Grand Forks.

²² B.C. Vital Statistics and Princeton and District, *Property Transfers* 1921-1935. Unaccessioned Princeton Records, PDM. The average age of four of the women who owned brothels in Princeton in 1925 was 42.

²³ BCPP “Greenwood Correspondence: 1920-21.” File 40-3053, 11 July 1921, RAAM.

²⁴ “Property Transfers.” Charlott M. bought Lot 6 Blk 4 Map 1003 for \$670.00.

²⁵ “Property Transfers.” Olga C. bought Lot 6 Blk 4 Map 1003 for \$700.00 from Charlott M.

²⁶ BCPP “Princeton Reports / Liquor: Aug 1923- Feb 1931.” File 40-3480. 05 May 1928, RAAM.

²⁷ BCPP “Princeton Correspondence 1913-1925,” File 40-3453, 23 June 1921, RAAM.

²⁸ BCPP “Greenwood Correspondence 1920-21,” File 30-3053, 11 July 1921, RAAM.

²⁹ *The Princeton Star*, 03 December 1920. See map and photo Appendix 9.

³⁰ BCPP “Greenwood Correspondence: January 1918-December 1919.” File 40-3050, 24 January 1919, RAAM

³¹ BCPP “Penticton Correspondence July 1928-December 1928.” File 40-3389, 14 November 1928, RAAM.

Macdonald reported to Inspector Dunwoody, Commander of “B” District, that although expenses had increased “by approximately \$60.00 per month” in 1926-28, he had placed pressure on the constables to “increase activity... [and Dunwoody should] note that the collections have increased considerably during the period.”

³² BCPP "Princeton Reports / Crime: Sex Offences 1924-26." File 40-3472, 25 January 1926 and 25 November 1926, RAAM.

³³ BCPP "Princeton Reports / Liquor: August 1923- February 1931." File 40-3480, monthly reports August 1926-May 1928, RAAM.

³⁴ "The actual act of exchanging sexual gratification for a consideration (between adults) has never been criminally illegal in Canada. The criminal law did, and does, however, deal with activities related to prostitution that are deemed a threat to public order or offensive to public decency. Incorporated into Canada's first *Criminal Code* in 1892, and essentially unchanged until 1972, was a provision which treated the activities of a prostitute seeking out customers as a form of vagrancy." Allain. Jane. *Prostitution*. Ottawa Research Branch: Law and Government Division, 1982. 2.

³⁵ BCPP "Princeton Reports / Crime: Sex Offences 1924-26." File 40-3472, 27 May 1926, RAAM. Foote reported that he had entered Joyce's house with a warrant after observing Jessi and Jenner through an open window and found them "in a bedroom in bed" together. Joyce received a \$50.00 fine and Jessi and Jenner each received a \$25.00 fine. This is the only mention of using a warrant to gain entry to a 'disorderly house' in the police records.

³⁶ *The Princeton Star*, 26 August 1926.

³⁷ BCPP "Princeton Correspondence 1913-1925." File 40-3453, 25 June 1925, RAAM. and *The Princeton Star*, 01 November 1928.

³⁸ BCPP "Penticton Correspondence Jan 1927-Dec 1927." File 40-3385, 01 November 1927, RAAM.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ BCPP "Princeton Correspondence 1926." File 40-3454, 26 November 1927, RAAM.

⁴⁴ 'Blind pig' is a term commonly used to refer to a place where liquor was illegally sold by the glass. BCPP "Princeton Correspondence 1926." File 40-3454, 28 November 1927, RAAM.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *The Princeton Star*, 27 November 1927.

⁴⁷ "Property Transfers." Margaret sold Blk 986 for \$800.00.

⁴⁸ BCPP "Princeton Reports / Liquor: Aug 1923- Feb 1931." File 40-3480, 02 January 1928, RAAM.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 31 May 1928.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 08 January 1929

⁵¹ B.C. Vital Statistics.

⁵² BCPP "Coalmont Correspondence 1920-30." File 40-2830, 02 October 1929, RAAM.

Corruption in the Okanagan, 1929

By 1929, fruit growing in the interior region of the Okanagan was an established industry. Although close to the mining region of the Similkameen, the Okanagan developed a different character due to the type of immigrants it attracted and the slow but steady growth of its towns. The few early settlers in the area were mainly interested in ranching, "but from the turn of the century the Okanagan Valley especially appealed to British immigrants and others who came to farm or grow fruit."¹ At the head of Okanagan Lake, "enclaves of middle-class Britons" settled in the Coldstream area and near Kelowna, and by 1929 the area appeared stable and well established.² One contemporary observer called Kelowna "an ideal British Columbian community."³

Kelowna's complacency was shattered in 1928 with the allegations of BC Provincial Police Constable Corrigan in open court that it was a "hot-bed of vice."⁴ Corrigan further claimed that Chief Thomas, head of the Kelowna City Police, was either "inefficient," or "grafting" (accepting bribes) and cited a number of cases that "implied laxity on the part of the City Police."⁵ Corrigan also inferred that the city Police Commissioners, in allowing Chief Thomas free reign, were also negligent in their duties. The allegations came out during Corrigan's testimony in the fall of 1928 in the Vernon Court of Assizes, when "Corrigan charged Chief Thomas with tipping off Annie Wong She, [a] Chinese prostitute and dope pedlar, [sic] with regard to a raid on her premises made by the Provincial Police."⁶ Kelowna Police Commissioners were infuriated at the allegations and demanded a full public enquiry into police affairs in their city. Under the Public Inquiries Act, the Lieutenant Governor in Council appointed Lindley Crease, K.C., of Victoria sole commissioner. This commission commenced 9 May 1929 with fairly widespread powers to investigate affairs in the city.⁷

Testimony to the commission demonstrates the level of complacency in the small Okanagan town. Current and former Police Commissioners, several citizens and the health inspector all claimed that “law enforcement was good in Kelowna.” The testimony of Dr. J.E. Wright, Police Commissioner from 1923 to 1929, is typical of attitudes towards vice. He stated that although he travelled through Chinatown every day in the course of his duties, “he knew nothing of alleged conditions in Chinatown...he knew nothing of the sale of liquor to Indians...and had never seen evidence of Indians drinking.” Dr. B. deF. Boyce, medical health officer until 1918 and a current Police Commissioner, claimed that “over a period of ten years there had not been more than two cases of venereal disease,” leading him to conclude that the lack of disease was a good indication that there was little prostitution in the area.⁸ The Mayor agreed with these statements and added that he “He knew nothing of the practice of prostitution in the city. He felt that if a horrible state of affairs had existed generally he would have heard more about it.” Mayor Sutherland concluded that he “thought Kelowna was one of the cleanest cities in the country.”⁹

Their evidence was in direct opposition to the testimony of RCMP officers who had made many drug raids in the city throughout the 1920s. Detective Staff Sergeant G.O. Reid testified that he had served in the interior from 1919 to 1926, and upon commencement of his duties, “he had received the information that Kelowna was a distributing centre of narcotic drugs. He had found the information to be correct, learning that the drugs were being sent from Kelowna to Princeton, Keremeos, Midway and logging camps near Summerland, with an occasional shipment to Nelson.” He also testified that he had reason to believe that Chief of Police Thomas was “unreliable and likely to tip off the Chinese” about forthcoming raids, so he had obtained authority to conduct investigations in the city without first informing Thomas. Reid provided

details of a number of cases where large quantities of drugs had been seized in raids in Chinatown and claimed that in many of the “shacks” in Chinatown, prostitution was also rampant, evidenced by the large number of “French letters” or condoms often found during raids.

