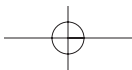
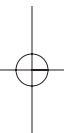




Creating a Modern Countryside



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Creating a Modern Countryside

Liberalism and
Land Resettlement in
British Columbia

JAMES MURTON

FOREWORD BY GRAEME WYNN



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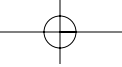
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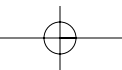
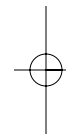
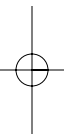
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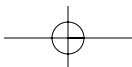
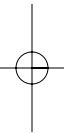
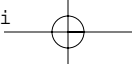
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For my father, who taught me about British Columbia;
my mother, who taught me to look things up;
and for Catherine, who was there for all of it





This war has set its vitalizing hand upon our people.

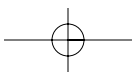
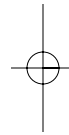
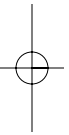
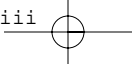
– Leonard S. Klinck, dean of agriculture and
later president of the University of British
Columbia, 1918

Only food and drink and, contingently, shelter are absolute physiological necessities that must be gotten, and in general no immense allocation of time has been necessary to get them. The allegations that nature *itself*, the planet as a whole, has been insufficiently generous or unreliable are ignorant and/or dishonest slurs. In those cases where people have gone without, or had to work very hard to meet those needs, they can honestly lay the blame for their misfortune squarely on other human beings.

– Colin A.M. Duncan, *The Centrality of Agriculture*

What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man's institutions.

– Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 178



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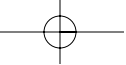
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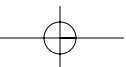
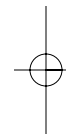
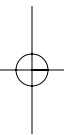
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FOREWORD

Soldiers' Fields

by Graeme Wynn

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

RECITED ON REMEMBRANCE DAY in Canada and England, and on Anzac Day in Australia and New Zealand, these poignant words from Lawrence Binyon's poem honouring the dead of the British Expeditionary Force in 1914, remain powerfully, hauntingly familiar in the twenty-first century. Engraved on the Cenotaph in London's Whitehall and on countless smaller memorials to those who fell "in the cause of the free," they affirm the deep sense of loss felt for the men and women killed in service of their countries amid the carnage and devastation of World War I.¹ "We are the Dead" wrote Canadian lieutenant-colonel John McCrae in an equally affecting commemoration of comrades who fell in the terrible battle of Ypres in 1915: "Short days ago / We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, / Loved and were loved, and now we lie / In Flanders fields."²

From the Canadian Monument at Vimy Ridge in France to the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, USA, from the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, Australia, to the War Memorial Carillon in Wellington, New Zealand and the monument at Delville Wood commemorating South African troops caught in ferocious fighting during the Battle of the Somme, moving official tributes to those who died "in defense of liberty and our country" also offer solemn reminders of the sacrifice made by a generation of young people: "Their ideal is our legacy, their sacrifice our inspiration." Few visitors to these sites or to any of the larger cemeteries constructed and maintained by the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission remain unmoved by the magnitude of the killing and

the commitment to “preserving the memory of the dead with simple dignity and true equality,” in hope of encouraging “future generations to remember the sacrifice made by so many.”³ Markers in the larger cemeteries proclaim that the names of those buried there “liveth for evermore,” and Rupert Brooke’s familiar sonnet, “The Soldier” paints personal sacrifice bright with patriotic meaning in its best-known lines: “If I should die, think only this of me: / That there’s some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England.”⁴

Countless other, less obvious, monuments and tributes to those who fell in the First World War – some of them neglected, others so familiar that they are taken for granted, their original purpose rarely recognized – dot the landscapes of the combatant countries. In the years after 1918, many debated whether commemorative ventures should be ornamental or utilitarian, whether they should speak to the spiritual values that had taken men and women to war or provide material means (hospitals, schools, or museums) to assist the comrades and descendants of those who had died.⁵ Echoing the opinion of the Roman poet Horace – “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*” (“It is a sweet and honourable thing to die for one’s country”) – New Zealand’s acting prime minister came down firmly on the ornamental side in arguing for “something that represents to us duty done,” something to improve the character of generations yet unborn and make them “realize what it is to sacrifice ourselves for the good of the whole.”⁶ Others opted for more directly functional investments. In 1919, oak trees were planted in an elaborate, extensive design across North Otago, New Zealand, in honour of each of the four hundred or so men from the district who never returned from the war. Intended to beautify the landscape as well as to serve as impressive living memorials to the fallen, each had a marker post and a bronze plaque; those in rural areas were surrounded by a protective fence.⁷

Yet the forces of nature, neglect, changing priorities, and fading memories have conspired variously to dull the expression of gratitude inherent in this and many other commemorative endeavours. Although many of the North Otago oaks flourished, others surrendered to drought, road works, and pruning. Today, the Auckland War Memorial Museum is often referred to simply as the Auckland Museum, and many Canadians are unaware that Memorial University of Newfoundland was established in 1925 to honour residents of that colony who lost their lives on active service during the First World War. Similarly, few know that when architects began designing a new sports arena on the south side of Chicago in 1919, their mandate was to commemorate Americans who died in uniform.

Opened as Municipal Grant Park Stadium on the fifty-third anniversary of the Chicago Fire in 1924, the arena was renamed and dedicated as Soldier Field on Remembrance Day 1925. Much remodeled, it is now more widely recognized as the home of “Da Bears,” Chicago’s National Football League team, than as the memorial to combatants in a long-ago war that it was designed to be. “Who will remember, passing through this Gate,” asked English poet Siegfried Sassoon, in a satirical reflection on the structure erected on the outskirts of Ypres after the First World War to commemorate those missing but believed to have been killed in action nearby, “The unheroic Dead who fed the guns? / ... / Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?”⁸ Memorials, piles of “peace-complacent stone” of any sort, might indeed belie the sacrifice of “the Dead who struggled in the slime” as Sassoon put it, but even as time and circumstance blunt the sharp, sad sentiment that inspired their creation, they give cause to remember (if not always “at the going down of the sun and in the morning”) those who died.

But what of those left to grow old after 1918? In contrast with the tributes paid the dead, the fates and fortunes of those who survived and returned to their homelands have been substantially forgotten. Contemporaries recognized that they owed much to those returning from the war. “We owe a great debt of gratitude to these men, and we should be willing to compensate them for the great sacrifices they have made,” said one contributor to a parliamentary debate in Victoria (Australia) in 1916.⁹ Yet they found this debt of honour far more difficult to pay than that due the deceased. The numbers involved were huge. Of the near nine million people who went to war from Britain and the Empire, almost eight million were discharged. These returned servicemen were a diverse lot. Drawn from city, town, and countryside, from factories, offices, and farms, from relatively affluent, moderately comfortable, and hard-scrabble circumstances into military service, they were generally young and had been affected in various ways by their wartime experiences. Many suffered physical injury – over two million were recorded as wounded in action. More carried psychological scars. “Shell shock,” debilitating neuroses, and other afflictions now known as post-traumatic stress disorders (but then largely unrecognized) took their toll. According to the Australian social historian Raymond Evans, many ex-servicemen “carried the war home in combat-ravaged minds and battle-hardened bodies to inflict it as a private hell upon their wives and children.”¹⁰

In Britain, anxieties about impending social and political upheaval were heightened by the fear that traumatized veterans would concentrate in cities with high levels of unemployment after the war. Melded with

swelling imperial sentiment and a sense of responsibility toward demobilized soldiers, these concerns underpinned enthusiasm for the idea, as a later report (published in 1920) had it, of *Land Settlement for Ex-Service Men in the Overseas Dominions*.¹¹ The prolific popular novelist and sometime colonial administrator and adventurer Henry Rider Haggard played an influential role in these developments. With the backing of the Royal Colonial Institute in London and as a member of the Royal Commission on the Natural Resources, Trade and Legislation of Certain Portions of His Majesty's Dominions, he travelled widely through the settler colonies, to stress both the crucial need for imperial vitality and the particular attributes of British ex-servicemen. They were, he assured his listeners, "the finest settlers in the world – men who have been thoroughly disciplined, who know what stress and danger mean, and who know how to face opposition of every kind."¹² With similar Imperial confidence, Christopher Turnor, author of the 1920 report, *Land Settlement*, went so far as to outline appropriate mechanisms for placing British soldiers on colonial farms: for strategic reasons, metropolitan authorities should orchestrate the flow of ex-servicemen and their families to the dominions; there they should be accommodated in group settlements comprised of at least two hundred farms and assured of freehold tenure, ample credit, expert advice, and the provision of necessary infrastructure.

