The Notorious Georges

Crime and Community in British Columbia's Northern Interior, 1909–25

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1
Establishing the Georges and the Birth of a Bad Reputation

The early twentieth century reimagined British Columbia's northern Interior. Once dismissed as having limited potential for white settlers, it became a promised land where they could burn their boats in anticipation of a boundless future. This transformation was attributable to Charles M. Hays, president of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTP), and his confidence that the region had the ingredients to ensure the profitability of his proposed railway.[1] Not only would the line and northern British Columbia prosper, but unlike the Canadian Pacific Railway, would do so without the company nurturing industries to generate traffic. Further, the GTP would thrive, it was imagined by Hays, thanks to a ceaseless tide of land-hungry settlers, despite British Columbia's nascent political parties disavowing land grants as a strategy to attract railway construction. Time revealed that both propositions were flawed. Still, in the summer of 1903, Richard McBride's new Conservative administration, which won another term in a razor-thin electoral victory on 6 October, may have given the impression that land grants might still be had.[2] After all, the provincial government's enthusiasm for railway expansion remained undiminished. Despite a shortage of funds to support such ventures and the absence of an articulated provincial railway plan, McBride's insistence that the GTP construction begin on the Pacific Coast hinted that an accommodation remained possible.[3] Indeed, that secret negotiations secured Kaien Island as the terminus, in exchange for the railway paying $10,000 into provincial coffers, lent weight to Hays's hope that the provincial government might eventually grant the

railway company lands, which would then be sold on the open market. That the terminal on the northwest coast remained distant from central and eastern North American markets (while being closer to Asia), failed to dent Hays's enthusiasm, and the company's boosting of the rail line continued. While his predictions proved to be woefully inaccurate and set the GTP on course for receivership in 1919, Hays's confidence meant that, between 1903 and 1911, settlers turned their eyes to the imagined promise of British Columbia's northern Interior and what, in time, emerged as a three-way battle for supremacy between townsites at the confluence of the Fraser and Nechako Rivers.

This contest is central to the current chapter. Not only did the competition between these settlements consume an exhausting amount of energy, while contributing to uncertainty about the predominantly white settlement in the region, but it also encouraged fractiousness as a trait of local character in and around the Georges. Experience taught residents that certainty was evasive. Guided by their own interests, those with financial, economic, and political power managed and, all too often, manipulated local necessities. The arrival of railways, the development of timber resources, the establishment of pulp mills, and the expansion of mining were determined by interests outside the region. Indeed, the location of settlements for both Indigenous and white residents and the physical layout of communities invariably answered to forces beyond the local, though neither the Lheidli T'enneh nor the newcomers acknowledged this shared experience of finding themselves on the margins of decisions made elsewhere. The resulting settlement history in the morning of the twentieth century nurtured scepticism about schemes hatched by outsiders and by distant and all-too-fickle provincial and dominion governments. In turn, this early history produced an enduring regional reputation for mulishness in the disinclination to accept what others had determined was best for the northern Interior. The result was a legacy of anxiety rooted in the contrast between how residents imagined themselves and how they imagined that they were perceived elsewhere in the province and beyond.

This fractiousness was evident along the white settlement's cutting edge. As a group, the founders were "colourful." They liked their poker and their bootleg liquor. Their business practices were sharp, they were fearless in rounding off the law's edges, and, when circumstances demanded, they would evade, obscure, and lie. Their behaviour created tension in the telling of local history. Most early accounts depict the founders of white settlement in adventuresome tones. A less celebratory, but more accurate,

image would be of individuals who could not be trusted with the family silver. This was certainly the case with the consortium linked to early South Fort George; with George Hammond, the Natural Resource Security Company (NRSC), and its Fort George townsite; with the GTP men overseeing the purchase and development of the Prince George townsite; and with a cast of supporting characters including John Houston of the *Fort George Tribune,* John Daniell of the *Fort George Herald,* and his nemesis J.P. McConnell of the weekly magazine *BC Saturday Sunset.* To a man, they dressed up self-serving business and partisan manoeuvres as serving the public good. Press accounts of their behaviour lent credence to the growing suspicion that everyone associated with the Georges was on the make. In the shadow of such impressions, potential newcomers found it near impossible to discern who, if anyone, was being honest about the conditions, opportunities, and challenges in the province's northern Interior before the First World War.

Locating South Fort George

Long before the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was confirmed, observers identified the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers as prime real estate. Why? Many believed that it was here that the east/west GTP would intersect, with railways cutting through the province's Interior and onward to the Peace River country at the northwestern edge of the Great Interior Plain. Such speculation collided with the reality that a misshapen triangle of land wedged between the two rivers – some 500 hectares – was one of four Lheidli T'enneh reserves set aside on the Nechako and Fraser Rivers.[4] While not an unbridgeable obstacle to potential development, Fort George Reserve No. 1 obliged newcomers and speculators to adjust their expectations. The most common response was to take up lands on the southern or western boundaries of the reserve in the expectation that land close to the rivers' junction and probable rail crossing would increase in value as development progressed.

The region's oldest white settlement, South Fort George grew up around Alexander G. Hamilton's mercantile store, which began operations in 1906. Built south of the reserve and the adjoining Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) holdings, Hamilton's store sat on Sousa (Joseph) Tapage's eighty-acre preemption – and, no doubt, Hamilton hoped to squeeze every cent of profit out of his neighbouring sixty acres. Although both men remained

FIGURE 1.1 Map of British Columbia. | Cartography from Eric Leinberger.

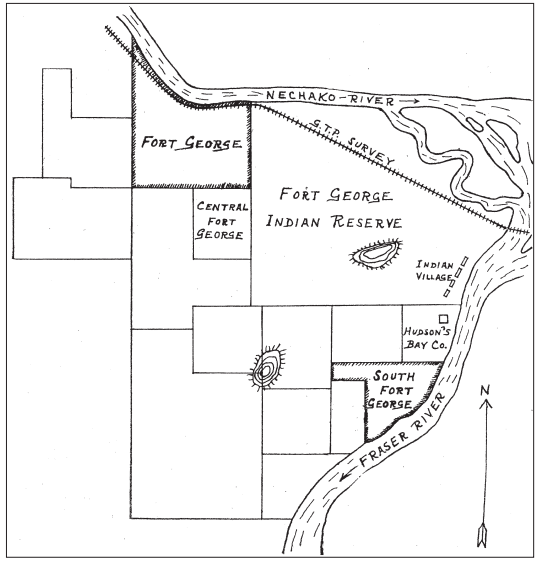


FIGURE 1.2 Map of the Georges, 1906–13. | F.E. Runnalls, "Boom Days in Prince George, 1906–1913," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 8, 4 (1944): 286–87.

in the region until after the First World War, it was Hamilton who was tied to local development.[5] A bluff Irishman connected to the Orange Lodge and the Conservative Party, Hamilton in early 1897 came to the Kootenays in southern British Columbia, where he had a brief and scandalous career as a British Columbia provincial constable, first in Sandon and then in Silverton.[6] Drummed out of the police service following allegations of consorting with gamblers and frequenting brothels, and charges of attempted blackmail, Hamilton went to ground in the autumn of 1897. He later reappeared, first as a merchant in Stuart Lake, and then at South Fort George, where he fashioned himself as an informal legal adviser, owing to his claims of experience with the North-West Mounted Police.[7] Along with later claims he had been involved with Colonel Garnet Wolseley's suppression of the Red River Resistance of 1869–70, the military response to the North West Rebellion in 1885, service with the British Army in the first Zulu War, and a stint in camp with General George Custer, these stories were likely nonsense, although the penchant for reinvention was a common attribute on western Canada's white settlement frontier.[8]

Hamilton's imprint on what became South Fort George is difficult to miss. Not only was "Hamilton Avenue" the centre of the community's growing business district, but his term as president of the South Fort George Board of Trade and secretary of the school board kept him in the public eye. At the same time, he was known for the six cottages he built on the corner of Hamilton and Second Street, his winter mail contracts, an eighteen-horse stable constructed in late 1910 as part of his haulage operations, his Fort George Hardware Company (established in May 1911), and his ten-hectare farm across the Nechako River from the Fort George townsite. Ultimately, his reach exceeded his grasp. Nominated and then elected as the party's candidate after five ballots at the local Conservative convention in late March 1915, Hamilton was packaged as a Canadian pioneer – a "Dean" of western settlers – with a military bearing well suited for a nation at war.[9] Yet as the September 1916 provincial election neared, he withdrew in favour of Premier W.J. Bowser's land minister, William R. Ross, who was seeking a safe seat away from his home riding in Fernie, where he had lost touch with the region's working men while currying favour on the coast.[10] Perhaps, Bowser's knowledge of events in Sandon and Silverton encouraged Hamilton to fall on his sword.[11] The retreat signalled an end of his ambitions. After selling his Nechako farm, he withdrew first to his store and property at Stuart Lake before finally retiring to Vancouver in the summer of 1921.[12] His death went unrecorded in Prince George.