Reid also provided testimony about a well-organized trade in White prostitutes that was connected to the Chinese drug trade in Kelowna. Sergeant Birch of the Penticton RCMP confirmed Reid’s testimony. Both testified that while waiting to raid the house of a Chinese cook, Chu Pen Chung, early one morning in January 1925, they “observed thirty-two white girls get out of taxis at 2:30 in the morning and proceed[ing] in the direction of Kong Woo’s store.” They stated that they believed the women were part of a definite circuit between the coast and the Okanagan-Similkameen used for transporting drugs. The women entered Kelowna by car, stage, or CPR boat, stayed in the city for a day or two and engaged in prostitution in Chinatown, picked up small retail packages of narcotics and moved onto the next town, “where their information is there is the most money to be obtained. They plan to be [at particular places] at particular times” along certain routes “known to be profitable.” The constables believed that the routes had been in place for a considerable time and that “prostitution is quite common in Chinatown.”¹⁰ Although both agreed that there was no red-light district in Kelowna, Birch stated that conditions in Chinatown indicated that it “took the place of a red-light district.” He further stated that in his twenty-four years experience in the police force, he had never seen conditions so bad in other places, and that Kelowna was “more open...[whereas] other places show a little decency in keeping it [prostitution] covered.”¹¹

Although evidence of a white slave trade being conducted in Kelowna right under the noses of the police was bad enough, this was not the only instance of prostitution that came out in the proceedings. The agent in charge of the Okanagan Indian Agency, F.J.C. Ball, testified he

had sent a letter to Mayor Sutherland four years previously about the ease with which Aboriginal people of the Westbank Reserve could obtain liquor in Kelowna from Chinese bootleggers. Ball claimed that he had lost faith in the ability of the City Police to enforce the law in the city, so he had “enlisted outside aid,” requesting the RCMP and Provincial Police to investigate the liquor trade in the area. As part of his testimony, Ball recounted a story told to him by “Emily Tomat, daughter-in-law of Indian Chief Tomat of the Westbank Reserve” about the prevalence of prostitution in the city. Emily confessed to Ball “cases of Indian prostitution carried on by Indian women in what was then known as the Royal Hotel, opposite the old government ferry wharf” and just a few blocks away from the police station and downtown area. Before she died of cancer of the womb, Emily said that the empty hotel was used “about two years ago [as] a regular house of assignation for Indian women and Hindoos, [sic] and Chinese, and low whites.”¹²

Ball’s allegations about the prevalence of Aboriginal prostitution in Kelowna were substantiated by RCMP Sergeant Birch, who “watched the place and had it under observation”, and heard “the screams of certain Indian women while they were having connection.” One woman, believed by the Sergeant to be Emily because of her illness, screamed in such a manner “that somebody must hear them,” but the Sergeant never investigated because “the matter itself was rather small and we have got a very large district to work, and it is impossible to investigate all these minor irregularities.”¹³ Birch was clearly interested more in the liquor and drug traffic than in prostitution, but was never censured by either his superiors or the commissioner for his lack of action. Ball’s attitude towards Aboriginal prostitution is equally chilling, as he testified that prostitution was not confined to single women, but that “the Indian women who are living with their husbands, married either in Indian fashion or in regular marriage [all] go in for this

prostitution.” He claimed that in his experience, Aboriginal women under the influence of liquor “lose all control.”¹⁴

Testimony from many sources suggests that prostitution was also rampant in Kelowna outside of the Chinese district. A brothel on Water Street was “a quite notorious...whore house...a blind pig too...[and was] the talk of the town.” Although it was well known, the police never raided the couple who owned the house and the inmates were never prosecuted.¹⁵ Another house on Ellis Street was also never raided, even though a former city councillor testified that he had told Thomas to investigate it, and a neighbour reported to Thomas “that White girls were carried out of there on one occasion...helped out by Chinamen under the influence of drink or drugs. Helped out and put in a car.”¹⁶ Corrigan testified that he believed Thomas never interfered with the activities in the brothels because “quite substantial citizens of the town [were in the habit of] occasionally having a drink in there [the brothels].” He believed that Thomas was placed in the “rather embarrassing position” of having to arrest respectable citizens if he conducted raids, and thus chose to look the other way.¹⁷

Further evidence of the existence of other forms of prostitution in Kelowna may also be found in the proceedings of the commission. In the summer of 1927, two women who were believed to be professional prostitutes as both had been convicted in Vancouver, were seen swimming naked with a man with an unsavoury reputation in the Tourist Park in the middle of the afternoon.¹⁸ Chief Thomas was called and arrested them. The man was charged with keeping a disorderly house in the St. Louis Café, and the women were charged \$25 each for being inmates. Thomas loaned the women bail money while they were waiting for money to be wired from Vancouver, and believed they had left the area as soon as they money came, despite reports

to the contrary. Other evidence suggests that he never followed up on the case, and the three remained in the area where the women were still engaged in prostitution throughout 1929.¹⁹

Other evidence connected graft to the regulation of transient prostitution. Chief Thomas claimed that he was in the habit of forcing transient prostitutes out of the city as soon as they arrived. He said: "When I come across these women, I tell them what time the next bus or train leaves and advise them to clear [out]...[my] policy is to keep them going."²⁰ Despite his claims, evidence to the contrary was heard from many sources. For example, RCMP Sergeant Birch testified about a case in the middle of winter in 1922 when two girls came in on the boat at 4:00 "and there was no question of their vocation." They obviously did not leave right away as Birch spoke to one of the women later and she told him: "I had a visit from the chief of Police...[and] he let me alone for \$5.00."²¹ Chief Inspector Cadiz concurred with Birch's testimony and further suggested that Thomas should have had an easier time controlling vice in Kelowna than in other areas because "you can't get in or out other than boat or ferry."²² Other testimony expressed the opinion that Thomas "has either been grafting or that he is a fool...I do not see how he would let things run the way he has unless he was benefiting by it in some manner or another."²³

The first clear case of juvenile prostitution in British Columbia is found in the Kelowna proceedings. Corrigan claimed that he had come across a young girl of "11 or 12 years alone with an Italian about 25 years of age" in a remote cabin while searching for a thief. Although he told Thomas that the girl was nude, "no prosecution was made by the City Police."²⁴ Magistrate Weddell, who claimed that the case of the young girl and her sister was "one of the most disgraceful affairs which had ever come to his attention," confirmed Corrigan's tale. He recalled that the younger sister had only been "seven or eight years of age [when] she had been induced by a Chinaman to go to his shack...[and thus] started on a career that had made her notorious."