In each of the British Dominions, and in the United States (which sent 4.7 million troops to combat and suffered 120,000 casualties), public expectations and official policy largely coincided in the conviction that land should be made available to those who returned from the war, but in the dominions local efforts to implement this commitment rarely mirrored metropolitan designs. Colonials and their representatives were cautious about granting the gift of land, their readiest currency, to British soldiers and sailors before accommodating their own ex-servicemen. And relatively few members of the British forces showed much interest in taking up the limited opportunities available to them in the colonies. In Australasia, politicians and patriots had encouraged men to enlist by promising them farms upon their return. As early as 1915, New Zealand prime minister W.F. Massey was envisaging "colonies of ... returned soldiers, planted, as the ancient Romans did, in different parts of their great Empire after their victories," and later that year legislation was passed providing for land grants on favourable terms and generous financial assistance for soldier settlers.¹³ Across the Tasman Sea, South Australia quickly followed the New Zealand lead, and other state governments soon emulated these early adapters. Soldier settlement seemed to promise many things:

repatriation, patriotic compensation and economic self-sufficiency for individuals, and the opportunity to develop and “open up the country” for the benefit of all. By 1916, the Commonwealth government had agreed to provide financial assistance for land acquisition and infrastructure development to facilitate the settlement of discharged soldiers by state authorities.

Noone knew what this commitment might mean, but one reasonably contemporary estimate suggested that if no more than one in every four eligible Australians took up land, and it cost £2,000 each to place them on farms, expenditures would reach £150 million.¹⁴ In the end, numbers were smaller (by about half), and costs were considerably lower, amounting to less than a third of the total envisaged. In New Zealand, land settlement was judged “the best known, the most expensive, and the least successful” of all forms of rehabilitation offered returned servicemen after the war. By March 1924, the government had loaned £22 million to 22,000 ex-servicemen.¹⁵ In both of the Australasian dominions, the commitment to settle soldiers on the land had followed earlier efforts to “burst up the great estates” and promote more intensive patterns of land use. These closer settlement movements, which rested on deeply entrenched agrarian visions of the yeoman farmer (and his household) as constituents of the ideal society, had been buttressed, if not necessarily guaranteed success, by the application of science to agriculture and the growing conviction, early in the twentieth century, that natural limits to intensification could be overcome.¹⁶

Generally, the Australian and New Zealand soldier settlement schemes have been seen as dismal failures. Concerns were expressed early, by a Royal Commission of Inquiry in the state of Victoria in 1925, which clung to hope even as it recognized shortcomings in the soldier settlement program: “The course lies across an imperfectly charted sea, through many reefs and shoals, and shifting sands called prices. The ship was hastily equipped but it is well-manned, and we believe will ultimately be brought safely to port.” A harsher verdict was pronounced by an Australian inquiry four years later, which lamented that 30 percent of soldier settlers assigned land had left their properties. Some have disputed the broad condemnation, noting that persistence rates varied enormously. Even the 1929 inquiry noted that they ranged from 40 percent in Tasmania to slightly more than 80 percent in Victoria, and assessments of outcomes at the local scale provide examples of both heartening successes and dispiriting failures.¹⁷

On balance, however, it is clear that many soldiers and their families struggled to win a decent living from the fields assigned them. Large numbers

of those placed on the land lacked experience in farm management. Post-war inflation and high demand raised the costs of stock and equipment for those developing farms immediately after 1918. Few had sufficient capital. The financial advances provided them were generally inadequate and came with stringent repayment schedules. Individual farms were often smaller than necessary for successful operations in the areas in which they were located, as extensive pastoral estates were divided into separate blocks that averaged less than two hundred acres each in many settlements. Some settlement locations were simply misjudged, leaving soldier settlers on undrained swampland, or setting them up for dairying in wheat-and-sheep country. On top of all of this, agricultural produce prices were highly, and unexpectedly, volatile in the 1920s. "For far too many" Australian soldiers, concludes a recent detailed examination of soldier settlement schemes in Queensland, "the struggle against mud, sand and shells was merely transformed into a battle against the natural environment, abject poverty and governmental neglect."¹⁸

Contemporary estimates suggested that as many as 750,000 American soldiers would want to take up land at the end of the war. A precedent for large-scale allocations of public land to former soldiers had been established after the Civil War, but half a century later, the public domain was far less extensive. Plans therefore focused on bringing unused, or "waste," lands into productivity. The National Soldier Settlement Bill of 1919 envisaged a \$100 million appropriation to provide farms for war veterans. Each project developed under this scheme was to make farms available through the Department of the Interior by clearing, draining, irrigating, or fertilizing land, and each was to include at least a hundred households; plans also called for settlers to live in communities from which they would work the surrounding land. All costs were to be charged to the projects and recouped from land sales, although short-term loans were to be offered for the acquisition of stock and equipment. "Nothing was to be given to the veterans other than an opportunity for immediate employment, credit, and a chance to acquire a farm unit."¹⁹ Still, the bill encountered opposition on several fronts. Some considered it discriminatory for extending assistance only to those soldiers who wanted farms; others took issue with its cost and argued that there was no need to bring new land into competition with existing farms. Modifications and other initiatives were proposed to address the concerns of critics, including revisions to, and amplifications of, the 1902 Reclamation Act by extending its provisions beyond the seventeen western states to which it originally applied and making more money available for reclamation works.²⁰

In the end, Congress failed to enact soldier settlement legislation per se. Although thirteen states had approved measures to place ex-servicemen on farms, seven had made their implementation dependent upon federal cooperation and financial assistance. Thus, only California, Oregon, Washington, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Arizona made practical efforts to place war veterans on farms. The details of their schemes varied, but all fell short of their objectives. Those in Minnesota, Washington, and California (which framed the most ambitious scheme in the country) were perhaps least successful. Generally, all of these initiatives foundered because the costs of making land available (and thus the price of farms) exceeded the earning capacity of the properties, which was due to low market prices and, said one later assessment, “poor supervision and lack of settler responsibility.”²¹

Canada, which sent 650,000 of its citizens to the Great War and lost over ten percent of them, began to face the challenge of dealing with returned soldiers as early as 1915, when the Military Hospital Commission met with provincial representatives, who agreed to establish committees to deal with the needs of discharged servicemen. Within a year, the British Columbia Returned Soldiers' Aid Commission was recommending the settlement of “all returned soldiers” in cooperative communities located in areas selected by an appointed Board of Commissioners. With approval of the Land Settlement and Development Act in 1917, the province created its own Land Settlement Board in the Department of Agriculture to promote agricultural development and to serve as an instrument for the establishment of “Settlement Areas” for returned soldiers, their widows, and other bona fide settlers on undeveloped agricultural lands. As so often in the Canadian federation, however, it soon became apparent that it was “not possible for any one province to arrive at a solution that would be adopted by all of them.”²² None of the other provinces moved as decisively as British Columbia on this front. Federal-provincial cooperation was necessary for the development of a practical policy. The federal government convened a Parliamentary Committee on Returned Soldiers early in 1917 and six months later, in September, “An Act to Assist Returned Soldiers in Settling Upon the Land and to Increase Agricultural Production” established the Soldier Settlement Board to assist returned servicemen onto the land.

