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# Becoming British Columbia



*John Douglas Belshaw*

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Becoming British Columbia  
A Population History



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*To Diane*



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# Acknowledgments

One ought to be wary of personal motivations in any scholarly project, so I lay my cards on the table. Adopted as an infant, I have invested way too much time mulling over the sorts of things that concern demographers: nuptiality, fertility, household size, birth-spacing, and the life-course. Having lost a parent at a young age, I was introduced to morbidity and mortality, single-parenthood, and the spatial disconnect between household and house. The time I've spent obsessing about these features of my own life and of those near and dear to me might account in some measure for my assertion that British Columbian history is fundamentally a demographic history.

As I indicate in Chapter 1, demographic history occupies a peculiar place in the intellectual firmament. Demography – one half of the equation – is starkly empiricist and deeply rooted in the social sciences. Years ago, as a callow youth, I sat in on Tim Dyson's demography seminars at the London School of Economics. (At the time, demography was not one of my interests, and I attended mostly out of a sense of intellectual duty. I took copious notes but struggled to stay focused and even awake through the mid-afternoon doldrums. The fact that I still have the notes from that class is testament to Professor Dyson's clarity and ability as an educator.) The focus was very much on methodological issues, which Dyson could describe with remarkable, casual ease. Although demography has a predictive disposition – tea leaves for academics, journalists, marketers, and politicians alike – it is also evidence, footprints in the snow of an earlier society. *Historical* demography marries the methodological with the analytical and a wide-angle view of historical processes. What that means is that a book such as this is neither fish nor fowl, as my publisher's readers have pointed out. And, frankly, I'm fine with that. So, I want to thank those anonymous scholars who commented on earlier drafts and suggested I pull it this way or push it that way: I didn't ignore your suggestions; I decided to remain true to a particular vision. Cheers just the same.

The material contained in this book grew out of a series of individual studies and papers to which a substantial number of friends and colleagues contributed. Portions (mostly now modified) appeared as articles in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, the *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, and the *Western Historical Quarterly*, and as a chapter in *Beyond the City Limits*. Editors and peer readers improved the materials I submitted, and their contribution deserves to be recognized. Integral research support came from individuals engaged through the Work Study Program at what was then the University College of the Cariboo, including Marcy D'Aquino, Gillian Cheney, Lindsay Hank, Sarah Houston, Mary Koehn, Amanda MacKay, Jeffrey Preiss, Sheri Thom, and Jeremy Willis. Papers were presented at departmental colloquia at Thompson Rivers University, the University of Victoria, and the University of Wolverhampton, at Canadian Historical Association conferences at Calgary in 1994, Laval in 2001, and Dalhousie in 2003, the Western Historical Association Conference in Denver in 1995, and the conference of the British Association for Canadian Studies in April 2000. I am grateful for constructive comments, suggestions, and assistance from Allan Bogue, Gérard Bouchard, Lisa Dillon, Lynette Gallant, Peter Gossage, Lorne Hammond, Cole Harris, Kris Inwood, Genevieve Later, Julie Macdonald, Richard Mackie, Robert McCaa, Patricia McCormack, Jeff McLaughlin, Tim Rooth, Eric Sager, and Martin Whittles, colleagues at Wolverhampton University, the students in my Population History and BC History courses over the years, and for a period of Thompson Rivers University-funded research leave in 1998. Marvin McInnis was kind enough to reply to my queries regarding his approach to marital fertility statistics. Anonymous readers for the journals *BC Studies* and *Ethnohistory* also made a contribution. In the early 1990s, there emerged in British Columbia a consortium of historians interested in demographic issues. Their ranks included Patrick Dunae, John Lutz, Robert McDonald, Ruth Sandwell, and Duane Thomson, to all of whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Elizabeth Duckworth and Susan Cross at the Kamloops Museum and Archives and Joan Newman at the Anglican Diocese of Cariboo Archives in Kamloops (now part of the Anglican Provincial Synod of BC and Yukon Archives) were characteristically generous with their assistance. The V-Ps Academic at Thompson Rivers University and North Island College, Drs. Mark Evered and Martin Petter respectively, gave me the space and encouragement to see this book to fruition. Rose Delap very generously granted me a peek into the world of Charles Lee and Jessie Hing, for which I continue to feel privileged. James Manuel kindly took me on a walk back two centuries through a Secwepemc village site on the North Thompson and shared his knowledge of indigenous land use. With these people I am happy to share any credit that comes our way; as to blame for errors, I shall take that all for myself.