Despite knowing of the sisters' actions, Weddell testified that Thomas "did nothing in this case, but Corrigan eventually arrested them and was instrumental in having them sent to an Industrial Home."²⁵

A.J. Foot, caretaker of the Aquatic Pavilion in the city park in which many of the sisters' activities had taken place, also testified that he had "asked the Chief if something could not be done about them but Thomas had done nothing."²⁶ The doctor who testified that he had examined the eldest girl "after her connection with the Chinaman" stated, in his expert opinion, that the sisters were "monomaniacs. They were very bright girls but they had a mania for sexual intercourse...they were abnormal."²⁷ He therefore claimed that Thomas was not at fault for the girls' actions, as nothing anyone could have done would have stopped their activities.

Despite the doctor's defence of Thomas, this case may have turned public opinion against Thomas, as the chief was publicly censured by the commissioner for his lack of action in the case. In his rebuttal, Thomas claimed that he knew the girls' mother was "loose" but only told her to restrain the girls, which in the commissioner's view, "was as good as doing nothing to protect them or the public morals."²⁸ Thomas' main defence to all of the allegations against him was that Corrigan falsified the allegations due to "bad blood" between them. He claimed, "the case of the...girls had marred the relationship" between Corrigan and himself, and he believed that the BCPP constable had the girls sent to an industrial home to purposely "'show up' the inactivity of the City Police."²⁹ Thomas even brought charges against Corrigan for "interference with the City Police in city territory, and of threats and vituperative language being hurled against them [Thomas and City constable Chaplin], without just cause," although Crease dismissed these charges early in the hearings as being brought in revenge for the allegations against Thomas. The evidence against Thomas was very circumstantial throughout most of the

commission, and although public opinion began to turn against him when the testimony about the young girls came out, Thomas may have been exonerated if not for being caught in a deliberate falsehood.

Thomas claimed throughout the commission that he had little connection with the Chinese merchants accused by the RCMP and BCPP of being involved with the drug trade. He categorically denied being involved with a petition requesting the release of the Chinese cook, Chu Pen Chung, charged in 1925 with narcotics smuggling on the night that RCMP Detective Staff Sergeant Reid and Sergeant Birch claimed they had watched the thirty-two white women enter Kong Woo's store at 2:30 in the morning. However, when his old office typewriter was examined, it proved to the commission that Thomas had lied and that the petition had been typed on that machine. Expert witnesses further proved that Thomas himself had written the petition as it was in the same writing style as Thomas' police reports. When confronted with his lie, Thomas "admitted that he had typed the Chung petition and that he had not told the truth when he denied any knowledge of it."³⁰ Immediately thereafter, Thomas' counsel withdrew and the commission adjourned.

When Commissioner Crease weighed the evidence in light of Thomas' fatal admission, he found that Thomas had failed to faithfully serve the citizens of Kelowna, failed in his duty to uphold the law, was incompetent, and failed to cooperate with other law enforcement agencies, which was detrimental to the administration of justice. But the commissioner found no evidence of widespread corruption, extortion, or graft, and completely exonerated the police commissioners, although he did criticize the lack of resources that contributed to the poor quality of policing in the city. He completed his commission by recommending a number of changes to

policing in Kelowna, few of which were taken up as the commissioners contracted the RCMP to take over policing.³¹

Lessons from Kelowna

Although Chief Thomas was caught in a lie during the hearings and censured in Commissioner Crease's report, there are some indications that Thomas may have been a scapegoat. Kelowna was clearly a centre of prostitution and drug smuggling throughout the 1920s. But Thomas may have done no less than any other in his position to combat the vice trade, although others were not held up to the same level of scrutiny. For example, in testimony on the prevalence of Aboriginal prostitution, the evidence of the Indian Agent and the RCMP officer suggest they are both as much at fault for inaction as was Thomas. Similarly, in testimony surrounding the activities of the two young girls, the magistrate, the doctor, and the caretaker, as well as Thomas, did nothing about the girls for *eight* years. Thomas' actions are especially difficult to reconcile in this case, as he had three boys and three girls of his own, two of whom were the same ages as the girls when they were sent to the industrial home. Although the doctor's opinion of the girls as 'defectives' may have been widely accepted, Thomas, like the others, still failed in their duties to protect the girls.

The activities in Chinatown may be connected with larger events in the province. This was the first time that there is evidence of a widespread traffic in white women – a true 'white slave trade.' This may have been connected with the dispersal of prostitutes in the urban centres in accordance to the demands of reformers. Many of the women in Vancouver and Victoria moved into rooming houses when the red-light districts were closed. I previously suggested this led to a structural change in prostitution, with more men becoming involved in the trade as

pimps. The organized trade in Kelowna may be one of the results of women's increasing lack of independence in the sex trade. The involvement of Chinese men in the trade may have been the evolution of anti-Chinese legislation that eventually slowed the importation of Chinese women into Canada for the purposes of prostitution, although the scale and degree of organization in the Okanagan was clearly more refined than in the earlier period.

Prostitution in Kelowna outside of Chinatown may also be viewed in light of policies of toleration or informal systems of regulation found elsewhere in BC. Thomas' testimony about his method of dealing with transient prostitutes is similar to tactics used in Princeton to force transient women out of the area. His inaction regarding the brothels may also be connected to the same type of community tolerance for prostitution that was found in the Similkameen in the same period.

Commissioner Crease's finding that there was no real evidence of graft was based on strong supporting evidence. Financial documents in the proceedings suggest that Thomas simply did not live at a level above his means. There is also no evidence that Thomas had any expensive habits, and everything indicated that he was a dedicated family man. But that does not mean that Thomas did not abuse his authority in the performance of his duties. Just as police corruption in the Kootenays was not necessarily tied to financial gain for the officers, Thomas may have gained the acceptance and good will of the Chinese community through a policy of selective toleration. If vice was sufficiently hidden, Thomas may have left the Chinese alone. If illegal activities were conducted in the open, then he may have stepped in and exercised his power of authority. The Chinese who testified against him all clearly had grievances with Thomas, suggesting that he had lost the good will of not only the white population, but of the Chinese population as well. Both may have contributed to his downfall.

Finally, the tone of the accusations against Thomas by the other levels of police suggest that there was some basis to his claim that the charges against him were brought due to personality conflicts and self-interest. Corrigan's tone throughout is self-righteous. In many of his accusations against Thomas, he clarifies that his own conduct was above reproach. Similarly, in Thomas' rebuttal to the RCMP testimony, he stated that he believed they "made the case look bad for him" because they were interested in obtaining the police contract for the city.³² Although this indeed happened in the aftermath of the commission, Thomas' conspiracy theory goes too far. Clearly, Thomas was at fault in many of the charges brought against him and his counterclaims have every appearance of being a last ditch attempt to clear his reputation. For Thomas, it was too late. But one of the lessons we can take from Kelowna is that the rhetoric surrounding prostitution continued to conform to the prevalent discourse of the moment, regardless of how much basis it may have had in reality

¹ Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 142.