With vast acreages of unsettled territory and extensive areas throughout the west in the hands of the federal government, the Canadian response to the challenge of soldier settlement was quite different from those of the Australasian colonies and the United States. Given the extent of good, uncultivated land near existing settlements and markets, the government

early decided to avoid “the settlement of soldiers as pioneers in remote locations or under isolated conditions, removed from markets, in virgin forest areas, or on lands not cultivable without reclamation or other development.”²³ Federal lands along railroad routes were reserved for veterans, and in the prairie provinces, eligible ex-servicemen were allowed a 160-acre land grant, to which they could add a similar area under the provisions of the Homestead Act. Basically, the government invited eligible applicants to apply for loans to a maximum of \$7,500 for the purchase of land, stock, and equipment and for the execution of “permanent improvements” to their properties. Applicants had to satisfy officials as to their fitness and moral character, and provide information about their assets and abilities.

The press of applications soon exceeded the capacity of the Board of Commissioners to cope with them. Loans could be processed quite expeditiously but establishing men on free Dominion lands proved more difficult. Amendments to the Soldier Settlement Act (effective in 1919) committed the federal government to providing funds for the provinces to purchase or expropriate private and uncultivated land within designated districts for the settlement of soldiers. Anticipating these changes, BC premier John Oliver moved late in 1918 to introduce the provincial Act to Provide Lands for the Use and Benefit of Returned Soldiers (known as the Soldiers’ Land Act). Through its provisions, the Lieutenant-Governor in Council (effectively the governing party in the legislature) was allowed to acquire land for soldier settlement with monies from the consolidated revenue fund, and it thus held considerable power “to control land development and the settlement of returned soldiers and bona fide settlers” in British Columbia.²⁴ Quickly, the province’s Land Settlement Board established fourteen settlement areas, one in the Kootenays near Fernie and the others ranging across the central interior, from Smithers south to Rose Lake near Kamloops, but few veterans were attracted to these locations. Disappointed, the premier turned to encourage community settlements. The idea of cooperative land settlement was in the air but the federal government was dubious about both the financial feasibility and the eligibility of such ventures for assistance under the Soldier Settlement Act. Undaunted, Premier Oliver instructed the Land Settlement Board to purchase unoccupied forest and logged-off lands for designation as “Development Areas,” where soldiers would work together for modest wages to clear the land before purchasing fractions of it for their own farms.

Three years after the war ended, the federal Soldier Settlement Board had received some 60,000 applications for assistance and deemed approximately

two-thirds of them eligible; by the end of March 1921, aid had been extended to over 25,000 soldier settlers across the country. Almost 80 percent of them held loans, amounting in total to \$80 million, and the others had taken up free Dominion land without loan assistance.²⁵ Those found to be lacking adequate farming experience were required to find employment with a “good farmer” until they had gained sufficient knowledge and experience to convince local field supervisors that they were likely to succeed on the land. Until 1921 allowances were provided and, in some parts of the country, special training centres were operated to aid those starting out. In addition, field supervisors visited and advised all those assisted by the board, and a “Home Service Branch” provided help and advice on home economics and farming subjects to soldier settlers’ wives.

Contemporary reports were often enthusiastic about these efforts. On 2 September 1920, the Regina *Morning Leader* carried an article by C.W. Cavers of the Soldier Settlement Board touting the progress of soldier settlement in Saskatchewan, which offered “a very excellent field for this great experiment.” The disposal of Indian and forest reserves as well as land formerly assigned to the Hudson’s Bay Company and “many acres of idle lands formerly owned by private individuals” had provided “a decided fillip” to expansion in the “great West” and increased the country’s resources. Over four thousand loans (valued at over \$16 million) had already been approved and close to 3,250 members of the Canadian Overseas Militia Force were settled on their new farms. Although some of the soldier settlers failed because of what Cavers described as “ill health,” death, “domestic infelicity,” or the disappointing quality of the land they were assigned, he had no doubt that in the course of time, thousands “who would have been compelled to seek employment” in already overcrowded cities, would become “producers in the truest sense because of the extremely favorable terms of the Soldier Settlement Act.”

A year later, the Soldier Settlement Board was equally positive about its activities in British Columbia, despite the fact that its efforts were spread across three wide – and very different – districts and it was therefore impossible to offer a single narrative of achievement. In its report, the board paid no specific attention to the jurisdictional complexities created by the BC government’s Development Areas scheme, and simply reported on the numbers of soldier settlers in the different parts of the province. There were 939 in the Vernon district, scattered across an area that encompassed 50,000 square miles and included the mountainous Kootenays as well as the dry Okanagan. The Victoria district was responsible for just over 500 men, most of them on the Gulf Islands, and in the Duncan and

Comox areas. The Vancouver district extended northwards to the Bulkley and Nechako valleys and eastward to the Cariboo, but fully 650 of the 1,400 soldiers in receipt of loans in this vast area were concentrated in the lower Fraser Valley, in Surrey, Langley, Matsqui, and Chilliwack. A large number were also settled in Richmond. Difficulties were legion: many struggled with the enormous trees on their properties; in the interior, farmers battled drought; land in some parts of the lower Fraser was flooded, and in others it was waterlogged during the planting season; commodity prices were high, beef prices were depressed, and the weather was bad. But the "Home Branch" was active, offering advice to farmers' wives, on everything from making bread to pickling fish, and providing pre-natal instruction. It was "impossible to speak too highly" of the settlers' "optimism and determination." Hardship had been bucked "by pluck and resourcefulness." Only later would scholars recount the failure of soldier settlements in the province.²⁶

In retrospect, it is clear that strong similarities reverberate through the stories told about soldier settlements across the British Empire (and to a lesser degree in the United States). In the immediate aftermath of the war, politicians and others echoed the conviction of Arthur Meighen, the Canadian minister of the interior, that the "primary and great principle" behind their efforts to encourage soldiers in the development of farm fields was "to secure settlements of ... idle lands, and to make settlers of those who have proven themselves the backbone and stay of the nation in its trouble." To greater or lesser degree, each was convinced that there was no better way to "fortify ... [the] country against the waves of unrest and discontent that now assail us, as all the rest of the world, than by making the greatest possible proportion of the soldiers of our country settlers upon the land."²⁷

Such commitments rested upon deep-seated beliefs about the place of agriculture in society. Long and complex genealogies shaped these points of view, and they were emphasized differently as they were threaded through debates about soldier settlement in different places at different times. In general, however, they incorporated three associated and overlapping visions of agriculture: an arcadian notion that emphasized the moral virtues and personal benefits of rural life and often entailed a romantic critique of modernity; an agrarian discourse that saw agriculture as the real source of all wealth and the yeoman farmer as the embodiment of freedom and independence; and an emerging "Country Life" movement that sought to reform and improve rural conditions through scientific research and implementation of progressive policies in the countryside.²⁸

Together, these impulses swathed the postwar development of soldiers' fields in hope.