Figure 1.3a Tents near A.G. Hamilton's store, South Fort George, 1910. | *Alaska Highway News.*

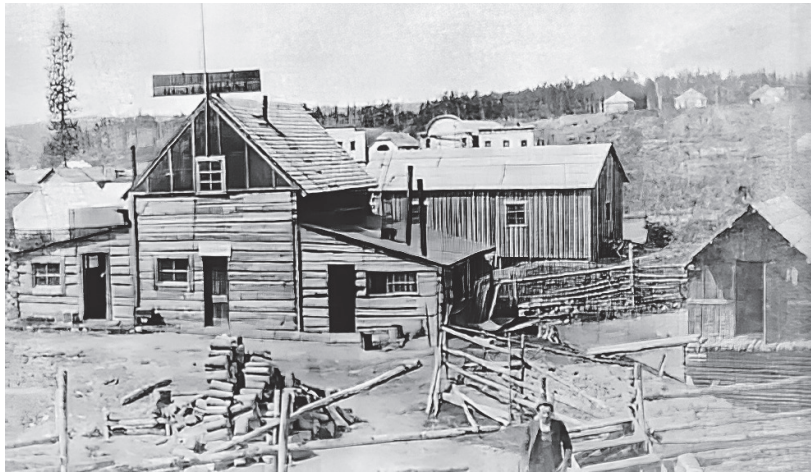


Figure 1.3b A.G. Hamilton's store, 1910. | *Alaska Highway News.*

Linked with Hamilton was Nick Clark of Vancouver, who arrived in Fraser Lake in June 1908. An exploratory canoe voyage along the Nechako and down the Fraser, during which the men met, convinced Clark that a riverboat could be piloted along the Nechako from Fraser Lake, eastward along the upper Fraser, and southward to Soda Creek. Returning to Vancouver, he allegedly incorporated the Fort George Lumber and Navigation

Company and arranged for the construction of the paddle-wheeler *Nechaco* – later renamed *Chilco* – which was launched on 12 May 1909.[13] Although what occurred next is muddled, Clark acquired an option on Hamilton's land in late 1909, sold it to mining entrepreneur Beach Lasalle, who, along with William C. Fry and M.C. Wiggins, were fronting the Northern Development Company.[14] Within a month, the company's advertisements marketing business lots in South Fort George appeared in the *Vancouver Province,* despite the company not being incorporated until September 1910.[15] That Clark's Fort George Lumber and Navigation Company and the Northern Development Company shared the same 614 Hastings Street address in Vancouver thickened the plot. Still, in the spring of 1910, land sales in South Fort George were underway, and a brood of tents, log cabins, and rough-planed shacks appeared near Hamilton's store. Soon, a barber shop, a second mercantile, branches of the Bank of British North America and the Trader's Bank of Canada, two restaurants, the BC Express (BX) office, and the *Fort George Herald* populated the business district. Albert Johnson and Michael Burns's Hotel Northern was under construction by October, destined to become the raucous epicentre of licensed alcohol consumption in the region.

One of the townsite's greatest advantages was Clark's waterfront mill, which provided local settlers with timber and planed lumber.[16] As its operations were expanded and upgraded, the riverboat trade grew to include the *Fort Fraser* and the *Chilcotin* in May and June 1910, in competition with BX steamers the *Charlotte,* the *Quesnel,* and the *BX,* all set afloat in late 1909 and early 1910. Clark's business was pushed into receivership in late 1910 by the termination of timber contracts to the perennially delayed Pacific Great Eastern Railway and by tightened margins owing to competition on the rivers from the BX Company and on land from Russell Peden's Northern Lumber Company sawmill. Valued at $58,000, Clark's company faced liabilities of over $80,000. Having been present in South Fort George since late October 1910, a Winnipeg-based consortium that included F.A. Thompson, R.L. Hay, C. McElroy, Dr. J.K. McLennan, J.D. McArthur and Company, and A.J. Adamson acquired Clark's assets in March 1911 and rechristened the enterprise the Fort George Timber and Transportation Company.[17] Clark eventually divested himself of shares in the new company and relocated to Vancouver. He later returned as part of an exploratory interest in oil sands development in Haida Gwaii and the Athabasca country.[18] Like Hamilton, Clark's eventual passing went unacknowledged in the local press.

Locating Fort George

While South Fort George's backers fashioned the region's predominant community, another entrepreneur, Ontario-born George J. Hammond, had his own plans. He began his career as a drug store clerk, a station agent on the Canadian Southern Railway in southern Ontario, and then a train dispatcher for the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway company. The latter led to a position with Western Union Telegraph and the Postal Telegraph-Cable Company in 1884.[19] Trouble found him four years later when he was charged with wiretapping. Hammond and partner O.M. Stone were accused of attempting to defraud a Terre Haute, Indiana, pool room operator by delaying the transmission of a horse-race report while a confederate placed a winning bet before the results arrived.[20] Although Hammond escaped prosecution, the case was his initial clash with the criminal law. Attracted to the dark arts of the late nineteenth-century North American stock market, he moved on to become a "bucket-shop operator," where investors were manipulated to wager on individual stocks rising or falling. By pumping up the apparent value of a stock or, conversely, suppressing its true value, Hammond bilked investors under the guise of the Combination Investment Company in Chicago and the Minneapolis-based Coe Commission Company.[21] Whether through good fortune or sheer luck, Hammond eluded convictions in Chicago, Minneapolis, and North Dakota. Perhaps suspecting that his luck south of the border was exhausted, Hammond returned to Canada for a vacation with his brother in southern Alberta. There, Hammond was felled by appendicitis. He was rushed to Lethbridge, where, while recuperating in the Gault Hospital, his room was struck by lightning.[22] How Hammond interpreted what a local newspaper characterized as a near-death experience is guesswork, but, after recuperating in southern California, he returned to Ontario, married Margaret Jean Cameron in Sault St. Marie before relocating to Nelson, British Columbia. There, he dabbled in real estate while working as a land sales agent for James J. Hill's Great Northern Railway and cultivated a personal interest in the province's northern Interior.[23]

Hammond's interest took form in early September 1909 when his NRSC acquired three parcels of land overlooking the Nechako River west of Fort George Reserve No. 1.[24] Having acquired the rights to the name "Fort George," Hammond launched a come-hither sales blitz of newspaper advertisements and brochures detailing a government ferry crossing, local post office, telephone exchange, town hall, library, hospital, hotel, board

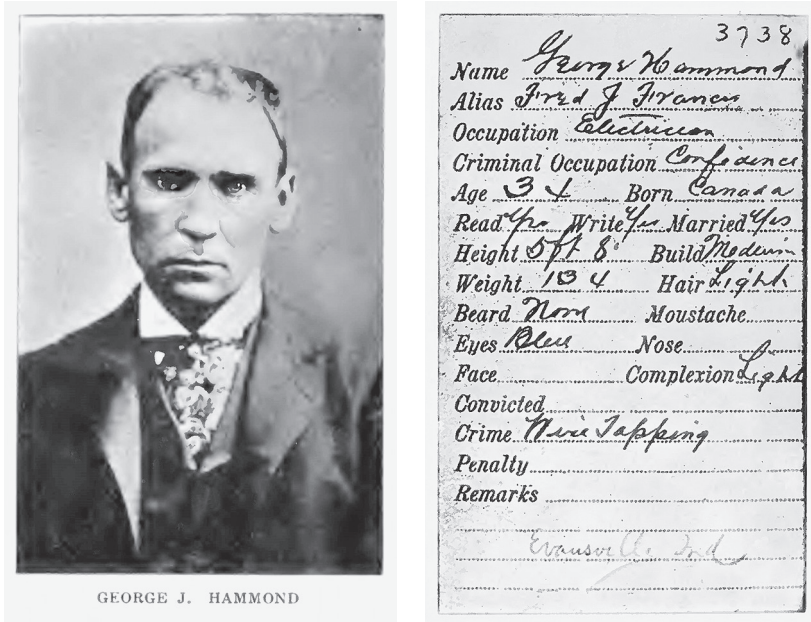


Figure 1.4 George J. Hammond, police photograph and details, 1898. | Lincoln Book Concern.