³ *The Kelowna Courier and Okanagan Orchardist*, 9 May 1929, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Rex v. Wong Shee, Vernon Assizes, 13 November 1928.

⁷ Most of the following discussion of the commission is taken from reports in the weekly newspaper, *The Kelowna Courier and Okanagan Orchardist*, May to September 1929. 1400 pages of transcripts of the proceedings and the full report of the Commissioner's findings are in "BC Commission on Kelowna Police, 1929", GR0903 Boxes 1 and 2, PABC, but due to the 'restricted' status of the file at BC Provincial Archives, the proceedings and findings are mainly used to verify the newspaper reports. I believe that the reporter for the *Kelowna Courier* did an exceptional

job of summarizing the daily testimony at the commission hearings, with very few omissions. Where the actual words of the testimony are important, evidence has been taken from the proceedings.

⁸ *Courier*, 23 May 1929.

⁹ *Courier*, 16 May 1929.

¹⁰ Commission Proceedings, 380-381.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 420-21.

¹² *Courier*, 9 May 1929.

¹³ Proceedings, 411-412.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Proceedings, 171.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 256-270

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1165.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 421.

²² *Ibid.*, 434.

²³ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁴ *Courier*, 9 May 1929.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Courier*, 16 May, 1929

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Commissioner's Report, GR0903, Box 2, File 24, 9.

²⁹ *Courier*, 23 May 1929.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Courier*, 26 September 1929.

³² Proceedings, 1126.

Conclusion

Campaigns that gave rise to 'nuisance laws' like Spokane, Washington's recent ordinance, reflect contemporary western legal strategies aimed at controlling activities like prostitution. Although ordinances tend to generate little debate over prostitution today beyond urban centres, moral regulation has a long history in North America and has caused extensive discussion in the past. In a global context, the British Columbian experience can only be understood as a single chapter in the long international fight against prostitution. Further, British Columbia's regulation of the sex trade must be considered as unsuccessful. Despite the many attempts by reformers to eliminate prostitution, ultimately, the continued existence of the sex trade is proof of their failure. Reformers never obtained the orderly society that they sought. At times, it appeared that they had successfully suppressed prostitution, but in reality they had only driven it underground, dispersing the trade or moving it to a new location. The women always reappeared and continued their business.

My conception of moral regulation as a process of negotiation within and outside of legal systems is influenced by several important works on the legal regulation of women in Canada. In a recent spate of scholarly works on British Columbian history, Tina Loo, Mary-Ellen Kelm, Jean Barman, and Jo-Anne Fiske have all written significant works that further our understanding of moral regulation of Aboriginal women.¹ Adele Perry has also published a new study of gender and race in colonial British Columbia.² These works are connected to a larger trend in gender and legal history in which women's diverse experiences with the law are examined. Recent works have dealt with specific experiences, such as wife abuse, mental health, penal institutions, and rape laws. Others have considered moral regulation from a broader perspective, such as Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo's general study of law and moral regulation

in Canada, or Mariana Valverde's excellent work on moral reform in English Canada, which centres on the Ontario reform experience.³ Regardless of their diverse subject materials and varied backgrounds, examinations of moral regulation of women in Canada seem to share at least one element – they recognize that law and practice often follow divergent paths.

Regulated as they were through a system of monthly fines, police and judicial practice suggests that prostitution was not typically viewed as a criminal offence. The difference between law and practice has also historically tended to skew conviction rates and official crime statistics as most charges for prostitution-related offences were not considered 'criminal' charges. Thus, the regulation of prostitution was a plural process, one in which moral and socio-legal regulations overlapped and were influenced by competing discourses. In this context, the debate over regulation or suppression of the sex trade may be seen as an arena of struggle that was complicated by the resistance and negotiation tactics of the women themselves.

Women's resistance to moral regulation has close connections to Aboriginal resistance to the colonial agenda. In her study of Aboriginal 'negotiation' of legal systems, Tina Loo identifies two opposing pressures that the historian must work under – on the one hand, the Aboriginal ability to "act as well as react" must be acknowledged, while on the other, the "law's coercive dimension" must be recognized as having the power to "reduce those who are the subjects of regulation to mere objects or victims," which must also be placed into perspective.⁴

These pressures have implications beyond the Aboriginal experience. The history of all marginalized groups is affected by similar debates, and this has had a significant effect on the historiography of prostitution in western Canada. The author of a recent thesis on prostitution in Vancouver in the 1930s and 1940s argues that attempts to control women's bodies and sexualities were unsuccessful because the women firmly contested social constructions of

themselves.⁵ Conversely, the only recent article that focuses on rural prostitution in BC takes a moralistic approach, presenting the pimp and the prostitute as victims of their own base passions. Petersen del Mar concludes that their relationship “is disturbing and repulsive.” However, he also finds that there are lessons to be learned in the story: “in the centre of our repulsion lies the seeds of understanding, and in the heart of our discomfort resides the will to change.”⁶

While I have also concluded my case study of prostitution in rural Kelowna with ‘a lesson,’ it holds out little hope for the amelioration of prostitution. I view prostitution as a multifaceted activity which, combined with a scepticism about the law’s claim to truth and justice, suggests that at the local, daily level, in the lived experiences of the law, prostitutes seldom received any form of ‘justice’ or protection. The effects of politics and economics on the formation of law are considerable. But it would be naïve to believe that the interests of dominant political groups or organized reform groups were the only elements involved in the formation of law.

The evidence suggests that the police and the judiciary in British Columbia’s legal history mitigated pragmatic concerns to some extent. The actions of police forces in the regulation of prostitution demonstrate specifically that the formation of law is a communal activity, inherently linked to the formation and ordering of societal institutions. Since prostitutes were important contributors to the economies of fledgling towns in the interior as well as significant sources of revenue for municipal governments, they must be considered as contributing to the formation of law. Therefore, my conception of prostitution is not subordinated to a ‘monolithic’ conception of the law. Rather, prostitutes’ experiences suggest the existence of a constant process of re/negotiation.

Just as we must view reformers' attempts to suppress or eliminate prostitution in BC as unsuccessful, given the current prevalence of the sex trade, so must we view many of the women who appear in police and court records as being unsuccessful. These women failed to negotiate the shoals of accepted practice and became entangled in the legal system. The women who were truly successful are not often found in the official records, as they conducted their businesses while never catching the attention of police. Therefore, we must remember that we can only skim the surface of prostitution. Outside of our view, confined as it is to the public record, is what is commonly referred to as the 'dark figure of crime.' The extent to which this may distort our understanding of prostitutes' experiences may never be known.

Although we may never know 'the full story' of prostitution in British Columbia, significant changes in both the structure of the trade and in responses to it are discernible. Initially, prostitution was seen as beneficial to economic development in BC. Typical is this attitude: "prostitution must to some extent bolster the idea that women do not need sex enough to demand it in the market and that men need it enough to be willing to pay dearly for it."⁷ Scarcity models of a distinctly gendered society suggest that women profited within a climate of social acceptance of the sex trade. In the era of the large brothels, women tended to own their property and generally appeared more prosperous and independent, and more accepted within their communities, than at any other time.