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To put the course of this project into demographer's language, it has carried me through one mortality, a divorce, two household formations, a nuptiality, no fertility, and repeated local migrations. As well, it has seen me through a decade of diminishing life expectancy and two bum knees. When it started, I was inspired and supported by my two sons and my daughter; as it concludes, I am indebted to two stepsons and a stepdaughter for their encouragement. Above all, as always, and without fail, I am indebted to my friend, partner, colleague, and inspiration, Diane Purvey, to whom this unworthy book is dedicated.

# Acronyms

ASFR	Age-specific fertility rate
CBR	Crude birth rate
CDR	Crude death rate
CMR	Crude marriage rate
C/WR	Child/woman ratio
GFR	General fertility rate
GMFR	General marital fertility rate
GLFR	General legitimate fertility rate
GIFR	General illegitimate fertility rate
$I_f$	Overall fertility index
$I_g$	Marital fertility index
$I_h$	Illegitimate fertility index
$I_m$	Index of marriage
SDR	Standardized death rate
TFR	Total fertility rate

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# Becoming British Columbia



# 1

## Cradle to Grave: An Introduction

In the 1880s, when the Canadian Pacific Railway was being surveyed and laid alongside the Thompson Rivers in British Columbia's southern Interior, European Canadians began building substantial houses at the townsite of Kamloops. By the early 1890s, some of the structures had aspirations. A few included chimneys assembled from rounded river rocks, verandas that announced an imperial link to India, Victorian features such as turrets, leaded windows, gingerbread trim, and substantial brickwork as well. Sadly, many early builders used sand from the riverbanks when they were mixing their mortars. A century later the foundations of the oldest houses in the city are, in many cases, dissolving. The sand pours out between the bricks or river rock; the concrete foundations bulge and slough away. What once, long ago, seemed like a robust base on which to build a monument to British Canadian domestic-cultural values runs away like time.

Of all the varieties of history, population, or demographic, history has arguably the lightest grip on the academic and public imagination. As the historiographer Ged Martin laments, "Somehow [population history] seems to be almanac stuff, beneath the dignity of the creative and analytical scholar."<sup>1</sup> And though it is true that the local Chapters is as unlikely to have a section dedicated to economic history as it is to have one on population history, books on the Wall Street Crash of '29 do manage to find a home on its shelves (albeit surrounded by studies on the rise and fall of Adolf Hitler). Is this because *demographics* is for predicting the future, not dissecting the past? Or is it because it is assumed that writers of economic, political, social, or cultural histories have done their demographic spadework at the outset? After all, one wouldn't build an analysis of the Industrial Revolution or Confederation or the post-war boom or the Age of Television without having a sense of the numbers of people involved, would one? Given the substantial quantities of time and effort invested in gathering materials, developing a design, and marshalling expertise and skills before putting one's hand to

the task, wouldn't one spend the few extra bucks for a sack of Portland Cement?

Like the oldest houses in Kamloops, histories are often constructed with inadequate concern for the foundation. And the foundation of every human history is its people. The history of British Columbia, in particular, has been written in the absence of a systematic understanding of the engines of demographic change in the past and how they exist in a reciprocal relationship with human agency, or choices. The reasons for this lack of attention to the basic building blocks, I argue here, are complex. The consequences are much the same as those facing the Victorian piles: regardless of the elaborate and pretty trim, the whole structure of our historical knowledge is in some jeopardy.

Why write a history of British Columbia's population? It is, in some ways, an old-fashioned and parochial approach. Earlier histories of the province all focused on population growth. We have, in a sense, been there and done that. Arguably, it is too narrow a subject: British Columbia is but one of ten provinces in Canada and, even now, its population is only slightly greater than 4 million. There are more people in Metro Toronto than in the whole of Beautiful BC. If British Columbia had more national or regional or global influence, one might say this sort of study is in order. But it doesn't pack that kind of punch, not on the Pacific Rim, nor even in Canada. What's more, the subject is not very theoretically alluring in that it does not suggest a post-colonial fascination with discourse. So why bother? There are many answers; I offer but one.