of trade, "city" newspaper and printing office, and mercantile store, as well as an enormous Presbyterian church and manse, and riverfront wharfage occupied by the Bogue and Browne sawmill. Hailing the moment as singular, Hammond spared little in his inaugural advertisement of 20 October 1909. Here was the "golden opportunity" of founding North America's "last great metropolis."[25] In reports placed in the *New York American,* the *Seattle Times,* and an assortment of Vancouver newspapers, Hammond declared Fort George's emergence a topic of international acclaim. The future city's prospects warranted comparisons with Vancouver, Seattle, Washington's Inland Empire, and Winnipeg's commanding position on the Canadian Prairies. Claiming to offer a select opportunity for astute investors, the company announced that on 22 October 1909, the first 890 lots in Central Fort George would be released to the market for $100 per lot, with available terms of $10 cash down and $10 monthly payments. Single investors would be limited to five lots. So great was the occasion that the NRSC claimed that "every newspaper of consequence from the Pacific to the Atlantic" was detailing the sure-fire opportunity that was attracting buyers from across the continent and beyond.[26] A day

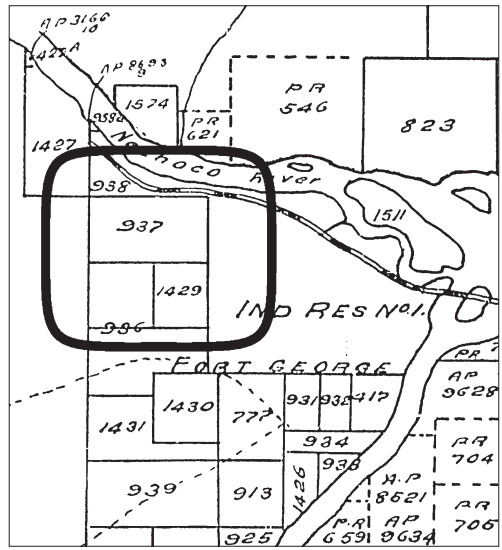


Figure 1.5 Map of Central Fort George and Fort George, 1910, with the NRSC lots circled. | *Victoria Daily Colonist.*

later, the fourth in the series of advertisements breathlessly announced that telegraphed purchase orders were pouring in and that shrewd investors needed to act immediately. "Title to these lots is indefeasible, guaranteed and insured by the government of the province of British Columbia. It is an absolute certainty that inside of one year, Fort George will be a bustling city, and will increase in population and realty value several times faster" than cities such as Seattle, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, or Edmonton.[27] The final instalment on 26 October carried a sting for South Fort George's backers when one of their own, Nick Clark, manager of the soon to be bankrupt Fort George Lumber and Navigation Company, was quoted as having preached Fort George's virtues for over a decade.[28] That Clark had undoubtedly been referring to "old" Fort George – that is, South Fort George – escaped notice. Having made the desired splash, Hammond and his company settled down to business, maintaining a drumbeat extolling the townsite's virtues.

The combative *Fort George Herald* in South Fort George acknowledged the results. The NRSC had "required oceans of money, spent in advertising and exploiting in ways too numerous to mention here, to keep it before the public and make its sale a success. And no one will deny it has not been a successful sale. Thousands of lots have been traded to the

Figure 1.6 Cartoon of George Hammond, one of "Our Men of Affairs," 1912. | *Vancouver Daily World.*

public. Almost superhuman strength has been necessary to keep it going, and we must take our hats off to the gentlemen who have steered its career since the fall of 1909."[29] If his claims are to be credited, by Christmas 1910, Hammond had invested $100,000 on advertising and townsite improvements.[30] The *Victoria Daily Colonist*'s reprint of a *Winnipeg Post* report clarified that, by the end of July 1911, $131,000 had been spent building roads, clearing lots, grading streets, and laying sidewalks. This amount eventually rose to $171,000.[31] Buyers did, in fact, come from across the western world.[32] True, most were speculators without any intention of visiting the region, let alone relocating there. Nonetheless, in time, genuine settlers arrived, and their presence provided an air of permanence to the moonscape of tree stumps and muddy trails of the early Fort George townsite.

Despite initial laurels, curiosity about how Hammond financed the effort remains. Certainly, given the amount of money that "vanished" when the Combination Investment Company and the Coe Commission Company collapsed, it is conceivable that Hammond arrived in the northern Interior with a thick bankroll. Indeed, as he later struggled to convince

the GTP Railway to locate its station in Fort George, Hammond reportedly offered $1 million to lubricate negotiations. Whether the claim was accurate is uncertain, but the blotted copybook of his American career testified to a bottomless reservoir of duplicity. Another possibility is that lot sales financed the advertising campaign and the local improvements.[33] The difficulty with this explanation is that the campaign and sales began simultaneously in October 1909. Of course, it is possible that he borrowed money in anticipation of future profits, although this raises the question of how, given his record, he could have secured such loans. The enterprise's moving parts remain shrouded. What is certain is that his operations were less than they appeared. To succeed, Hammond needed to convince the railway company that building the station in Fort George offered greater possibilities than locating it at the GTP townsite. This unlikely possibility rested on Hammond's townsite boasting a population base and an established economic foundation allowing legitimate comparisons with Vancouver, Seattle, and Winnipeg. Therefore, populating Fort George with thousands of residents *before* the GTP reached the confluence was central to winning over the railway.[34]

Even this attempt to sway the railway company does not reveal the whole story. Despite local lore, Hammond's company did not actually own its townsite land. Lots 937 and 938 – comprising the Fort George parcel – were initially owned by William Campbell of Winnipeg, who, in mid-May 1910, sold 412 acres to unnamed parties for $300,000.[35] The purchasers were probably John Hugo Ross, a Winnipeg real-estate promoter, and George Barbey, of Paris.[36] Five months later, they sold the lots back to Campbell, who, in turn, sold them to Hammond in small increments of six to twelve lots at a time. The Hammond-linked Fort George Townsite Company acquired Ross's holdings following the latter's death on the *Titanic*.[37] Therefore, as Hammond acknowledged in his promotional literature, his company only *partly* owned Fort George.[38] Further, mining promoter Frank Hammond (no relation), of the Pacific Securities Company, owned lot 1429 of the Central Fort George townsite. Upon completion of the township survey, the NRSC was obliged to market a set number of business and residential lots within a specific period to meet scheduled payments and to trigger the release of a fresh set of lots. Hammond was gambling that he could stay one step ahead of Pacific Securities. While the *Victoria Daily Colonist* reported that sales were brisk, with 5,815 of 6,506 lots having been sold by the autumn of 1911, it was uncertain which – or whose – lots had been sold.[39] Eight months later, amid criminal libel proceedings against John Daniell of the *Fort George*

Herald, it was reported that the NRSC had sold 12,316 lots out of 20,145.[40] Yet, despite the campaign's apparent success, Hammond was just keeping his head above water.

He proved to be his own worst enemy. Perhaps owing to a desire to appear as a steely-eyed businessman or because he was drinking his own bath water, Hammond declared in the spring of 1910 that the GTP train station was destined for the Fort George townsite. This drew the attention of "Gold and Dross," a financial advice column in Toronto's *Saturday Night* magazine. Having inquired into Hammond, the NRSC, and the Fort George townsite, the column warned off readers and potential investors. The magazine's concern was simple: the company's advertisements did not "accord with the facts." Specifically, and despite the NRSC's inferences, the GTP was unaffiliated with any land companies in the region, and, until the Lheidli T'enneh surrendered their reserve, the railway company's plans remained fluid. Any claims to the contrary were without substance.[41] Over the ensuing months, the magazine continued to pour cold water over the townsite scheme. Its efforts represented such a threat to Hammond that he launched legal proceedings to prevent *Saturday Night* from commenting on either the NRSC or its Fort George townsite. Mr. Justice W.E. Middleton of Ontario's High Court of Justice dismissed the application.[42] Having secured its pound of flesh, *Saturday Night* departed the stage, but not before publishing a parting blow, with a full-page advertisement extolling South Fort George's virtues. The feature carried the names of the businessmen on that community's board of trade (which had sponsored the ad), including A.G. Hamilton and Nick Clark.[43]