With the rise of the social reform movement in Canada, medical and social organizations called for state intervention and public control of prostitution to protect society from the deviance of the social evil and from the diseases associated with prostitution. As legal systems changed in response to reformers' demands, the process exacerbated the alienation of prostitutes, especially when their economic ties to communities were broken. In urban centres, where the

reform movement was strongest, prostitutes dispersed throughout the city, thereby changing the structure of the trade. Large brothels where prostitutes congregated lost their rationale and support networks were rendered asunder. Women moved into rooming houses or plied their trade on the streets. When they needed protection, prostitutes turned to pimps who eventually took over the trade.

The zenith of the social reform movement in BC came during World War 1, when the campaign against prostitution took on patriotic overtones in the fight against VD. In the aftermath of the anti-prostitution fervour of the war years, moral campaigns in BC appeared to die down when it seemed they had been successful, but in fact reformers had only driven the trade underground or into the interior. During this period, moral regulation seems to have faded in importance in urban areas, while the rural areas re-emerged as centres of immorality.

The rural and urban dichotomy emerges as significant in the examination of prostitution throughout the 1920s. While prostitution in the rest of the province was either sporadic, or dispersed throughout the cities, in Princeton and Kelowna the trade emerged as both well organized and extensive. Canadian history has tended to neutralize prostitutes as actors by subtly implying that they ceased to exist or that they were never significant to larger historical practices. When they do appear in the historical record, it is usually in urban centres. Peterson del Mar suggests that this phenomenon is partly convenience because of the concentration of records in large cities, and partly pragmatic, as cities tended to spawn reform movements and police activities because larger numbers of prostitutes lived there.⁸ My research suggests the contrary, despite the invisibility of contemporary prostitution in small towns.

Although the sex trade continues, historically the lack of brothels, streetwalkers, or policing of prostitution suggests to most observers that the trade has been eliminated. Yet,

invisibility does not mean that the trade does not exist. As we have seen, Kelowna politicians and medical staff believed that the sex trade had been long abolished in their town. Evidence provided to the commission, however, suggests that prostitution had just been driven further underground. It was in fact well organized, and even flourished in the climate of tolerance.

In her study of western American women's history, Elizabeth Jameson argues that we must not try to fit women's experiences into a dominant historical framework. Instead, the local, lived experience of women must move beyond the known historical frameworks to expand them.⁹ The evidence of prostitution in Princeton and Kelowna suggests that the existing frameworks of small town economic and social development that exclude the influence of prostitutes are insufficient and impoverished. For example, historical understanding of development in the Similkameen has typically been based on a framework of regionalism whereby the region is connected to the metropolitan centre of Vancouver, and within the region, Princeton is the economic centre and the surrounding towns and mining centres are satellites of the town.¹⁰ Prostitutes do not fit into this model, although some citizens clearly felt that they were important contributors to Princeton's economy and status as a service centre. Similarly, the perception of Kelowna as an area comprised of predominantly British 'gentleman farmers' does not fit well with the evidence of prostitution, drug smuggling, and the illegal liquor trade provided to the Kelowna Police Commission.¹¹ I suggest that not only is inclusion of prostitutes important to historical understanding of a region, when the women are placed at the centre, we are given the opportunity to explore more inclusive frameworks and develop new models of interpretation.

In general, legal discourses worked to implement the social order deemed 'acceptable' by social reform groups. The problem is that they could not reach a consensus on how to achieve it,

and in trying to find that consensus had difficulty in combating the continual resistance of prostitutes and their supporters. By refusing to leave their neighbourhoods or towns, sex trade workers resisted police harassment. By hiring lawyers, writing to the Attorney General, and complaining to the BCPP Superintendent about the actions of constables, women fought legal systems from within the law. By using institutions like the Chinese Rescue Home to help them escape undesirable domestic slave positions, Chinese women used the Home to their own advantage. By the very fact of their continued existence in the sex trade, prostitutes resisted. Although seldom organized and rarely successful, prostitutes consistently undermined attempts to gain control of their bodies and their sexualities. In a phrase, they resisted.

¹ Tina Loo, *Making Law, Order, and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998); Jo-Anne Fiske, "The Supreme Law and the Grand Law." *BC Studies* 105:6 (Spring-Summer 1995), 183-99; Jean Barman, "Invisible Women: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed-Race Daughters in Rural Pioneer British Columbia." In *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*. Ed. R.W. Sandwell. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999 and Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900." *BC Studies* 115 (Fall-Winter 1997), 237-266.

² Adele Perry. *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

³ See for example the following specific works: Annalee E. Gözl, "'If a Man's Wife Does Not Obey Him, What Can He Do?' Marital Breakdown and Wife Abuse in Late Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Ontario." In *Law, Society, and the State: Essays in Modern Legal History*. Eds. Louis A. Knafla and Susan W.S. Binnie, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 323-351; Jennifer Stephen, "The 'Incorrigible,' the 'Bad,' and the 'Immoral': Toronto's 'Factory Girls' and the Work of the Toronto Psychiatric Clinic." In *Law, Society, and the State: Essays in Modern Legal History*. Eds. Louis A. Knafla and Susan W.S. Binnie. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 405-439; Wendy Ruemper, "Locking Them Up: Incarcerating Women in Ontario, 1857-1931." In *Law, Society, and the State: Essays in Modern Legal History*. Eds. Louis A. Knafla and Susan W.S. Binnie.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995, 351-378. Or the general works on moral regulation and reform: Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, ((Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991).

⁴ Tina Loo, "Dan Cranmer's Potlatch: Law as Coercion, Symbol, and Rhetoric in British Columbia, 1884-1951," in *Historical Perspectives on Law and Society in Canada*, ed., Tina Loo and Lorna R. McLean, (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman Ltd., 1994), 221.

⁵ Michaela Freund, "The Politics of Naming: Constructing Prostitutes and Regulating Women in Vancouver, 1934-1945, (M.A. Thesis, Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, 1995).

⁶ David Peterson del Mar, "Pimping and Courtship: A 1940 Court Case from Northern British Columbia," in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1999), 224.

⁷ Mary McIntosh, "Who Needs Prostitutes? The Ideology of Male Sexual Needs," in *Women, Sexuality and Social Control*, ed. Carol Smart and Barry Smart, (London: Routledge, 1978), 64.

⁸ Peterson del Mar, "Pimping," 212.