British Columbia is a splendid laboratory in which one may test to destruction any number of historical orthodoxies. This is especially true of population history. The region has always been home to a rich constellation of cultures, arguably more so before European contact than thereafter. But, facing the Pacific and with its back to Canada and the rest of the continent, it remains a crossroad of North America, Europe, and Asia. The imperial experiments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries accelerated traffic through this intersection, some of which stayed. Industrial capitalism was in the ascendant in Britain when the colonial era began on the coast, shaping the kind of settlement society that would emerge and – hard on the heels of the appearance of genuinely racist ways of thinking of the world – the character of relations between peoples. British Columbia was established, too, at the very moment when households in Britain and other industrializing economies were experiencing one of the landmark demographic changes in recent history: the fertility transition from large families to progressively smaller ones. It coincided, too, with the spread of that bureaucratic instrument of measurement known as *the census*. The regional resource-extraction-based economy made BC a “Man's Province,” an extraordinary

twentieth-century baby boom made it a young person's province, and the mildest climate in Canada made it an elders' province too.

In short, British Columbia's history combines an Aboriginal story with an imperial tale, a highly contained industrial revolution with an accompanying cultural transformation that picks up speed through the era of modernization, a rhetorical slate on which differing and conflicting demographic stories could be – and were – inscribed. The big picture of running totals could well be far more dramatic than anything Europe or the rest of North America has to offer. The finer details of sex ratios, marital behaviour, fertility transitions, and race-based demographically different experiences are not less startling.

A British Columbian population history is not only desirable but *necessary*. It tests orthodoxies about population history generally, and it challenges historians of the region to think again. What is argued between the covers of this book is that we face huge challenges in accounting for nineteenth-century imperial and Aboriginal experiences; we have badly misunderstood one of the underpinnings of early twentieth-century social history; the sex ratio imbalance worked differently than common sense suggests it should; immigration was a massively important factor in growth, but it was paced by natural increase and driven more by a high mortality rate than by a weak fertility rate; population has been the very business of successive British Columbian regimes, and they have not behaved especially well; and, finally, British Columbia's demographic past is every bit as extraordinary as that of Quebec, which means many shibboleths about Canadian population history need to be reconsidered.

The task of the present work is to show how fundamental an understanding of the demography of the past is to the business of history. Indeed, it demonstrates how population is at the centre of History with a capital H. As a resource, this book provides academics, students, policy makers, and the public at large with the principal themes of the demographic history of the westernmost Canadian province. Also, it seeks to suggest future directions for the examination of this population. Striking a balance has been a challenge: one reader might like a more technically sophisticated and narrowly focused book; another might call for something more accessible to a larger audience. To the former, I would say that the polish here is less in the demography and more in the history; to the latter, I would say, I hope the technical sidebars are helpful. Obviously, this study cannot hope to be exhaustive; nor does it lay hubristic claims to being definitive (it is *A*, not *The, Population History* of BC); nevertheless, a lot of important ground is covered with an eye to encouraging more.

This chapter provides, first, an introduction to the mission of demographic history. That is followed by an assessment of the ways historians have treated

the chief population issues in BC's past. It is argued that, far from being an approach that is unfashionably numerate in a post-modern era of inquiry, demographic history in the Far West is laden with critical rhetorical/linguistic issues and preconceptions that have successfully colonized historical writing. Revisiting British Columbian population history is thus a necessary first step toward a timely reconsideration of the larger historical problem of Pacific Canada.