The fracas that started between Hammond and *Saturday Night* eventually involved the *Fort George Herald,* the *Fort George Tribune,* and Vancouver's *BC Saturday Sunset* magazine. Rooted in the question of whether the Fort George townsite scheme had been a swindle, the notion of the Georges' early notoriety hardened by late 1910 as the dispute echoed through local newspapers acting as surrogates for the competing communities. Had the effect not been counterproductive, it would have been comical. Over the ensuing five years and in contrast with how the white settlers imagined themselves – confident, independent, hard-working, forward-looking, and fair-minded individuals who neither asked for nor expected more than their due – depictions of the Georges reduced the community to a cartoonish jumble of rowdy liquor joints, gambling dens, and brothels that were frequented by "scarlet women," card sharps, drunks, "wily Indians," and conniving businessmen, all of whom would gladly separate honest settlers and investors from their hard-earned money.[44]

And it is here that we again encounter the anxiety, a mercurial unease, produced by the tension between how local leaders and opinion makers – invariably white residents – saw themselves (and how they wished to be seen) and their disquiet in imagining how others viewed the Georges.[45]

Hammond's desperation following his judicial setback produced an offer to pay the GTP Railway $200,000 to build its station within 400 metres of Fort George's eastern boundary. This offer stemmed from the guarantee, included with lot sales agreements, that the property at issue was within a specific distance of the station. Having inquired into Hammond's reputation and found "disparaging reports" of the entrepreneur's reliability, a month before his fateful voyage on the *Titanic,* GTP president Charles Hays allowed negotiations to drag on, letting the NRSC "stew in their own juice" before withdrawing, given Hammond's inability to provide cash payments.[46] When the townsite promoter offered $1 million to allow the NRSC to market lots on the GTP townsite, the company's silence spoke volumes. Yet another cash offer in exchange for a public statement that the railway would locate its station within a four-kilometre corridor running along the Nechako River (corresponding to the width of the Fort George townsite) failed to gain traction. Finally, and without having reached an agreement, Hammond claimed that the railway company's station would be within 400 metres of Fort George's eastern boundary.[47] It was then, in January 1912, that Hammond petitioned the Board of Railway Commissioners (BRC) to compel the GTP to build its station at or near the NRSC townsite. The dispute dragged on until 1921.

In the interim, Hammond's campaign withered, as did Fort George. It may have felt as if events were conspiring against him: the tortuous station-site dispute, the financial jitters of 1913, the uncertainty caused by gathering war clouds, and, soon, the exodus of men to the frontlines all had their effect. And while the fire of 13 November 1914, which consumed much of Fort George's Central Street, may have symbolized the collapse of his aspirations, the GTP's acquisition of Fort George Reserve No. 1 in November 1911 had, in truth, sounded the death knell of the NRSC townsite.[48] Hammond exchanged his dreams for ashes. True, he battled onward, but his moment had passed. Homes and businesses relocated to the new Prince George townsite in mute acceptance of the inevitable. While some might romanticize Hammond and his struggle against "interests more powerful than himself and associates," his was always a con man's gamble.[49] Because the GTP had deeper pockets and political clout, it could afford the longer game. Left with little choice, Hammond retired from the stage, first to Vancouver and then, after a brief role in the provincial prohibition fight,

to South Pasadena and, finally, El Monte, California, where he was still alive in 1943, when his only son, Robert, was killed in a mid-air collision while training RAF pilots in Mesa, Arizona.[50] Hammond died on 7 September 1950, and, akin to Hamilton and Clark, his passing escaped notice.[51]

Locating Prince George

Unlike South Fort George and Fort George with their chancers and confidence men, the Prince George townsite's origins were prosaic. Aided by idiosyncratic contributions of a Methodist minister and two Roman Catholic priests and the Department of Indian Affair's (DIA) presumptuous manner, moving the Lheidli T'enneh from Fort George Reserve No. 1 was a clumsy affair. From the outset, the GTP Railway company mistakenly assumed that events would wait on them. Yet even before the railway's confirmation, speculators such as Hamilton, Clark, Hammond, and others acquired land near the anticipated route. Consequently, by the time discussions turned to the question of station locations, Hammond possessed lots 937 and 938, where the GTP had anticipated building its station.[52] Denied its first choice and the opportunity to profit from sales in anticipation of the railroad's arrival, the GTP turned its attention to Fort George Reserve No. 1. Revealing a generous sense of entitlement, company assistant solicitor D'Arcy Tate thought that the Ottawa-based Board of Railway Commissioners would secure the entire reserve acres for "railway purposes."[53] Although dealing with the board seemed an attractive alternative to negotiating with the Department of Indian Affairs, chief engineer B.B. Kelliher thought it unlikely that the commissioners would acquiescence. Historian Frank Leonard dismissed Tate's hope as "a foolish suggestion from an experienced railway lawyer."[54] The company approached Frank Pedley, the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs, with an official request to acquire the reserve for the company's townsite. This began almost two and a half years of pursuit – detailed first by Leonard and then by David Vogt and David Gamble – during which the Lheidli T'enneh gamely defended their reserve and their rights against priests, ministers, the DIA, and the GTP.[55]

Once the railway finally acquired the reserve in November 1911, the company turned to the business of settling scores. An initial goal was to impose its own stamp – its sense of order – on the townsite by choosing a new name. With historic links to the fur trade and the HBC post overlooking the Fraser River, "Fort George" may have seemed the obvious

choice. The problem was that Hammond and the NRSC had been advertising "Fort George" and "Central Fort George" since October 1909 and had established a legal claim to the name in 1911 by registering one of its lots as the Fort George townsite. Given the already poisonous relationship between the GTP and Hammond, there was little reason to believe that the company's townsite would become "Fort George." Moreover, the war of words between those backing South Fort George and Fort George had sown so much confusion that the railway company had good reason to be leery of any association with "Fort George." In contrast, the name "Prince George" had been reserved for the GTP's exclusive use since 1912. It served a dual purpose of distinguishing the new community from its battling neighbours and fashioning a promotional link with the Pacific terminus at Prince Rupert.[56] So, when GTP president E.J. Chamberlain confirmed in January 1913 that "Prince George" would be the townsite's name, few were taken by surprise.[57] That the choice antagonized Hammond was merely a bonus. Despite the announcement, the name question remained unsettled, entangled in the battle over community incorporation and the railway company's desire to reduce the Hammond properties to scrublands west of the new city.

Thanks in large part to historian Frank Leonard's account of the GTP's "thousand blunders" in northern British Columbia, both the incorporation saga and the associated station-site battle have been told.[58] Motivated by the financial and administrative benefits of incorporation – increased local autonomy, a wider tax-base to distribute the costs of local improvements, and access to both provincial and dominion funding for development – the rationale for South Fort George pursuing incorporation as a city was understandable, particularly given the GTP's ham-fisted behaviour. For Fort George, while the same benefits also pertained, avoidance of irrelevance loomed large in the NRSC's thinking. The hard reality facing Hammond's community – and the railway company's objection to incorporating Fort George – was laid bare in a December 1913 letter from GTP solicitor Hugh H. Hansard to Victoria barristers Pooley, Luxton and Pooley:

> It is pretty well admitted now that all residents in the District will in a very short time reside in the Railway Company's townsite, South Fort George, and on the Hudson Bay Company's lot, and that there will be no or hardly any residents on the original Fort George townsite and the subdivisions added to that townsite by Mr. Hammond and his interests.

> In view of the fact that lots sold in the Fort George townsite and in the subdivisions added thereto by the Hammond interests will be in the near future abandoned, and the lots become valueless, this Company objects very strongly to its townsite being incorporated or in any way connected with the Fort George townsite and its subdivisions.[59]

The railroad company was committed to thwarting Hammond at every turn by cutting him out of any new incorporated entity. Therefore, when South Fort George's incorporation campaign spurred Fort George in a similar direction and floated the idea that all three communities might be incorporated together as the expanded community of "Fort George," the GTP rejected the initiative and chose to go it alone.[60] Despite sustained opposition from both outlying communities, the provincial legislation incorporating the new community – ironically, named "Fort George" – received third reading in the early morning of 6 March 1915. In the town's first municipal election, on 20 May of that year, it elected a mayor and council. And, with a plebiscite tally of 153 to 13, it chose the name "Prince George."[61]

All that remained for the railway was to navigate the conflict over its station. With the GTP pitting its corporate interests against the NRSC, the dispute hinged on the BRC's duty to ensure that the location of such facilities reflected the common good. Motivated by self-interest in opposing the railroad company's plans, Hammond portrayed himself as the people's champion in a struggle against the GTP's corporate might.[62] The situation was more complicated than such an assertion admitted. Settlers at the confluence were not of one mind when it came to the station. Some residents subscribed to the notion that a station built at the end of George Street, Prince George's high street, represented a sound business decision. Others, including the city's first mayor, W.G. Gillett, who owned land nearer the NRSC townsite, hoped that his holdings might profit from a more westerly station. Still others, who had made their peace with the townsite battles and had moved homes and businesses to Prince George, absented themselves from the ongoing belligerence. With both Hammond and the GTP stirring the pot while the latter ignored BRC rulings as well as dominion cabinet edicts, the affair stretched from November 1912 to March 1921, twice the length of the Great War. By the time the BRC finally ordered that the station be located three blocks west of George Street, the community's business centre was already well established and the short journey to meet the train hardly mattered.