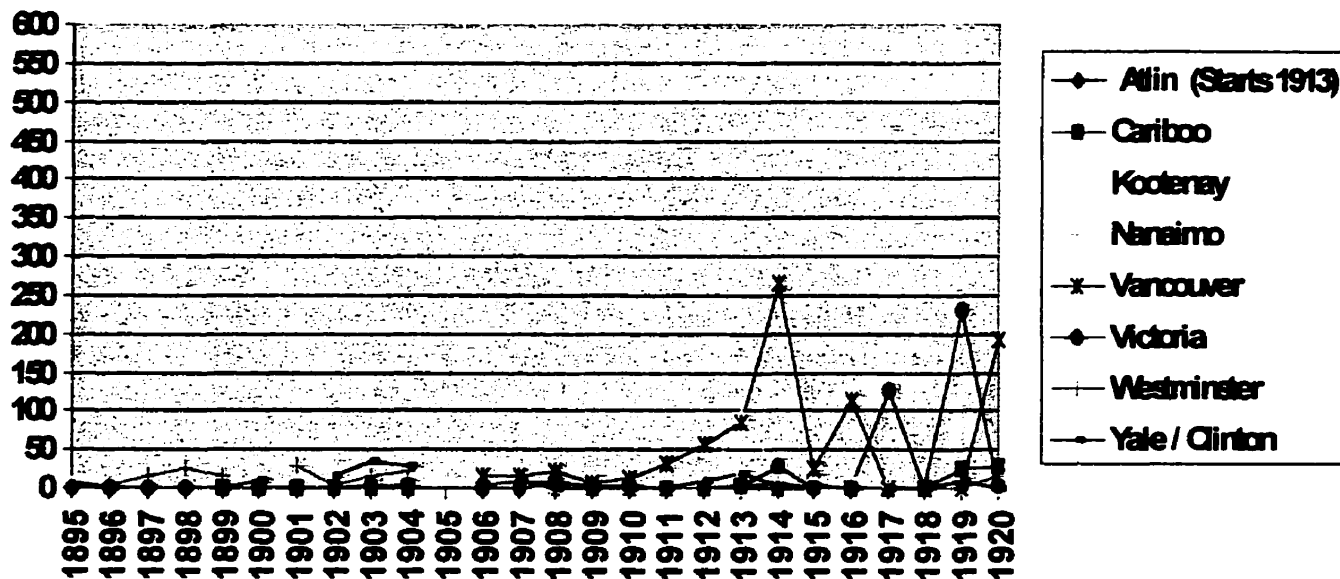
⁹ Elizabeth Jameson, "Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States," *Signs*, 13:4 (1988), 762.

¹⁰ Regionalism or metropolitanism was initially constructed as a historical framework by J.M. Careless, and is applied in the Similkameen by J.C. Goodfellow in "An Historical Gazetteer of Okanagan-Similkameen" in *22nd Report to the Okanagan Historical Society* (Vernon: The Vernon News Ltd., 1958), 123-169

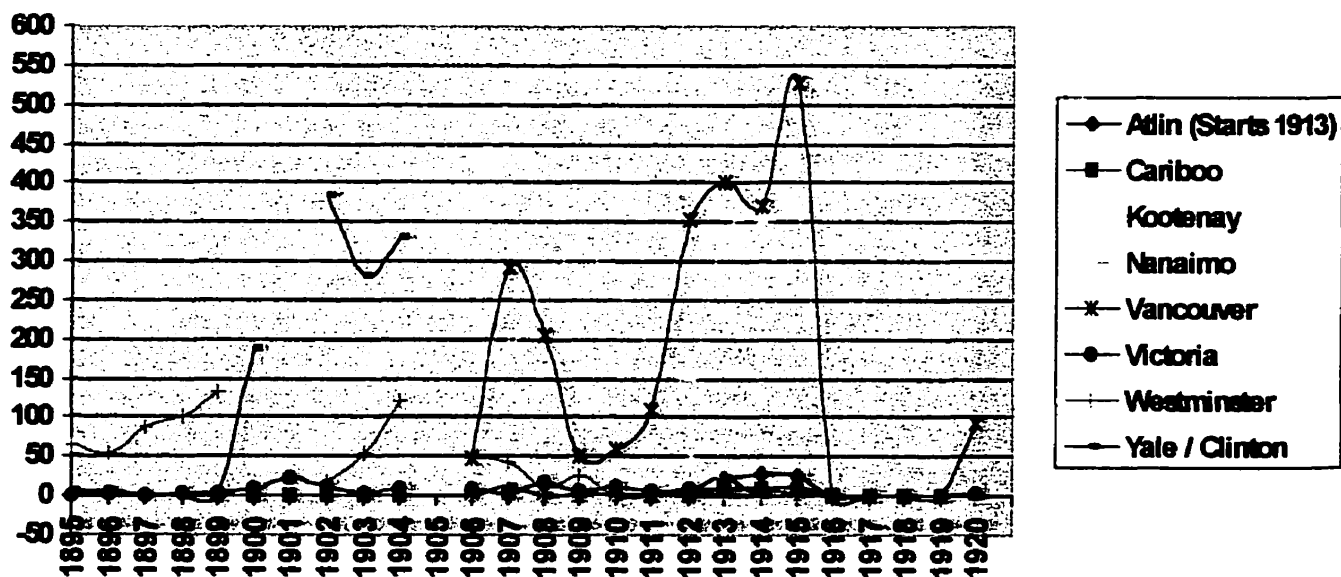
¹¹ For the 'British character' of the Okanagan in general see Jean Barman, *Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984) and Margaret Ormsby, *A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1976).

Appendix 1

Male Convictions for "Frequenting Bawdy Houses and Inmates Thereof,"
British Columbia 1895-1920



Female Convictions for "Frequenting Bawdy Houses and Inmates Thereof,"
British Columbia 1895-1920