### **Getting at the Demography of the Past**

Modern interest in demography as a special field of historical study begins with the Reverend Thomas Malthus' late eighteenth-century *Essay on the Principle of Population*, in which he linked variations in marriage and birth rates to economic change. More than one hundred years later, the field developed as a bridge between economic and social history, continuing to highlight the various ways in which changes in nuptiality, fertility, and mortality rates affect community formation and economic performance. For many historians, including Britain's Peter Laslett and Tony Wrigley, America's John Demos and Tamara Hareven, and Quebec's Louise Dechêne and Gérard Bouchard, demographic history offered a method by which the lives, loves, and deaths of the plain people of the past could be disclosed. By scrupulously examining church and state registers, and by applying continuously refined quantitative techniques, we could recover, in Laslett's famous phrase, the world we have lost.<sup>2</sup>

In English-speaking Canada, the demographic past of the common people has not faced the same kind of scrutiny. There is not, as yet, a national demographic history of Canada, although some efforts in that direction have been made by sociologists.<sup>3</sup> There are many studies (described in this volume's Suggested Reading), but little to tie them together. This reflects in part the breadth of the field of demographic history, both regionally, and more importantly, along specialist lines, including examinations of fertility, nuptiality, and family formation. Whatever has been accomplished with respect to Central Canada, there is currently little on the shelves on the Canadian West as a whole and British Columbia specifically. This is unfortunate for, as Wrigley put it, "When it became demonstrable that the demographic constitution of a society had an important bearing on many of its other characteristics and it was impossible to regard its demographic constitution as secondary to some other aspect of its economic or social makeup, it also became essential to change its logical status."<sup>4</sup> Despite the best efforts of a handful of historians, neither the recognition of the importance of demographic history nor the change in its status have occurred in Western Canada, particularly not west of the cordillera.

With what do historical demographers concern themselves that we ought to welcome their work in Western Canada? Historians of population are

principally interested in the critical elements of demography: marriages (or household formation), births (a.k.a. fertility), deaths (mortality), and in- and out-migrations. These are hardly straightforward. The ideas of *household formation* and *marriage*, when measured over time, usually assume an adherence to certain social practices that, however, may be in flux. Marriage is, obviously, one of those social institutions that is not universally accepted as a necessary prerequisite to new household formation. Likewise, divorce carried a very different social meaning at the start of the twentieth century than it does a hundred years later. One might also point to adoption/fostering as an element of household formation that was defined differently over time and measured differently by government and church agencies in the past.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, if one wishes to identify changes in the population of any jurisdiction and to determine how those changes came about, the place to start is with the basics.

The principal challenge to establishing a demographic history of any jurisdiction is the quality of information available.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the general trends of British Columbia's population history can be described through a wide-angle lens is, in itself, a fact that is worthy of note. The nineteenth century, in which two colonies and a province were established, was the first in which statistical investigations became mainstream. For a variety of reasons, which include the growth of the modern state, census taking became a common practice in industrializing nations. Britain, having assumed the lead in this respect, spread its bureaucratic methods across its empire.<sup>7</sup> Achieving agreement on what was to be measured in the pre-Confederation Canadian censuses was not easily accomplished, and the burden of that sometimes acrimonious dispute was one inheritance of the larger new Dominion in general and British Columbia in particular.

Before 1880, attempts to amass information on the region's population were sporadic, inconsistent, and sketchy.<sup>8</sup> What censuses might have been collected before the arrival of Europeans are lost to us. Head counts were, very unscientifically, performed by a variety of visitors to the region thereafter.<sup>9</sup> A more systematic Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) census of Aboriginal communities was collected in the 1830s, with an eye to understanding the peoples with whom the company traded. Parish and congregational records were, as well, maintained from the earliest days of Fort Victoria. These documents would be complemented by Customs House records, civic/municipal tax lists and population surveys, and, increasingly from the mid-nineteenth century, assessments of the school-age population. From the 1850s, the Colonial Office made repeated but unheeded requests that the local administration maintain a register of births, deaths, and marriages. In 1866, a Colonial Office proposal to register marriages in the united colony, for example, was rejected by the local administration because it was felt that settlers knew one another's affairs so well it would be redundant.<sup>10</sup> Two years later,