Birth of a Bad Reputation

The founding of the three Georges and the subsequent battle for supremacy proved central to local self-perceptions as well as to how others imagined the region. As was often the case in communities on the settlement frontier, white newcomers saw themselves as central to the progressive spread of civilization and order. This idealized sense of self was first articulated by newspaper man John Houston, who, in referring to the region's administrative designation, juxtaposed the "Old" and "New" Cariboo. Long before his October 1909 arrival at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers, Houston had established himself as an irreligious crusading journalist, a pro-union man, prospector, entrepreneur, white supremacist, mayor, and a two-term member of the BC Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Nelson, before abandoning his political aspirations to oversee, first, the *Prince Rupert Empire* and then the *Fort George Tribune*.[63] Addressing an audience drawn to unadorned remedies, Houston unveiled his blueprint for the Cariboo in a rambling editorial covering two-thirds of the second page of the *Tribune* on 27 November 1909.[64] The "Old Cariboo" centred on 150 Mile House and was

> wedded to the old days, when Cariboo with Victoria was the "whole thing" in British Columbia. Its people live in the past, for few of them have lived in the district less than twenty years. They are good-natured when telling stories of the past glories of Williams Creek and of the millions that will yet be taken out of Slough Creek. They talk of railways; but only know of the Cariboo wagon road, on which a million dollars have been spent to kept it in repair. Over-represented in the legislature and in parliament for years, they like power, but do not know how to use it. They are in a rut, from which they will have to be jolted.

On the other hand, the "New Cariboo"

> is a wilderness. Its center is the Indian village of Fort George at which there is now a circular saw and a printing press in operation. Scattered from Fraser Lake to Giscombe [sic] rapids, along the Nechaco [sic] and Fraser Rivers for a distance of 150 miles are individual pre-emptors and small settlements in which pioneers are making homes. All told, they number about 100 white men, few of whom have wives and children with them. Few of these men are of Old Cariboo. They know if they must depend on the Cariboo wagon road for future transportation facilities that they might

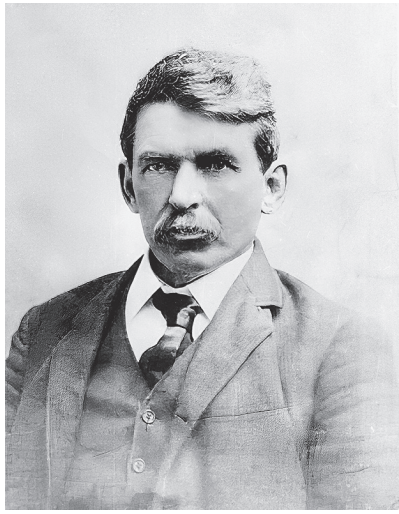


Figure 1.7a John Houston. | KootenayHistory.com.

Figure 1.7b The *Fort George Tribune* office, 1909. | KootenayHistory.com.

> as well pack up and leave the country. They know they are without representation in the legislature, for the tail does not wag the dog in Cariboo.

In Houston's reading, the New Cariboo boasted a distinctive people who were sceptical of distant centres of government, possessed a keen eye for the future, and were unafraid of the challenges it might bring. True to his own legislative experiences, he voiced a regional suspicion that contact

with the provincial capital was corrupting. Indeed, expecting Victoria to champion the Interior's interests was foolhardy. Although the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island were unreliable, Houston unapologetically embraced the province's mainstream culture with its racist attitudes toward Asian immigration and labour. If the northern Interior was to thrive, it would do so only through white labour invested in the region's long-term development: the very nature of non-preferred immigrants, he argued, prevented them from holding the New Cariboo's best interests at heart. Finally, and as a legacy of his own personal battle with alcohol, Houston favoured abolishing the barroom and implementing a policy that liquor should be available only in "rooms in which well-cooked food is served." It proved a difficult pledge to maintain, and, shortly before his own physical collapse and death, Houston offered an amended policy favouring the sale of provincially produced spirits, wine, and beer (as opposed to imported beverages), with a local option for determining if a community wanted liquor sales.[65]

Having mapped this regional identity, Houston founded the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) of British Columbia at a Fort George "convention" on 22 January 1910. Owing to the absence of surviving copies of the *Tribune* for any dates in that month and the *Cariboo Observer*'s thinly veiled hostility, there are no accounts of the gathering. The *Observer* editor, John Daniell, dismissed the "egotistical" Houston as the "Great I am of Fort George" whose platform was nothing more than a simple-minded "pipe-dream" that ignored the efforts of the region's representatives in the provincial capital.[66] It fell to John P. "Black-Jack" McConnell, editor and part owner of the *BC Saturday Sunset,* to wax lyrical about Houston's "Moses-like policy."[67] In McConnell's telling, Houston possessed the means to peer through the fog of BC politics:

> The policy that John has made contains much that is good and timely. It is the product of the straight-thinking man whose life has been mainly lived upon the far-flung frontier. Untrammeled by the exigencies of petty party considerations it deals two-bitted axe blows at the roots of political evils, it makes a full-throated, deep chested demand for reform and straight dealing in public affairs. If there were enough argonauts in British Columbia – not only of the pilgrims traveling through or sojourning in nature's fastnesses – but of those who in the busy "roaring streets," yet find their mental vision unclouded and turned towards the glistening peaks of political ideals, one might hope to see some of the principles become political actualities.

> But the average voter denies himself the privilege of contemplating political ideals, we all grope in the smoke and dust and grime of expediency and the love and need of lucre which breeds graft and the interminable mazes of intrigue in politics.[68]

McConnell's rapturous swoon ended with a point-by-point account of the PLP's founding principles:

- all legislation involving the province's credit be ratified by voters;
- that financial aid provided to railroad projects be conditional on the province owning a majority of stock in the company and that, if such conditions were met, railways in central and northern Interior be built through lands capable of producing foodstuffs to replace those currently imported from outside the province;
- that the rural population be enlarged and that settlers on the land be provided with a $2,000 loan at 5 percent interest; that staking public land should be abolished and that all existing pre-emptions be surveyed at government expense;
- that legal, medical, and dental professionals, along with land surveyors, be required to pass competency exams before being allowed to practise;
- that liquor be sold only in districts that expressly agreed to its sale, and that alcohol of any sort be available only in licensed dining rooms;
- that the provincial voters' list be renewed every two years; that "undesirable" and non-assimilative peoples be barred entry to the province, and that those already present be restricted to specific forms of employment;
- that anyone performing policing duties in urban or rural areas be obliged to pass a physical and mental examination;
- and, finally, that the party commit itself to contesting every election and by-election in the province.[69]

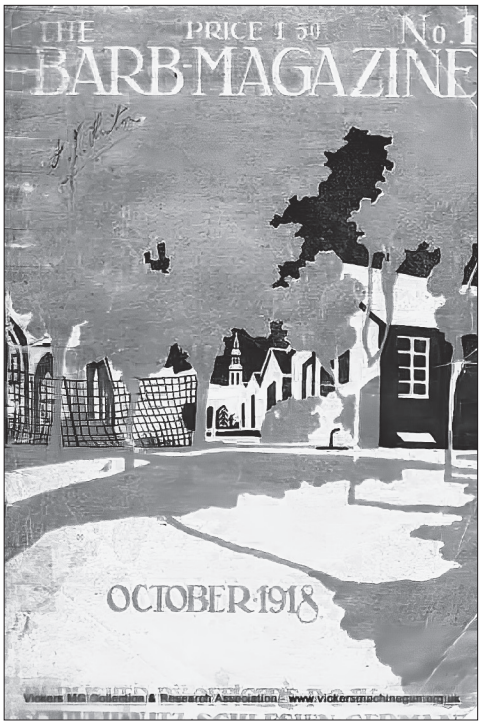
The platform proved to be Houston's parting declaration: he died of exhaustion and congestive heart failure on 8 March 1910 after being delivered by sleigh to Quesnel in search of medical care.[70]