Time and experience cast these initiatives in a different light, however. Many of those who had been encouraged to take up land struggled to make ends meet. Indignant that those who had fought for freedom had become prisoners of difficult circumstances, contemporary commentators tended to emphasize failures above successes and their accounts led many later historians to portray soldier settlements as examples of good intentions gone awry. Misguided decisions, careless choices, unforeseen market conditions, personal failings, and many other factors were held responsible, in varying degrees, for particular outcomes but, generally, the enormous investments made in settling ex-servicemen upon the land have been condemned for their failure to produce acceptable returns.

Creating a Modern Countryside is written against this canvas of globe-encompassing efforts to establish soldiers on fields (and farms) of their own. At first (and too-fleeting) glance, it might be regarded simply as a useful contribution to the now-considerable array of studies dealing with this broad topic, one that offers new detail about hitherto under-studied soldier settlement schemes on the Pacific fringe of Canada. But this would seriously underrate the value of the contribution that James Murton makes in the pages that follow. By focusing his attention on two of the BC government's most concerted efforts to establish soldier settlements, at Merville on Vancouver Island and at Camp Lister in the Kootenay mountains of southeastern British Columbia, as well as on the Southern Okanagan Irrigation Project, which began as a soldier settlement, and considering them alongside contemporary and cognate efforts to drain Sumas Lake, encourage agricultural settlement in the Cariboo region, and irrigate the dry Okanagan Valley, Murton throws new light on both the development of British Columbia between the wars and on the soldier settlement schemes of this period more generally.

The freshness of Murton's story derives from the somewhat unusual bifocal view that he brings to his work. Recognizing, as he puts it in the first line of his book, that nature haunts the great projects of the state but that historians interested in the processes of state formation have generally relegated the environment to the margins of their accounts, he seeks to re-centre his discussion of the interwar years on the reciprocal, and inescapable, links between changes in the state and changes in the land. Here he draws inspiration from two lines of historical inquiry (and their associated literatures) that remain, at least in Canada, largely and unfortunately

discrete. One of these focuses on the various ways in which governments have promoted and facilitated processes of territorial occupation, (re)settlement, and the extension of authority over land and people. This line of inquiry has long and deep roots but its antecedents run variously from ideas associated with Michel Foucault through Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer's *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution*, published in 1985, and James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* to Ian McKay's influential article, published in the *Canadian Historical Review* in 2000, which argues that the development of Canada is best seen as a "project of rule" by which the "politico-economic logic" of liberalism was imposed on a vast territory and implanted in the hearts and minds of its inhabitants.²⁹ Murton extends and refines this latter point by focusing on the moment when the classic laissez-faire liberalism of the nineteenth century (intent on establishing equality of opportunity for individuals) gave way to a more interventionist "new liberalism" early in the twentieth century. Central to this political/ideological shift (which was also seen in Britain and in the United States, where it was incorporated into the broad agenda of the Progressive Movement) was a new conception of the state that encouraged action to ensure "the general welfare of its citizens." This, maintains Murton, led the British Columbia government into soldier and other settlement projects that were exercises in both social and environmental reform.

The second source of inspiration for Murton's bifocal vision lies in environmental history. Several practitioners in this field have examined relations between the state and the environment through a variety of lenses, ranging from official endeavours to preserve wilderness through consideration of the politics of development to government-led efforts at conservation. In this context, Murton draws particularly on the ideas of two American scholars, taking from Richard White a central idea of *The Organic Machine* that efforts to transform the Columbia River were predicated on a desire to make it "part of a larger unity ... composed of nature and machine, for the betterment of humanity," and from Donald Worster the observation that the modern capitalist state was driven by "an ideology of instrumental reason" that "saw no value in ... nature that was not doing work directly useful to humans" (see pages 4 and 5 herein).³⁰ Central to both of these positions – and thus to Murton's assessment of the interwar efforts to create a new countryside in British Columbia – was the conviction that the state could bring technology and nature together productively, to benefit both humans and the environment. In this perspective, the impulse to place returned soldiers on the land was less a reflection of rural romanticism – a retreat from the travails of modernity – than a well-intentioned

attempt to frame an alternative form of modernity, a way of life that offered those who embraced it both access to nature and the advantages associated with modern science and technology. On this account, the soldiers and others encouraged onto the land by the British Columbia government after 1918 were participants in a noble – if ultimately unsuccessful – attempt to transcend the dichotomy between humans and the environment, nature and the machine.

In this, participants in the interwar initiative to develop the British Columbia countryside stand in sharp contrast to most of those who later occupied the lands – no longer cultivated – in the Development Areas and in other isolated parts of the province: members of the 1960s and '70s “counter-culture,” whose “back-to-the-land” movement rested on the belief that “the machine” (often construed to include all facets of high modernist society) had no proper place in the garden of nature. By drawing this contrast and reminding readers of the differences that set these two instances of enthusiasm for rural life apart, Murton lifts his study from its preoccupation with a couple of decades of British Columbia history to make the first of several larger points upon which this book invites reflection: History may seem to repeat itself, but it does so only to the superficial observer. Getting “down into the dirt” (to use Murton’s metaphorical phrase) of the past, to explore its details and intricate patterns, its puzzles and contradictions, reveals both its complexity and the importance of context and contingency in shaping events. More than this, it should be clear, after reading Murton’s book, that historians’ views of the past – reflected in the questions they ask and the answers they deem important enough to emphasize – are cumulative and conditional. *Creating a Countryside in British Columbia* rests (in some fair degree, as all historical works do) on the inquiries of others and renders the past relevant, at least in part, as a refraction of current concerns and debates.

Second, this book contributes to our understanding of early twentieth-century Canada in two important ways: by demonstrating that, in British Columbia at least, soldier settlement initiatives were assimilated into larger programs of organized land settlement and helped impart a sense of urgency and moral conviction to existing agendas; and by indicating that British Columbia stood somewhat apart from other regions of the country in its efforts to place returned soldiers in communal settlements in Development Areas, which were chosen because they were relatively isolated and unimproved. Third, Murton invites those interested in the relations between nature and human societies to ponder his book’s foundational assertion that “understanding environmental change requires moving beyond the

consideration of ideas explicitly about nature to more general logics – such as liberalism – that implicitly encourage a particular form of engagement with nature” (page 6 herein). This is an important summons, not least because it encourages a more historical perspective on the role of the state in relation to the environment than that articulated by several recent theorists of this relationship, at the same time as it cautions against narrow, instrumental interpretations of human-environment interactions. And, finally but no less importantly, this work is, in its way, a tribute to soldiers and other settlers who sought and struggled to develop productive fields in often unpropitious circumstances in a postwar world that they helped to bring into being but that was never entirely of their own devising.

Acknowledgments

OVER THE COURSE OF THIS PROJECT, I have generated a long list of debts to friends, colleagues, mentors, and family. I will attempt to acknowledge all here. I apologize in advance to anyone inadvertently left out.

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My deepest thanks go to Catherine Murton Stoehr, who believed in me when I could not, offered endless advice and support, and, above all, showed me that I could do it.

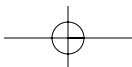
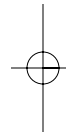
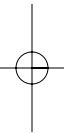
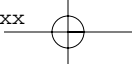
A Note on Terminology and Units of Measure

Following the lead of Cole Harris' *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, I have used the term "resettlement" in place of "settlement" when referring to plans to populate British Columbia with Euro-Canadian migrants. This serves to remind the reader that the lands that now make up British Columbia were already populated when Europeans arrived, and that white settlement therefore required the removal of Native peoples. When referring to specific settlement plans or programs, when summarizing the thoughts or positions of contemporaries, or where modification would have resulted in grammatical horror, I have left the term "settlement" in place.

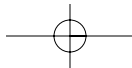
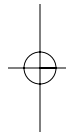
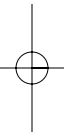
I have used the terms "white" and "Euro-Canadian" more or less interchangeably to refer to these settlers. As inaccurate and unlovely (respectively) as these terms are, I know of no adequate substitutes.