Governor Frederick Seymour sourly described what he viewed as the impediments to a vital statistics registry: "The population is greatly scattered. The majority are Indians whom we could hardly expect to register one of the three great events of their life. Many of the white men are living in a state of concubinage with Indian women far in the Interior. They would hardly come forward to register the birth of some half breed bastard."<sup>11</sup> On the eve of British Columbia's entry into Confederation, Governor Anthony Musgrave was no less pessimistic and only slightly less caustic. He wrote to the Colonial Office about the difficulties bound to face a proposed vaccination campaign on the Pacific coast, given "the impossibility of establishing any efficient system for the registration of Births in a wild Country like this."<sup>12</sup> Rising secularism and the failure of a state religion to take root, however, ensured that data collecting and analyzing functions associated with vital statistics and the census became the responsibility of the provincial and federal governments, not the church. The extension to British Columbia of the Dominion of Canada's census machinery did not occur until 1881, because the province entered Confederation too late in 1871 to be included in that decennial effort. In its stead a local and questionable mini-census was conducted, a necessary step – and useful foil – in claiming moneys from Ottawa.<sup>13</sup>

The first registration of something like the whole population in British Columbia, therefore, is the Dominion census of 1881. Although it offers our earliest glimpse into the lives of workaday British Columbians who left behind few other records, the 1881 census is far from unimpeachable. Eric Sager, a key figure in the 1901 census sample project, has put it very well: "It is no longer possible, if it ever was so, to treat routinely generated information in historical sources as a transparent window into the social reality of the past." The census and similar records are created in a fluid social context that categorizes and recategorizes with passing generations. Place of birth might be less important at one time than ethnicity or religious affiliation; place of residence might be a coin toss from one decade to the next between *de jure* and *de facto* – the difference between one's legal home address and where one hangs one's hat. From 1891 through the mid-twentieth century, the official census definition of *family* was so flexible as to be downright slippery: it might include any group of individuals living under the same roof who dined together, or it might exclude every kind of household except for those in which a husband and wife cohabit. Locating children in the census is even more problematic: they are counted where they are found and not always with their parents. Children thus show up in institutions or in the households of other biological families, and thereby disappear from the census's metaphorical photograph of *the family*. Even if we set aside contested definitions of what is enumerated and how, severe limitations hampered those who collected the data in the first place. As Alan Brookes said of the 1861 New Brunswick census takers, most did the best

they could, but “by twentieth-century standards that was not very good.”<sup>14</sup> The nineteenth-century enumerators in British Columbia were mostly unprepared, and in the course of their duties they encountered difficulties that may have produced statistical inaccuracies.<sup>15</sup> One recruit to the 1891 census recalled his efforts around the coal-port of Union Bay: “It took me about a week, doing it all on foot. A horse would have been an encumbrance, as I had to cross fences everywhere and hunt out people in the field.”<sup>16</sup> As historian Patrick Dunae writes, “Many of the standard themes of British Columbia’s history – notably the tyranny of terrain and the challenge of distance, regionalism and sectional rivalry, alienation from Eastern Canada, anti-Asian sentiment, and ambivalent attitudes towards aboriginal peoples – were hallmarks of the census of 1891.”<sup>17</sup> It is safe to say that these constraints proved resistant to change well into the late twentieth century. Indeed, the process of gathering population data is still subject to serious criticism: the 2006 Canadian census quickly attracted accusations of incompetence in its execution and incompleteness in its final product.

Of the barriers erected in the way of census taking, no barbed wire fence was as difficult to negotiate as race. It was one of the most powerful and durable ideas of the era in which the census was conceived. Race defines the sort of questions that were asked, but it also limits the utility of our statistical record.<sup>18</sup> Much of the British Columbian *demographic project* was constructed within a dichotomy between the growth of the European population and its competition with Aboriginal and Asian peoples. *British* British Columbians, the colonial charter group, saw themselves engaged in building what Patricia Roy has called a “White Man’s Province”; consequently, priority was given to the white population’s demographic categories, with long-term negative impacts inevitably falling upon the First Nations peoples in particular – as was the case also in other areas of British colonial settlement.<sup>19</sup> As Robert Galois and Cole Harris observe, the census – the principal tool for measuring population change – was “an instrument of the growing regulatory power of the modern nation-state and a reflection of the cultural myopia and the racial and gendered assumptions of the white Canadian society that devised and administered it.”<sup>20</sup> When non-whites were counted (by whites, of course), errors of fact did not precisely *creep* in: they *stormed* in. For example, by far the most common name recorded in the 1881 census in the southern Interior is “Ah”: there were 282 of them. Transcription problems associated with Chinese family names and the accurate differentiation between first/common and last names might be anticipated, but “Ah” appears to have had little basis in fact. It may have been a guttural pause, an “um” or “er” preceding the answer to the enumerator’s question. One Chinese Canadian claims that his ancestor, a prominent mine manager and merchant, was known to local authorities, the press, and local historians as “Ah Loy,” although his true name – not exactly a secret identity – was Leung Chong.<sup>21</sup>