Houston's death inadvertently set the stage for months of mudslinging between South Fort George and Fort George in the columns of *Saturday Night,* the *BC Saturday Sunset,* the *Fort George Herald*, and the *Fort George Tribune.* Although *Saturday Night*'s financial advice column "Gold and Dross" cast the first stone by questioning the virtues of George Hammond's Fort George townsite, it was John Daniell, whose presence in the district

was noted in a 20 May 1908 HBC post journal entry, who emerged as the lead combatant. Three months after that initial notation, HBC clerk James Cowie recorded that Daniell was establishing the *Cariboo Observer* newspaper in Quesnel.[71] Following Houston's death, Daniell shifted the *Observer*'s daily management to H.L. Stoddard, upped stakes, and dedicated his own energies to a new enterprise, the *Fort George Herald* in South Fort George. The war of words that followed continued until mid-October 1912, when, after being found guilty of libelling Hammond, Daniell temporarily withdrew.[72] With the backing of the GTP in the midst of its contest over the station site and with war clouds gathering over Europe, Daniell returned as editor of the *Prince George Post* in March 1914, but his newspaper career was interrupted by the war.[73]

After having been summoned to Esquimalt for a military physical in mid-September 1915, Daniell revealed his enlistment as a naval air service candidate.[74] The *Post* suspended operations a month later. By May 1916, Probationary Flight Sub-Lieutenant J.B. Daniell was in England.[75] Eventually attached to Naval Squadron No. 3 under Commander R.H. Mulock, Daniell was gunned down by a German Albatross on 11 May 1917 as his Sopwith Scout was on the homeward leg flying escort to 18 Squadron RFC (Royal Flying Corps) bombers.[76] Crashing sixteen kilometres behind enemy lines, he was taken as a prisoner to Épinoy aerodrome and then to Karlsruhe, Trier, and finally to the Schweldnitz prisoner-of-war camp. At the latter, he edited *The Barb Magazine*, an English-language POW newspaper.[77] Returning to the northern Interior after the armistice, Daniell took up the editorship of the *Prince George Citizen* in January 1920.[78] He stayed on for three years before leaving in the second week of April 1923 for Venice, California, where he became editor of the *Venice Vanguard.* In time, he became an executive officer with McCarty Advertising Company in Los Angeles.[79] Daniell died on 31 December 1964, and, like Hamilton, Clark, and Hammond, the local newspaper offered no mention of his passing.[80]

Before he left for the war, Daniell's main opponent in the townsite war of words between South Fort George and Fort George was John McConnell, an Ontario-born journalist and former editorial writer for *Saturday Night* magazine. McConnell relocated to Vancouver, where, on 15 June 1907, he launched the *BC Saturday Sunset.*[81] While commentators noted similarities between *Saturday Night* and the *Saturday Sunset,* the subsequent vitriol over the Georges suggested that his departure from the former had not been amicable.[82] McConnell's Liberal politics meant that he clashed early and often with Richard McBride's provincial Conservative



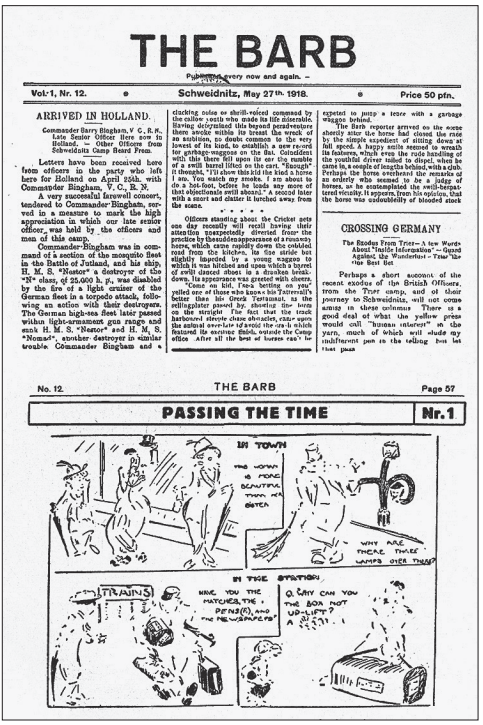


Figure 1.8 *The Barb Magazine,* edited by John B. Daniell. | ScholarWorks at WMU.

administration. McConnell was also a founding proponent of Vancouver's Asiatic Exclusion League, indicating his embrace of racist assumptions about the undesirability of all Asian immigration – a stance that most white residents in the province considered sound policy.[83] Having established a foothold in the province through the *Sunset,* McConnell and his brother-in-law, Richard S. Ford, launched the *Vancouver Sun* in February 1912 as an enterprise dedicated to resurrecting the Liberal Party's fortunes in the province.[84] Despite later remembrances of having fearlessly "served the cause of Canadian journalism faithfully and well" and having scorned "the trivialities and little jealousies of politics," McConnell's columns in the *Saturday Sunset* suggest a truculent editorialist whose appetite for battle appeared limitless. A veteran of four marriages and uncounted libel suits – the latter a point of pride – McConnell lost control of the *Sun* in the early 1920s before returning to Ontario and his brother's Toronto-based advertising firm, McConnell and Ferguson.[85] Four years later, at the age of fifty-one, John McConnell died following a gall bladder operation.

Figure 1.9 John McConnell and daughter Edith, 1925. | *Vancouver Sun.*

The third participant in the local name calling was the *Fort George Tribune.* Upon John Houston's death, his nephew Harry Houston took over the newspaper. The succession was barely in place before George Hammond, threatening litigation over allegations made by the late editor, assumed control in exchange for abandoning any potential suit. With Albert Dollenmayer as manager (his association with Hammond dated back to the Coe Commission Company), the *Tribune* became a NRSC mouthpiece and began trading insults and accusations with John Daniell at the *Fort George Herald.*[86] Because only a handful of the *Tribune*'s issues have survived, impressions of that newspaper are captured mostly in the arsenal of insults exchanged with the *Herald.* The tail of a *Herald* column summarizing local and provincial news captures the tone:

> The Nechaco [sic] townsite dribbling-bib, alias the *Fort George Tribune,* printed an inch or so of disparaging remarks, levelled at the *Herald* editor, last week. The Natural Resources Security Company, owners of the dribbling-bib, apparently can't find anything worse than an "ex-deck hand" to call the

> *Herald* scribe. We don't blush at all before the accusation. Yes, the *Herald*'s editor and owner did serve his apprenticeship in the British merchant marine. 'Tis not like being dubbed in the public print [as] a "get rich-quick swindler, wire tapper and jail bird," is it – George Hammond? To either the moon-faced type-picker who feeds the townsite company's organ to their multitude of dupes, or to the Albino manager of the townsite company, who has supervision of its columns, we attribute the "attack" of last week. Oh! you fools. Both those promoters-bell-hops are ex-employees of the Northern Interior Printing Company Limited [Daniell's company], and we have their mental gauge which is microscopical. The editorial end of the *Tribune* is not definitely allotted to any one man. The columns are for the purpose of inducing long distance investment, and any contributions, by the gamboling crowd of townsite puppets, which help in any manner to serve this end, are seized with avidity, and published in its columns. Go-to-it, you editors all. The *Herald* cares less than the value of a Hammond townsite lot for the squeakings of the townsite organ, or the persecution of its promoters.[87]

Hardly an even-handed exchange on the finer points of community life. The war of words was barely underway.

The final player was *Saturday Night* and its "Gold and Dross" column, which, within days of John Houston's passing, staked its position by casting doubt on Hammond's Fort George townsite proposition. The magazine's sniping continued into the summer of 1910 before approaching a crescendo with the photographic essay "Shacks and Forest at Fort George."[88] Researched in late June and early July, the article and photographs depicted "rough board shacks" and the surrounding "thick clump of virgin forest," and pointed out that, while its precise location remained undetermined, the GTP train station would be between one and a half and three kilometres away from the settlement. With this measure of things, the magazine reiterated that the NRSC was grossly misrepresenting the situation and that potential investors should be wary.[89] On the same day of *Saturday Night*'s photographic essay, John McConnell announced in the *Saturday Sunset* that "the world wants to know something about Fort George and the hinterland of the Northern Interior." And since "certain eastern newspapers" had heaped doubt on conditions in Fort George, McConnell was already en route northward to investigate the situation in person.[90] A collision between the two magazines appeared to be a near certainty. The unknown was how well the Georges would fare once the dust settled.