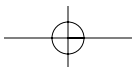
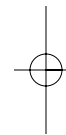
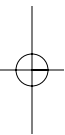
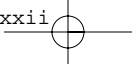
The terms "Dominion" and "Dominion government," used occasionally, mean the same as "Canada" and the "Canadian government." They refer to Canada's original official name, the Dominion of Canada, and were in common use in the period covered by this book.

I have preserved imperial units of measure throughout. Though metric units are standard in Canada and in scientific work today, converting historical, imperial figures introduced too many issues of accuracy and meaning. In particular, estimated figures ("four to six feet in diameter," for example) became either falsely precise (1.2 to 1.8 meters) or inaccurate (1 to 2 metres).



Creating a Modern Countryside





Introduction

NATURE HAUNTS THE GREAT PROJECTS OF THE STATE. One hundred and sixty years ago, the British imperial state began to remake the homes of the Coast Salish, the Nlaka'pamux, and their neighbours into places safe for capitalism, modernity, and white settlers. Colonizers had to balance the systems of property, law, and social values they wanted to impose and the existing realities of the northwest coast of North America. In the process, societies were displaced, geographies remade, and ecologies re-arranged: A new state emerged. Yet the state's engagement with the environment has generally been peripheral to historians' studies. Like a bothersome child acknowledged only infrequently, the environment does not receive much attention in their accounts. I would like to invite the environment to speak at length. I wish to examine the role it played in the formation of the state, and to consider why and in which ways the state intervened to shape the environment. I will argue that soils, rivers, trees, plants, and fire played key roles in the state-formation process, while the changing form of the state authorized historically contingent forms of intervention in the environment. In other words, changes in the state and changes in the land were inextricably linked. The "bothersome child" must be taken into account when we consider the influences that shaped the resettlement of British Columbia.¹

This discussion demands that we get outside and into the dirt. Imagine for a moment that it is May 1924, and we are standing in a muddy field that was, until a short time ago, Sumas Lake. The mud is thick with dead fish, bewildered ducks circle overhead looking for water. In the distance

we can see what is left of the lake: an expanse of shallow water equal in size to fifteen hundred acres, steadily shrinking as powerful engines pump the lakewater into the nearby Fraser River. A project of the British Columbia government's Land Settlement Board (LSB) is near to successful completion: The lake has almost been reclaimed.

Around this time, the LSB issued a pamphlet designed to sell the new farmland emerging from the waters. Figure 1 (see p. 53), a reproduction of the pamphlet's cover, depicts what the LSB thought the land should look like. The illustrator envisions a patchwork of fields receding into the distance, shrubbery between the fields suggestive of hedges. Tidy houses dot the scene. The entire landscape is framed by the peaks of the Coast Mountains, which pierce the clouds that shroud the Fraser Valley. The result: a lovely (if somewhat incongruous) amalgam of BC and England – the rugged west and the pastoral old country – an imagined geography uncomplicated by reality.

What is also clear, however, is that this is a modern, not an ancient, countryside. The pamphlet title acknowledges – or perhaps boasts – that these are “reclaimed” lands, a benefit of industry. These lands were to be the gift of the British Columbia state, which issued the pamphlet. A later pamphlet made the modern industrial origins of this landscape even clearer, mixing images of lush, reclaimed land with photographs of the giant pumps that reclaimed the land and of the provincial legislative buildings.

In the late 1910s and early 1920s, the BC state engaged in a brief but intense effort to manufacture a new, modern countryside for British Columbia. This effort, in a place of rivers and mountains not easily given to farming, would have long-felt consequences. The reclamation of Sumas Lake was only one element of the project. Though the project was initiated in response to the need to provide for “returned soldiers” – the veterans of the First World War – it quickly expanded. This book is a study of this process of state engagement with the environment via the imagining and constructing of new agricultural landscapes. Various aspects of this project will be considered here – such as the draining of Sumas Lake, the creation of “soldier settlement” communities at Merville on Vancouver Island and Camp Lister in the West Kootenays, the encouragement of agricultural settlement in the Cariboo region, and the irrigation of the southern Okanagan Valley – along with the discourses that animated and justified them.

The anxious encouragement of agricultural resettlement (and its faltering progress) is a theme as old as European colonization on the Pacific coast.² What was new in the postwar projects was the idea of modernizing

the countryside and the direct involvement of the state in planning and carrying out resettlement (and thus in large-scale environmental engineering). Both of these factors can be tied to the reworking in the interwar period years of what historians have called the Canadian liberal order. In his increasingly influential call for a re-imagining of Canadian history around this concept, Ian McKay argues that the development of Canada can profitably be thought of as a “project of rule,” implanting the “politico-economic logic” of liberalism both “across a large territory” and in the hearts and minds of people.³ Throughout the nineteenth century in Canada, liberal reformers challenged political and economic orders that emphasized such elements as an established social order, the inherent right of particular men to rule, and endowed rights to land.⁴ These reformers called on the state to guarantee an individualistic social order and a laissez-faire economic order, a “formal, rule-bound arena in which competition could occur without unfair advantage or interference.”⁵ These social and economic changes drove, and were supported by, changes in the land itself; in McKay’s words, “social ideology” was “set down on the land and hence made part of everyday ... experience.”⁶ The cover of the LSB pamphlet, for example, shows a liberal landscape, appropriate to an individualistic social order.⁷ Such a liberal landscape of individual properties, bounded by imaginary lines made real by law and patrolled by individual property owners, became a powerful tool of the colonial state as it removed First Nations people from their land.⁸

This sort of classical liberal order, focused squarely on providing equal opportunities for individuals (or concerned with “negative rights,” or “freedom from,” according to some scholars) was challenged in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “New liberals,” whose ideas became influential in British Columbia in the 1910s, took as their central tenet that the rights of the liberal individual “could no longer be the foundation of politics and social life.” Instead, society needed to be “safeguarded through a greatly expanded and much more activist state responsible for the general welfare of its citizens.”⁹

It will be argued here that this shift in the liberal project of rule led the BC state into its interwar engagement with the province’s environment. The post–Great War resettlement project was an exercise in both social and environmental reform. Soldiers and other settlers would benefit from living in a modern countryside: a rural (and so more healthy and moral) alternative to urban life. But as most arable, accessible land in the province was already being farmed by 1919, further land resettlement meant that the BC government needed to engage in environmental engineering projects

on a scale not yet attempted in the service of agriculture in the province. This was something that a newly expanded, more activist state was willing and felt able to do.

Yet though state experts were often able to transform the land, they could never do so wholly according to plan. Transformations were rarely smooth or predictable. Financial and environmental problems, such as the devastation wrought by a forest fire that swept through the soldier settlement of Merville in 1922, plagued the projects. The inability of state experts to apprehend ecological and social complexity was the primary factor in the failures of the program. These failures contributed, as well, to a later, important shift in the project of rule, away from the idea that agricultural settlement was central to the social and economic development of the province.