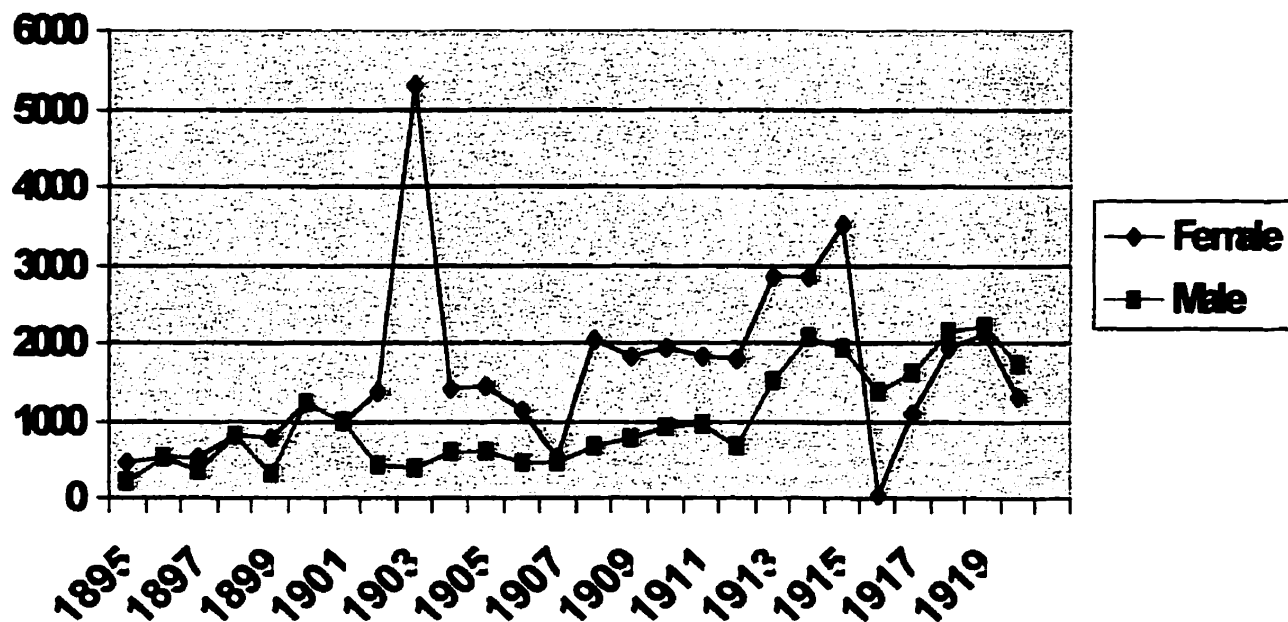


Source: Criminal Statistics, Canada Sessional Papers

Appendix 2

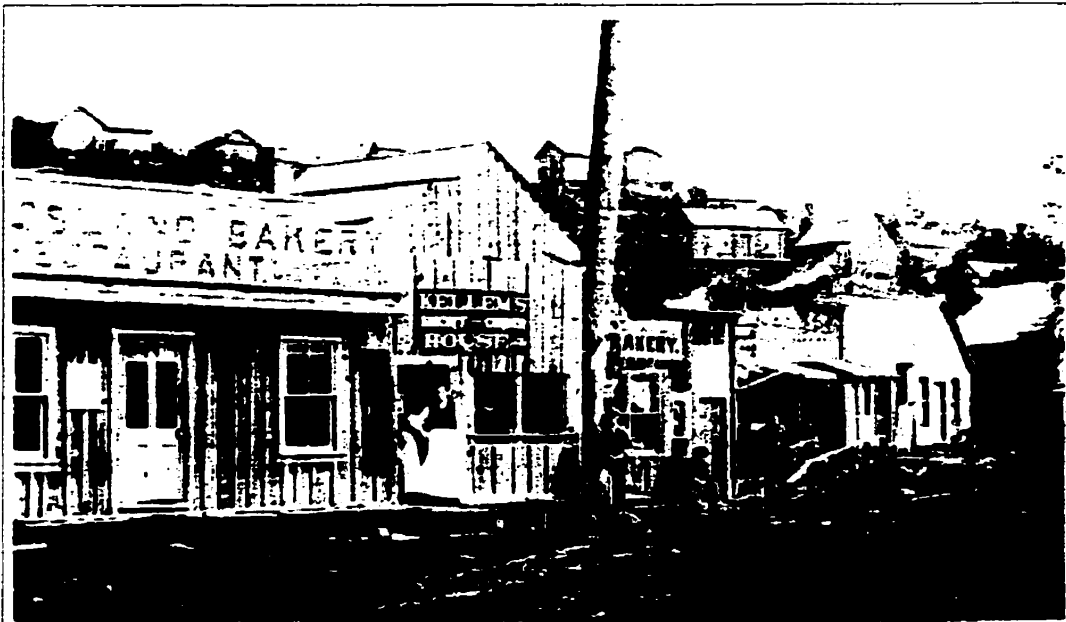
Convictions for "Frequenting Bawdy Houses and Inmates Thereof,"

Canada 1895-1920



Source: Criminal Statistics, Canada Sessional Papers

Appendix 3



Sourdough Alley with its collection of whipsawed lumber shacks and tents, attracted shysters, stock manipulators, claim jumpers dancing girls and madames as well as bakeries, saloons and general merchandisers who set up shop to cater to the booming mining camp.

Pauline Battien, *Joe Moris, His Stake and His Heritage to an Empire*,
(Rossland: Miner Printing Co. Ltd., 1967), 24.

Appendix 4



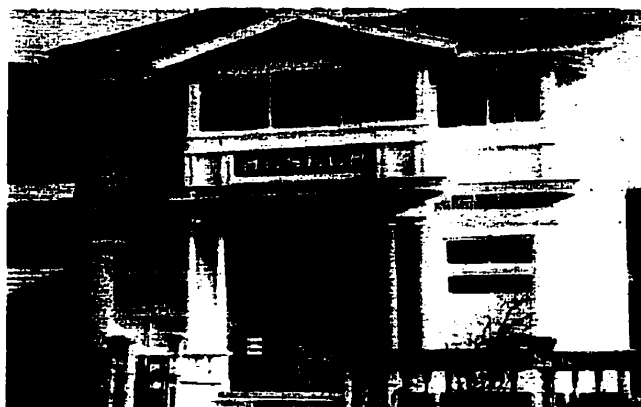
Judge John Andrew Forin wanted the restricted district on Nelson's Baker Street closed.

Nelson Daily News, 5 February 1999, 13.



Rosie's Lake Street brothel as it may have looked in 1900

The Islander, Victoria BC, 7-8 February 1982



Rosie's brothel was turned into a museum upon her death in the 1950s.

Nelson's first museum, formerly Rosie's Kansas City brothel.

Nelson Daily News, 12 February 1999, 13.

Appendix 5



This cartoon appear on the front page of *The Victoria Daily Times* on the first day of Judge Lampman's inquiry into charges of graft against the Victoria Board of Police Commissioners, 24 March 1910.

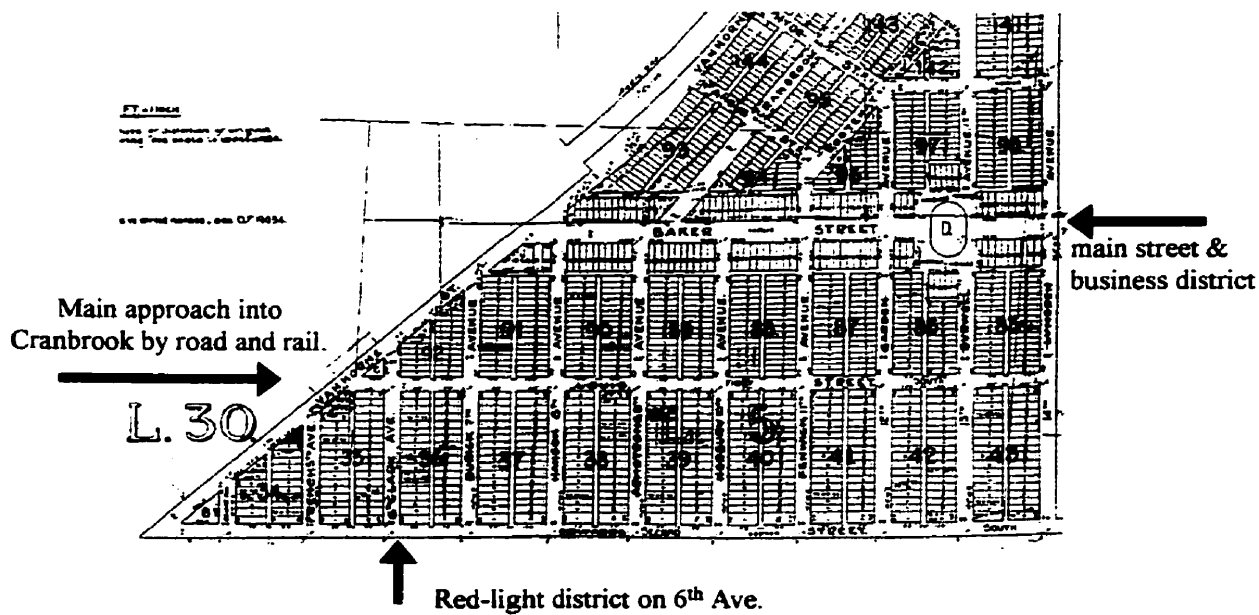
Appendix 6



"Burning the Tender Loine Cranbrook"

These houses on the 200th block of 6th Avenue made up Cranbrook's red-light district. The photo shows the destruction of the houses by fire in 1930.