Hostilities Erupt

McConnell's first report during his northern adventure, offered under his pen name "Bruce" – after the Ontario county of his birth – was published on 6 August, detailing his journey through the southern Interior and into the Cariboo.[91] A week later, he dedicated an entire front page to photographs, a dismissal of *Saturday Night,* a narrative description of the Georges, an argument that the NRSC owned the Fort George townsite, a racist depiction of why the local Indigenous population would not sell their reserve to the GTP, and a boosting description of Fort George and its agricultural resources.[92] A week later, John Daniell responded to both *Saturday Night*'s "Shacks and Forests" treatment as well as McConnell's account of what he depicted as the Fort George townsite's inevitable rise to regional dominance. Wondering whether *Saturday Night*'s reporter had gone on a bender while visiting the Georges, Daniell argued, with some annoyance, that both the magazines had erred. On the one hand, *Saturday Night*'s correspondent had confused South Fort George's developing business district for the desolation of Hammond's Fort George townsite.[93] As much as the magazine's error was maddening (and one that dogged the Georges), McConnell's argument was even more misguided. His claim about South Fort George's distance from the rail line was groundless, as the railway's actual route was undetermined. Further, Hammond's ownership of the name "Fort George" foreordained nothing, since there was no reason to suppose that a prospective community's location or amenities would necessarily bear that name. Finally, in racist language matching McConnell's, Daniell argued that, regardless of what Chief Quaw, a "wily old red-skin," claimed, the GTP would acquire the reserve. Rather than invest in these groundless speculations, the *Herald* was on hand

> to tell the people all the facts. We will not manufacture carefully worded articles for the protection of rich companies whether they need them or not. The editor of this paper has lived in or near Fort George for the past five years and doesn't give a damn for the seven-day opinion of that forceful writer, Bruce, on this particular subject ... If *Toronto Saturday Night*, the Natural Security Resources Company, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, and Bruce want to "start something" over the merits or demerits of Fort George we want to referee, but let them beware of involving South Fort George, a town that is rapidly building up in spite of conflicting interests, on its own merits.[94]

Given Daniell's prominent role in the name calling that was about to erupt, the assertion that South Fort George was well placed to referee is amusing, although Daniell himself may have believed it. But the confusion over what distinguished Fort George from South Fort George and the anticipated GTP townsite meant that neither community would allow others to determine the northern Interior's image. And, as it turned out, Daniell emerged as a dogged, if not obsessive, competitor. He was, in a phrase, a good hater.

Returning to the contest at the end of July, *Saturday Night* acknowledged that John McConnell had taken "up the cudgels" in favour of the NRSC and had used the butt end on the magazine. Nonetheless, the attack had failed to bolster the NRSC's claim that Fort George would be home to the railway company's station and yards. *Saturday Night* also concluded that, given the *BC Saturday Sunset*'s dubious recommendations of speculative and unsavoury ventures in the past, its endorsement of Hammond's scheme was meaningless.[95] In response to this, McConnell dedicated two front-page columns to characterize *Saturday Night* as a "muck-raking publication" edited by "a bunch of irresponsible ignoramuses," who, in a seeming attempt to blackmail the NRSC, were exposing that magazine's own "prostituted standards."[96] This harangue proved to be one of the last between the two magazines, as, two weeks later, Mr. Justice W.E. Middleton dismissed George Hammond's request for an injunction preventing *Saturday Night* from commenting on the NRSC or its Fort George townsite.[97] Summing up why the matter was before the court, Middleton pointed to Hammond's allegation that *Saturday Night* had acted with ulterior motives that reflected "a deep-laid plot" in which the magazine was behind an undisclosed land company and thus was an active competitor of the NRSC. There was, however, no evidence to support the claim. The court could not grant an injunction to restrain publication of libel generally, and, further, Middleton doubted that any jury would find that anything reported by *Saturday Night* concerning Hammond's townsite scheme was libelous. If a jury did rule that it was, the court would set aside such an unreasonable verdict. Costs were awarded to *Saturday Night*.[98] With victory in hand, the magazine withdrew, leaving the *Saturday Sunset* and the *Fort George Tribune* to continue an increasingly personal battle with the *Fort George Herald* over the Georges' fate.

This realignment sharpened the barbs. Daniell was first out of the gate. Referring to McConnell's editorials preceding the Ontario High Court ruling, the *Herald* editor wondered if his *Sunset* counterpart had suffered

a "brain-storm," for which "any reliable physician would advise complete darkness and ice bags for his present form of mania." McConnell retorted that Daniell's drunken enormities as editor were known to the police, a comment leading Daniell to question McConnell's masculinity as a "pink-tea editor" who was so full of half-truths and lies that he was a drunk.[99] At this point, McConnell's insults and allegations became entwined with masculine morality, suggesting, through the use of insults such as "tin-horn," "frisker," "four flusher," "piker," and "bootlegger," that his opponents lacked manly honour and self-control.[100] It proved to be an enduring theme in McConnell's attacks. Finally, McConnell dismissed South Fort George as a "wildcat" townsite, a financially risky and unsound proposition. This, too, became a recurring theme, despite a cease-and-desist letter from Vancouver lawyers Russell, Russell and Hannington, representing Beach Lasalle, one of the owners of the South Fort George townsite, who was seeking a "full and complete retraction of the article." McConnell responded by naming Lasalle, Nick Clark, A.G. Hamilton, and W.F. Cooke as the primary movers behind the South Fort George "wildcat" townsite.[101] Peppering his response with a litany of slurs, McConnell alleged that the cabal was damaging the region's reputation by attacking everything connected with George Hammond. And by being in league with *Saturday Night,* the schemers were broadcasting their "knocking" of the district to a national audience. There was more than a grain of truth in the charge, although McConnell himself was hardly blameless. He added more fuel to the fire by teasing that "spicy reading" and "illuminating information" about local MLA John Fraser would reveal him as a party to the skullduggery. This innuendo came to nothing. Nonetheless, the *Sunset* editor offered a hard truth to South Fort George's backers. Given its location almost two and a half kilometres south of the anticipated GTP rail line, the community was ill placed to maintain a prominent role in the region's immediate development. Once the GTP arrived, the hoped-for prospects would evaporate, an assessment that proved crushingly accurate.

On the same day that the *Sunset* was released, the *Fort George Herald* returned to the battle with two columns of small type headed by the accusation "LIES, LIES, LIES," in which Daniell vented his spleen at McConnell and the alleged string-puller Hammond.[102] Daniell's venomous outburst described the *Sunset* as "a prostituted 'independent' weekly" operated by a journalistic "pimp" peddling his columns to the highest bidder. "Bruce" was "a mountebank," a princely liar, "a white-livered ass" whose commentary was akin to a dog returning to its "vomit."[103] Yet, in defending South Fort George's founders, Daniell was in an awkward position. He

too had once labelled Hamilton as a bootlegger. Further, by December 1910, rumours were swirling that Clark's company was in dire financial straits.[104] The best the *Herald* could offer was the tepid assertion that neither Hamilton nor Clark were actually involved in promoting the townsite (despite operating businesses there), that the "oldtimer" Clark had been one of "the liveliest" promoters in the region, and that "we have always found his word good."[105] Not exactly a daring rush to the barricades.