Accounting for this shift is one of the major purposes of this book. In doing so, the book also considers the importance of the environment to the development of the liberal order in Canada. It is clear that the environment – and not simply space or territory – was a factor in the liberal project of rule. I also seek here to extend the work of Richard White. In *The Organic Machine*, White argues that it is work that connects humans to nature most fully, and that prior to the post-Second World War era of high modernism, many people believed this to be true. They talked of the damming of Washington State's Columbia River (for irrigation and electricity) in order to make it part of a unified whole comprising nature and machine. As part of such an "organic machine," nature would actually be *improved* as it reached a higher state of development. These ideas played a role in British Columbia in the 1910s and 1920s, growing out of the new liberal state's conception of its duty to manage nature for the development of agriculture. In this book, I explore and critique the resulting relationship between the state and nature.¹⁰

The book also engages in a more general discussion of the relationship between state and environment. A significant body of research in environmental history deals with government and the state. This work falls into a few general categories. First, a number of historians have examined how interest groups (such as tourism promoters, sportsmen, or a select few interested in wilderness preservation) encouraged the state to implement conservation policies and to designate parks in the early to mid-twentieth century. Second, a related literature has considered the development of the twentieth-century alliance between science and the state, and how this alliance has both fostered preservation and facilitated the development and more efficient extraction of resources.¹¹ Another literature sees the

state's relationship with the environment as embedded in the development of modernity. Tina Loo, among others, has argued that the interest of Canadian governments in conservation (in the interwar period) and in large-scale environmental engineering (in the postwar period) should be understood as deriving from modernity's simultaneous embrace of urban bourgeois malaise and scientific and technological triumphalism.¹² Others have shown how the reform movements of the interwar period, which worked so hard to bring the state on board, demonstrated environmental interests as well in their reform of such practices as forestry and agriculture.¹³ Finally, Canada's economic reliance on the export of lightly processed commodities (such as fur and timber) has encouraged the creation of an interventionist state by requiring non-market institutions to set the conditions for stable accumulation.¹⁴

In most of this work, however, the state is less the central object of analysis than it is a body forced into action by various interests, individuals, and/or outside forces. There has been little attempt by historians to theorize, and work through the implications of, the state's interest in the environment. One major exception is the work of Donald Worster. In *Rivers of Empire*, Worster argues that, in the development of the American West, capital has been allied with a "modern capitalist state." The state's purpose is the promotion and protection of conditions necessary for unlimited accumulation of private wealth. (This summary reduces Worster's argument to its essence, however, blanching out his interweaving of such factors as idealizations of the family farm, conservation, and federal and regional politics while he reflects on effects of the west's aridity and the technological and ecological requirements of irrigation.) The result of this approach, suggests Worster, has been the development of a particularly massive and oppressive state apparatus (its central element the federal Bureau of Reclamation), entirely allied with capital. Drawing on Max Horkheimer, Worster argues further that understanding this development requires understanding the ideological matrix of the state. An ideology of instrumental reason shaped the actions of the federal state, which saw no value in a nature that was not doing work directly useful to humans. Thus, for Worster, the modern capitalist state is driven to dominate nature in order to ensure a steady conversion of resources to capital.¹⁵

Worster is surely correct in his argument that the modern state has set itself the task of facilitating capitalist accumulation. But his argument edges towards the conclusion that capitalist interests and the interests of the state are identical – a conclusion that is by no means obvious. As political scientists and theorists have argued, the state, due to the tasks assigned

it and to its control of its own power bases, retains at least a certain degree of autonomy even in advanced capitalist societies. For instance, assuring the long-term health of the capitalist economy might lead the state to oppose short-term interests of capital by imposing such measures as the conservation of natural resources.¹⁶ Others have argued that the state has its own needs and interests. In his consideration of the failure of high modernist state-sponsored social reform projects, James C. Scott suggests that a key factor is the state's ability (or inability) to know and understand the complexities of its social and environmental domain. Unable to manage (or even gather) the volume of data necessary for full knowledge, the state instead has sought historically to make its subjects and terrain "legible" through a process of simplification, abstraction, and standardization. Thus did early modern states encourage the creation of standardized surnames. Given developments in science and technology, the modern state was able to deploy more powerful tools. For example, when Soviet state planners organized a total social and environmental transformation in their creation of collective farms, they blatched out details of local knowledge and relationships, as well as historical and ecological idiosyncrasies. Yet such "on-the-ground" knowledge and face-to-face relationships were key to getting the work done. As showpieces of central planning, the Soviet collective-farm program was contemptuous of local knowledge. This contempt hobbled their critical knowledge of soils, weather, and local work cultures.¹⁷

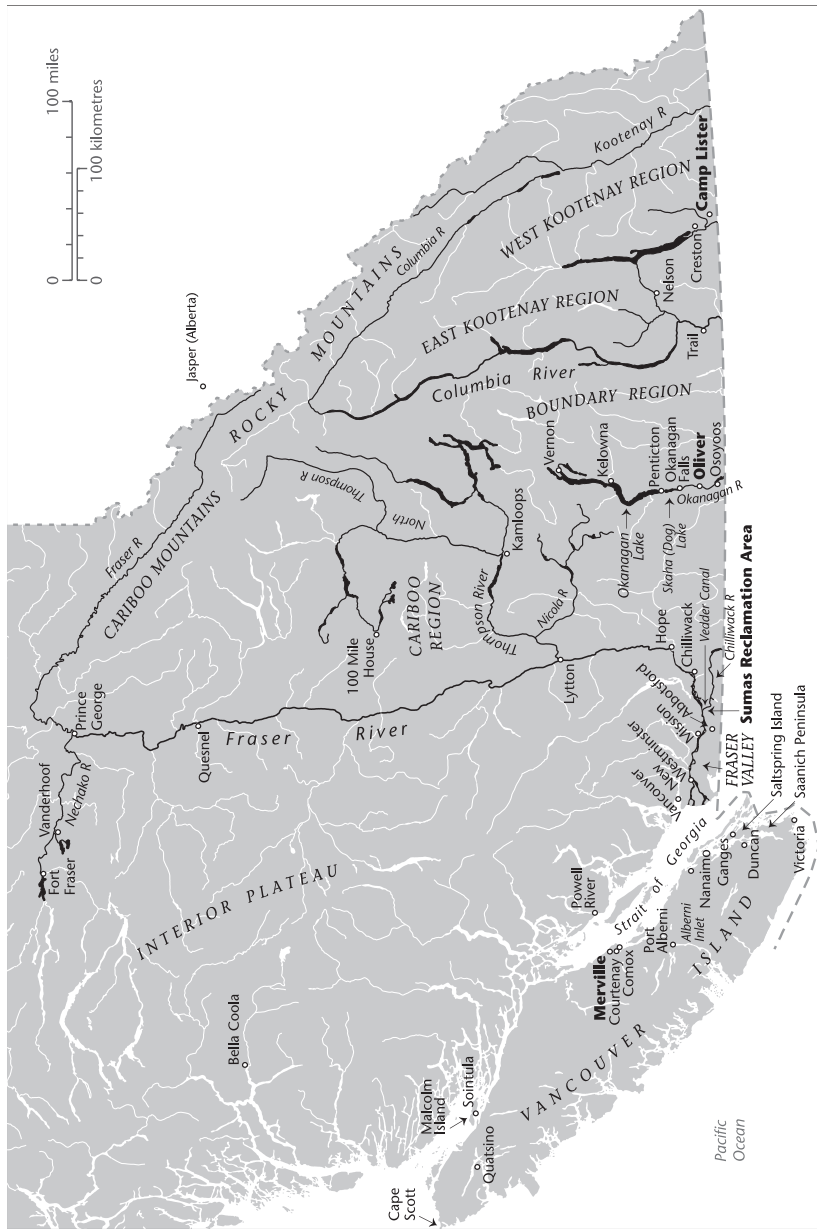
Scott's critique of the logic of state planning is powerful and persuasive. Yet state attempts to organize society and environment may derive less from a general "logic" than from historically specific formations. For all the inherent needs and emphases of states, capitalist society and the capitalist state remain historical phenomena, the result of ideologies fought for and debated over time. In late-nineteenth-century Canada, the politico-economic logic of liberalism described a kind of society, a type of economic order, and a particular sort of state with a particular type of instrumentalist relationship to the natural world (as I have suggested above and will discuss more fully below). By the interwar years, this liberal order had shifted into a new liberalism. Thus, understanding the BC state's engagement with the environment in the interwar years means understanding the way in which the actions of the state (as a partially autonomous actor) were shaped by the politico-economic logic of new liberalism. This raises the final major point (and contribution of) this book: to show that understanding environmental change requires moving beyond the consideration of ideas explicitly about nature to more general logics – such as liberalism – that implicitly encourage a particular form of engagement with nature.¹⁸

The remainder of this introduction examines the development of liberalism in Canada and the United States and the progress of colonialism and land resettlement in British Columbia, in order to lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow.