Kootenay Advertiser, Cranbrook, BC, 18 March 1996, "A Historical Look at Cranbrook" A4.



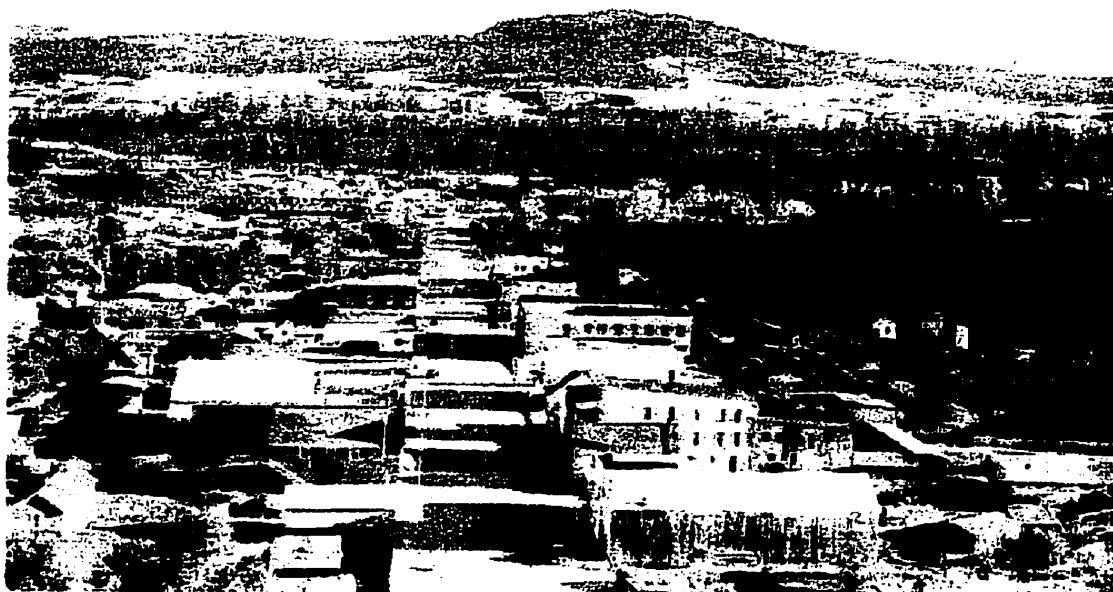
Map and photo courtesy of Skip Fennessy, Cranbrook and District History Books, Cranbrook BC.

Appendix 7



Princeton, circa 1910, looking down Bridge Street from the Tulameen River.

Accession # 193501-001, British Columbia Archives at
<http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/cgi-bin/text2html>



Princeton 1922, looking down Bridge Street - note the large brick structure on the mid- right, the Princeton Hotel. The small buildings behind are the red-light district on Angela Avenue.

Accession # 193501-001, British Columbia Archives at
<http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/cgi-bin/text2html>

Appendix 8



One of Hattie McBride's three properties in Coalmont. The property that burned is now a woodpile, and one lot is completely empty. Photo by author, 1999

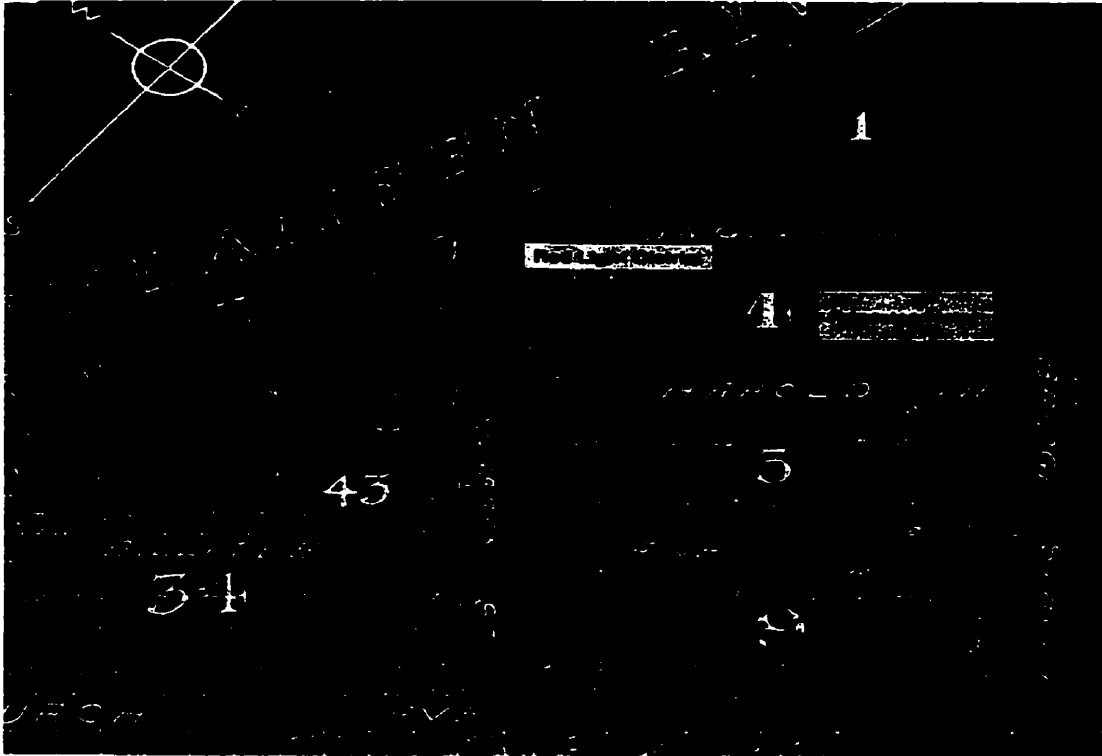


→
Block 1

Hattie McBride owned three lots in Block 1 on the far edge of town, close to the river.

Map of Coalmont courtesy of Princeton and District Museum,
unaccessioned records, circa 1920

Appendix 9



Map of Princeton courtesy of Princeton and District Museum,
unaccessioned records, circa 1920



The Princeton Hotel still hides Angela Avenue from view.

Photo by author, 1999

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