The editorial war raged until Christmas 1910 and then cooled until March 1911, after which Daniell signalled a new round of belligerence. Both men certainly relished the fight, with McConnell keen to goad his opponents. Conflict, recrimination, and libel proceedings made for good sales in the crowded Vancouver newspaper marketplace. In McConnell's telling, Hamilton was "a notorious bootlegger who peddled poisonous rotgut to Indians. The Indian chief at Fort George told me several of the young men of his reserve were killed by whisky sold to them by A.G. Hamilton last winter."[106] Nick Clark was a "tinhorn gambler who repudiates cheques which he issues to settle gambling losses" and who excused his behaviour by claiming to have been drunk at the time. Although Beach Lasalle was the first of the South Fort George clique to threaten legal action, tracing which went beyond legal counsel's brandishing complaints is difficult. Despite constant baiting, Clark seems to have been alone in bringing "Bruce" into court on a criminal libel complaint and filing a civil suit for an injunction to prevent McConnell from mentioning the South Fort George businessman.[107] In light of Hammond's setback in Ontario, Clark's decision to press the matter was ill considered. When it came time for depositions on the criminal side and discovery on the civil, the *Sunset* gleefully reported on Clark's confused account of events and his admission that his company's records were in disarray. When Clark's company initiated its winding up in early 1911, McConnell crowed that the proceedings "got to show that Nick Clarke [sic] is not only the tin horn gambler which I have accused him of being, but he is as well, a flim-flammer, a bogus cheque artist and the poorest kind of a businessman." The editor also paraded a series of dubious cheques and overdue accounts that required settlement before the new owners could acquire their assets.[108] When Clark's cases were dismissed, McConnell consigned "my interesting friend Nicolas Samuel Clark" to the scrap heap. Meekly acknowledging the defeat, Daniell charged the *Sunset* with scapegoating Clark because the South Fort George Board of Trade had raised legitimate questions about the NRSC's business methods.[109]

These legal tangles, both real and imagined, may have been little more

than theatrics designed to sell copy. Regardless, the involvement of *Saturday Night* and the *Saturday Sunset* meant that the story, with its confusion, innuendo, name calling, and litigation, had a national audience. It was highly significant that hostilities began in Toronto, where backers of both South Fort George and Fort George undoubtedly hoped to attract investment capital, and in Vancouver, British Columbia's largest city, which boasted a newspaper advertising centre with a natural audience for opportunities in the province's northern Interior. That the participants failed to recognize the self-inflicted damage is striking. McConnell, for example, chose to blame *Saturday Night* for a confused article on the Georges in a London, England-based magazine. Further, the *Sunset*'s editor claimed that the article "The Gentle Art of Selling Townsites" had purposefully distorted its portrayal of the Georges because of a squabble with McConnell over his magazine's advertising rates and circulation figures.[110] What especially attracted his ire was the British magazine's criticism of everything in the northern Interior except the South Fort George townsite, a position indicating that "this London writer has never been closer to Fort George than Dr. Cook ever was to the North Pole."[111] Inasmuch as McConnell blamed his opponents for the circulation of such falsehoods – a game in which he had been an active participant – the complaint was a selective version of events.

As 1910 turned into 1911, the enormities associated with the Georges lived on as half-remembered echoes in the public mind. A tone had been set and, with it, a note of disquiet – an unsettling "something" – about the region and its inhabitants. And while the name calling and the fallout continued into 1912, a libel suit brought by Hammond against Daniell and the *Fort George Herald* signalled that perhaps an end was at hand.[112] The case was brought before Chief Justice Gordon Hunter in Clinton on 1 May 1912. Legal sword play over the intricacies of a private prosecution, the question of whether the Crown could or ought to be involved, and procedural nuances associated with the terms "barrister," King's or Queen's counsel, and "Crown counsel," consumed the first day.[113] Once these topics were exhausted, Daniell entered a not guilty plea. The case centred on three assertions printed in the *Herald:* that Hammond and the NRSC continually misrepresented the content and character of the Fort George townsite; that he had manipulated newspaper reportage concerning Fort George's development and GTP efforts in the region; and that he had been held up to contempt and ridicule owing to Daniell's abuse and harassment, which included Daniell's libelling of Hammond by describing

him as a "get-quick-rich" schemer and a "jail-bird" whose photograph was found in a "rogue's gallery."[114]

Representing Daniell, Stuart Henderson argued that the alleged libel was "true in substance and in fact" and that it had been uttered "for the public benefit."[115] His was a justification defence, seeking protection on the grounds that the comments were true. In support of this defence, Henderson sought a commission to examine witnesses in Chicago and Minnesota, including John Hill Jr., who had authored the bucket-shop exposé that featured a chapter on Hammond. After another bout of procedural wrangling, the commission was set to be held before a Vancouver judge presiding in chambers. Owing to the necessity of securing witnesses in the United States and providing for travel time to Vancouver for the hearing, the libel trial was rescheduled for the next available assize in the Cariboo Judicial District.

It was at this point in the proceedings that the tide turned against Daniell.[116] Owing to claims that any Cariboo jury would be antagonistic to his client, Hammond's counsel, Sidney S. Taylor, requested a Vancouver venue.[117] Mr. Justice Aulay Morrison thought the suggestion excessive but agreed to moving the trial to Kamloops, where, in mid-October, proceedings reconvened.[118] Obtaining sworn statements in Chicago for the commission in chambers in Vancouver failed, owing to a Vancouver court official being unable to prepare and dispatch the documents with sufficient time for the statements to be sworn and returned for the trial's new date. Although Daniell implored John Hill Jr. to travel to Vancouver and then Kamloops to testify, the American's insights on Hammond's early career were beside the point. While Hill provided testimony as to Hammond's exploits, the information did not affect the question of whether Daniell had libelled the townsite promoter.[119] After deliberating for just over an hour, the jury found Daniell guilty. While he escaped with a sentence of time served in custody before the trial, Daniell nonetheless had to face Morrison, who, drawing on common visions of the beneficial British Empire and fictions about a free English (Canadian) press, scorched the editor for having done "a cruel, cruel thing," an unmanly thing, and for acting in a fashion that would cause any decent Englishman (and his family) to stagger under a burden of shame.[120] The *Vancouver Daily World* detailed Morrison's withering condemnation:

> I am very sorry to see you, an Englishman, in the position you are. If there is one thing the great English people have been noted for, it is keeping their

> press free from that of which you have been found guilty. If there is one thing that we Britishers in the colonies are proud of it is the English press. As an Englishman, I am sorry, I am ashamed, that you, an Englishman as you said you are, on the very threshold of your career, and I might say on the threshold of your existence in this province, should be responsible for such a thing as that.

Offered the opportunity to apologize, Daniell refused, accepted his judicial thrashing, and returned to South Fort George, where he boldly reprinted Hill's letter reiterating the details of Hammond's inglorious career in Chicago and Minnesota.[121]

Daniell's loss – when he had accurately portrayed Hammond's bucket-shop career, when the NRSC's self-inflicted wounds in reference to the station site were on the public record, and when the company's exaggerated sales pitch for the Fort George townsite was widely known – suggests that the case turned on the unprovable. Specifically, while Daniell believed that Hammond had paid off Hay Stead of the *Winnipeg Saturday Post* (where the libelous statement was original published) so that the newspaper would reverse course and label South Fort George a "wildcat," – a fly-by-night townsite without legal standing – was the only evidence sustaining Daniell's claim. Effectively, Daniell lost because he believed his own propaganda and stood by it regardless of the consequences. It was irrelevant that John Hill Jr. could testify to Hammond's early misadventures; the point was of no account to the *Post* libel and the accusation that Hammond had attempted to purchase Daniell's silence. Having lobbed uncounted gibes and accusations at Hammond, Daniell was undone by those that did not or could not stick. Yet by the Christmas season of 1912, it hardly mattered. The NRSC advertising campaign had run out of fuel, the GTP had secured the Lheidli T'enneh reserve and was beginning to clear the townsite, and, while never claiming to foretell the future, Daniell no doubt knew that Hammond did not possess the means to defeat the railway company.[122] Still, Daniell's own loss was costly. While presenting his readers with a brave face and committing himself to battling onward, he had accumulated over $7,000 in debt while fighting his corner. Within a year, he sold the *Herald* to Russell R. Walker and effected a temporary escape from the newspaper business.[123]

These prewar years offer complicated versions of the stories that the Georges' white settler society told themselves about themselves. While the self-congratulatory appeal of the New Cariboo, with a population of

independent, fair-minded, white, Christian people, was unquestioned, the townsite war's hard words and the images it painted suggested an unsettling counter-narrative. Indeed, for others – mostly outsiders – the region remained a foil for mid-nineteenth-century Vancouver Island's self-appointed role as an exemplar of the province's preferred identity on the eve of the First World War.[124] In that context, the Cariboo illustrated an absence, an unfinished and disorderly community. And even for those unaware of the province's history, who knew nothing of the northern Interior's initial promoters, confidence men, sharp dealing, and exaggerated sales pitches, something lingered on the edge of recollection. Here, in a nearly forgotten something, we find a persistent anxiety about reputation. For as much as early settlers and their families clung to an ideal of the New Cariboo and stood steadfast in their defence of their choice in turning their eyes and their aspirations toward the northern Interior, they too wondered about what the mean-spirited braggadocio of the newsprint war said about them. Was it possible that, despite their claims to respectability and order, they were somehow a party to that excess? It remained an unsettling possibility.

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