THE LIBERAL ORDER

When one approaches British Columbia from the air, the province appears first as a sea of mountains. On the flight from Calgary to Vancouver, snow-capped, craggy peaks dominate the view, and it is often possible to reach your destination with no more sign of human occupation than the occasional clearcut forest. The landscape can appear ominous, forbidding, and inaccessible – a “vertical landscape” hostile to human habitation and movement.¹⁹ These mountains permeate popular understanding of the province of British Columbia. When I was a child, the country was enthralled by *The National Dream*, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Pierre Berton’s dramatic history of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). One of the main characters in the history is CPR General Manager William Cornelius Van Horne. Van Horne is an ambitious autocrat, responsible for pushing an army of employees to work at a record pace of construction; he is also known for ploughing over anything and anyone in his path. In one episode, however, as the railway reaches Calgary, even Van Horne is forced to pause. His dinner companion comments on his brooding manner. Van Horne admits that his attention is on the financial troubles of the railway. But even more distracting is the forbidding landscape “out there.” “Those mountains,” he explains, “they’re in my way.”²⁰

The description “sea of mountains” has a basic truth to it. Aside from the prairie lands of the Peace River region in the northeastern corner of the province, BC occupies the western mountain cordillera of North America. There are mountains elsewhere in North America, but in the western cordillera they are higher and younger, particularly the Rocky Mountains, which define the eastern border of the province. Moving west from the Rockies to the coast, a series of mountain ranges runs roughly northwest/southeast. These mountains and the coastline sandwich an extensive interior plateau, geologically the oldest part of the province. These geological features are the basis for a series of ecologically and culturally distinct regions (see Map 1). The mild and wet climate (and corresponding lush vegetation) of the coast is what Canadians tend to associate with the entire province. But inland, the climate is drier and more severe, though



MAP 1 Southern British Columbia, c. 1925. Shown here are the locations mentioned in the text (major sites in bold). The straight line where the Chilliwack River connects with the Fraser River is the Vedder Canal (Chapter 4).

conditions vary from region to region. The southern Okanagan Valley, between the Monashee and Coast Mountains, is a near desert; the northern interior plateau is much colder.²¹

Overcoming the obstacles to movement inherent in the geography of British Columbia and linking together the various regions – in particular connecting what British Columbians refer to as the “coast” (Vancouver Island and the lower Fraser River floodplain) to the “interior” (everything else) – was central to the colonial resettlement project. But the British were not the first to move across this landscape. The lives of First Nations’ peoples were tied in complex ways to the exploitation of resources and often depended on movement between winter villages and various summer gathering sites. Where colonial society differed was in its aim to make the resources of British Columbia available to a world market. Both the popular and the academic histories of BC are replete with stories of the struggle to link the interior regions to the coastal ports (and thus the larger world). There are stories of the heroic construction of railways through the Rocky and Selkirk Mountains, of the paddleboats that connected interior towns like Nelson to the Columbia River and the Pacific, and of the task of carving out through the wilderness a network of trade and travel routes such as the Cariboo Wagon Road.²² The earliest system of resource extraction – the fur trade – made only a minimal impact on the existing environment and on First Nations societies, and required no formal state to run it. In contrast, European settlement, which would transform the region, was from the start associated with an explicit project of state rule. In 1849, the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) was given control over Vancouver Island in exchange for encouraging European settlement. Two years later, HBC Chief Factor James Douglas was made Governor of Vancouver Island. In 1858, Douglas faced a wave of (in his opinion) unruly American gold seekers along the Fraser River, and summarily extended his authority to cover the mainland as well. The Crown soon confirmed his action, creating the colony of British Columbia, with Douglas as Governor. From his base in the Vancouver Island capital of Victoria, Douglas moved quickly to secure this nascent project of British rule. He linked regions by commissioning the building of wagon roads, created a political system and a legal system, and moved to secure rights over the land where settlers would live and resources could be exploited. This last objective, of course, involved taking the land from the First Nations societies already living on it, a process accomplished primarily through the arbitrary creation of reserve lands.²³

On Vancouver Island, Douglas and the HBC’s effective control of the state apparatus did not go uncontested. As Tina Loo has shown, liberal-minded

settlers protested that the HBC was a business enterprise with its own interests and its own closed-off social structure; giving it the reins of power shut out anyone who was not associated with the company and created unfair competition. Believers in a laissez-faire economic system, these settlers demanded that the company's monopoly over the fur trade be brought to an end, and that individuals be allowed to participate fully in the colony's economy. They looked to the law to establish a properly liberal economy and society, based on standardization of individual rights, a more general security of contract, and uniform enforcement of laws and standards.²⁴

Such uniformity was more theoretical than real, however. For one, liberals understood "the individual" through discourses of class, gender, and ethnicity. Only a property-owning British male was a full liberal individual, fully free to exercise such social rights as voting. Further, the attempt to impose a system of liberal governance in colonial British Columbia exposed the way that space, place, and the social patterns of capitalist resource extraction complicated the picture. The European population was small (Native peoples made up the majority of the population until 1891) and spread out in the colony's various regions. Nevertheless, once HBC influence waned in the 1860s, liberals such as Victoria newspaperman and politician Amor de Cosmos sought to impose a grid of liberal power on this variegated landscape, treating all liberal individuals and all places, theoretically at least, as interchangeable parts of an atomistic political and social order. In practice, place could not so easily be abstracted in this way. Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie found this out in the Cariboo: communities of miners were unwilling to accept his decisions, based on formal law, over the rulings of their own local magistrates and juries.²⁵ Legislators and the elite of the coastal cities were unwilling, however, to give free reign to the customs of the itinerant single men who made up the workforce for the province's resource industries. The work of Christopher Clarkson and of Adele Perry highlight the elite concern that social stability would suffer from these men's lack of a fixed address, their drinking, their frequently all-male households, and their marriage to Native women. The response of the elite was a series of laws and programs – such as family-friendly inheritance and land laws, reform missions to the interior, and the mass importation of white women from Britain as wives for the single white men.²⁶ The family would be used to stabilize liberal society.

These concerns go far towards explaining the BC state's pre-1940 obsession with encouraging agricultural settlements. But concerns unique to British Columbia do not explain the obsession totally. For one, the BC state was hardly alone in encouraging agricultural settlement in this

period.²⁷ Further, colonization and back-to-the-land schemes elsewhere in this period similarly used agricultural settlement for the purposes of social reform. In the mid-nineteenth century, Quebec's elites responded to industrial capitalism by encouraging settlement to the north and southeast of the old seigneurial lands of the St. Lawrence Valley. Around the same time, the government of Ontario and its colonial predecessor tried to extend settlement beyond the good lands of southwestern Ontario by building colonization roads north into the marginal lands of the Muskokas and northern Ontario.²⁸ In both cases, colonization was motivated, at least in part, by a firm belief that a rural life, in which the family worked together at home, bolstered family and traditional values and so provided the base of a stable society.²⁹ In English Canada, colonization was fuelled by Anglo-American rural ideals that associated agricultural development with "material and moral" progress, social control, republican virtue, and a "middle- and upper-middle-class English view of nature rooted in the Romantic poets, John Ruskin, the picturesque landscape, and a broad reaction against urban, industrial life."³⁰ In a newly resettled place, particularly in BC, the agricultural landscape had a powerful symbolic meaning, inscribing Englishness into the very hills, emphasizing European possession of the land, and enabling settlers to imagine themselves as recreating a version of England in a new place.³¹ Thus, agriculture was a key tool of settler colonialism, a way of replacing Native peoples with stable Euro-Canadian rural communities and the re-made landscapes appropriate to such communities.³²

Farming also redeveloped complex ecosystems, creating simpler systems comprising plants introduced by the settlers, and the pests and weeds that inevitably accompanied them. The relationship between human activity and animal activity changed, as coyotes, wolves, bears, and cougars became nuisances to be hunted down and destroyed in great numbers. Further, farming tied the valleys and river flats of the province to a global capitalist economy. In these remote places, agriculture determined the manner in which, and the purposes for which, ecosystems were controlled. On farms oriented towards export production, species were cultivated first and foremost according to the demands of the market.³³ But we should not exaggerate the completeness of these ties between the land and the global market. The creation of a liberal capitalist agriculture was a complex and contradictory process. Well into the twentieth century, agriculture across the country continued to incorporate significant subsistence agriculture and household production within a larger structure of capitalist resource exploitation.³⁴ In BC in particular, isolation, marginal soil,

and short growing seasons made profitable, full-time agriculture impossible in many places. In other areas, as Ruth Sandwell has demonstrated for Saltspring Island (in Georgia Strait near Vancouver Island), people simply did not care to work full-time producing farm products for the market.³⁵ Instead, men worked for wages (in the forest, commonly), while women and children kept gardens or chickens and gathered other foods, such as shellfish.

The family often remained at the centre of agricultural production in this period, throughout Canada. Even commercial farms relied on the (unpaid) labour of the whole family. Harriet Friedmann has argued that prairie wheat farms were technologically sophisticated, commercial wheat producers that relied on the nuclear family for labour in the fields.³⁶ As Sandwell has pointed out, family labour and household production, separated from the cash nexus, thus remained significant a-liberal elements within the liberal order. Paradoxically, however, they were also key supports of that order, “integrated into modern, liberal, and capitalist formations,” providing the workforce for the capitalist market in wheat and supporting a labouring class for the forest industry.³⁷ The liberal order, as McKay has argued, did not sweep everything before it; instead it included ongoing efforts to incorporate the a-liberal into the liberal project.³⁸

NEW LIBERALISM

By the twentieth century, such efforts had produced a changed liberalism. Liberalism as a discourse – or, in McKay’s words, as “something more akin to a secular religion or a totalizing philosophy than to ... [a] set of political ideas” – had little capacity for recognizing and dealing with the effects of space and ecology.³⁹ As McKay insists, liberalism “begins when one accords a prior ontological and epistemological status to ‘the individual’ – the human being who is the ‘proprietor’ of him- or herself, and whose freedom should be limited only by voluntary obligations to others or to God, and by the rules necessary to obtain the equal freedom of other individuals.” The individual, for contemporary neo-liberals like former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, exists prior to (and more concretely than) such abstractions as “society,” “the state,” or “nature.”⁴⁰ Thus, classical liberalism effectively abstracts nature out of the picture (such abstraction was actually a key goal of early liberals, as Karl Polanyi made clear sixty years ago⁴¹). Liberalism encourages the development of an instrumentalist

view of nature, in which the natural world is judged solely on its usefulness to human ends.⁴²

By the end of the nineteenth century, such classical liberalism was under attack from various directions. Classical liberalism, so appropriate to a nineteenth-century economic world of relatively open markets and individual entrepreneurs, had less purchase under Edwardian conditions of large industrial conglomerates and restricted imperial markets. The Victorian social order was also under attack, from working people demanding a place in society and from reformers concerned about the problems of the poor and the conditions of industrial cities. Various theorists – such as John Hobson and Leonard Hobhouse in Britain, and Robert McIver, John Dewey, and Herbert Croly in the US – worked to reshape liberalism to take these factors into account. Their work drew on an older, more philosophical revisioning of society dating back to the 1870s – what James Kloppenberg has referred to as the philosophy of the *via media*, the attempt by such thinkers as Thomas Hill Green, William James, John Dewey, and Henry Sidgwick to bridge the gap between idealism and empiricism and create an epistemology rooted in experience and pragmatism.⁴³ These philosophers argued that self and society were not in opposition to each other, that individuals and their environments constituted a whole. This understanding led to their conviction that ethical truth could be determined only through experience, and the individual could find his or her own truth only through engaging with society. Self-realization, Sidgwick argued, “requires the progressive growth of character through ethical action motivated by a desire to advance the common good *and* carefully calculated to advance social goals effectively.”⁴⁴

The later thinkers took these ideas and developed them into a critique of liberalism, “based on a conception of the individual as a social being.”⁴⁵ This philosophy – referred to as New Liberalism in Britain, incorporated within the more general rubric of Progressivism in the US – placed new emphasis on the individual’s relationship to society, but also on the individual’s relationship to the state and the environment. The state, new liberals believed, needed to re-conceive its role, and move beyond the mere delineation and defence of the individual’s rights to focus on the protection of entire societies and communities. Individual rights should be expanded to include the right to “equal participation in and fulfillment from the spectrum of social, political, and economic life.” The success of a society would be measured by a “broad assessment of social well-being, opportunity, and satisfaction for all men and women,” not merely by

adding up total income in the manner of a Victorian liberal or a contemporary neo-conservative.⁴⁶

New liberal ideas interacted in complex ways with the various reform movements that attempted to remake society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Britain, new liberals merged with social democrats in a progressive alliance at the turn of the century, and new liberal ideas were influential in the British labour tradition.⁴⁷ In the US, such ideas were part of the larger discourse of progressive reform, fuelling the arguments of the reformers concerned with “social consciousness,” “social duty,” and the “common good,” but having less direct influence on the better-known muckrakers, trust-busters, evangelical social reformers, prohibitionists, and promoters of technocratic government.⁴⁸ In Canada, Barry Ferguson argues, historians have largely ignored the influence of the new liberals and their critique of society. Instead, they have focused on evangelical reformers and social-democratic intellectuals, or have argued that reform was a largely technical process of implementing Keynesian demand-management techniques.⁴⁹

Ferguson suggests, however, that new liberal ideas were well developed in Canada, particularly in the work of the four figures at the centre of his book: Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these men drew extensively on Anglo-American new liberal thought in developing their analyses of Canadian political economy. From faculty positions at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, all four moved into the Canadian civil service. A new liberal belief that society must be understood in its material and social environment led Shortt and Skelton to argue that the geography and resources of North America gave Canada interests separate from those of Britain. They opposed close imperial ties on this account.⁵⁰ This understanding of the ties between the social and material environments shaped the new liberals' belief in the natural environmental bases of economic activity. This belief in turn led them to emphasize the centrality of agriculture to economic growth and national well-being. Adam Shortt argued that a renewed agriculture was the key to ensuring the postwar stability of the Canadian economy and a smooth transition from war-time conditions. Later, W.A. Mackintosh emphasized the importance of “staples,” such as wheat, in shaping the development of Canada, as well as the influence of natural transportation routes. Ultimately, Ferguson concludes, Shortt believed that “only by coming to grips with the environmental forces that shaped their material life could women and men begin to choose policies and aims which were in their interest.” Similarly, Mackintosh argued that