Less well-known Chinese immigrants could scarcely expect to be treated with greater care. Further complications arose from the Chinese practice of sojourning –spending a few years in the Pacific Northwest before returning to China with sufficient funds in hand to improve the financial lot of their families. Similarly, collecting data on the Aboriginal community has long been a fraught pursuit. Categorization offers the first challenge: the distinction between Status Indian and Non-status Indian is a colonial legal artifact that invades the statistical machinery of the state before the First World War. Even the census itself, which provides one kind of information, was criticized a century ago by Aboriginal leaders who (very reasonably) feared it was an instrument for further reducing reserve lands.<sup>22</sup> Department of Indian Affairs numbers have been considered more trustworthy by historians, but for demographic purposes, one must inevitably turn to the reports of the Vital Statistics Department of BC, created in 1871.<sup>23</sup> Even that source is of limited utility in comprehending the life events of non-whites. Given the diversity and challenge of the province's landscapes and peoples, imperfect official surveys were inevitable; those imperfections occurred within a specific historical context.

The difficulties associated with the enumeration of Asian and Aboriginal populations by white census takers was but one stumbling block to reliable census results. The resource-extraction economy necessitated and produced high levels of labour transience. In addition to the seasonality of work in the fisheries and canneries, the forests and the sawmills, there was the short life expectancy of mining communities with which to contend. The whole of a large Kootenay silver town might exist for fewer than ten years and thus fall completely between the cracks of decennial censuses. The mobility of a wage-labour population that went to wherever the jobs appeared was a further obstacle, one that was less important in more rural, sedentary, and agrarian parts of Canada. Working-class British Columbians, “especially casual or itinerant labour and the unemployed, are certain to be under-represented,” according to one study of the 1891 census.<sup>24</sup> Also, there was geography to take into account. Many communities – whether deep in the coastal fjords or perched atop a mountain or scattered across the Peace River Valley – were so remote from the centres of bureaucratic power that they escaped enumeration.<sup>25</sup> Some Euro-Canadian communities, such as those of the Doukhobors, actively resisted the intrusion of vital statistics gathering and thus remained off the census record radar for many years. In terms of *reliability*, then, British Columbian population data from the nineteenth century to the present raise some questions.

With respect to *validity* (“the extent to which [the data] are meaningful indicators of the underlying concepts which we wish to explore”), the information at our disposal contains much that ought to interest the social and demographic historian, and a great deal that is genuinely useful. As

Michael Anderson has argued, “In historical demography there are clearly problems with the reliability of the data – but these are, at least in theory, susceptible to arithmetical adjustment. In contrast, there are fewer problems of validity, since we share with contemporaries the idea that burials normally imply a dead body, and baptisms a birth, and it is births and deaths that we wish to measure.”<sup>26</sup> To paraphrase Wrigley, “the paucity or incompleteness of the source materials” may threaten to “leave the subject impoverished and peripheral,” but this ought to stimulate methodological questions in such an important area, and not deter inquiry.<sup>27</sup> The outcomes of careful demographic history are, quite simply, potentially too rich to be overlooked.<sup>28</sup>

It is, indeed, possible to say a great deal about the population of British Columbia over the past two hundred years. Never more so than at the present time. Access to century-old enumerators’ notebooks, the development of machine-readable data bases, the microcoding of all the nineteenth-century Dominion censuses, and the availability of an enormous quantity of data (and analysis) on the internet have revolutionized the possibilities and practices. This study makes use of a variety of such sources, although the focus here is more on small but essentially comprehensive local surveys, rather than huge aggregates or inch-deep-but-four-thousand-mile-wide national samples. The most significant of these larger collections – the Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) – has been explored, but I decided early on that focusing on these sources would entail a significantly different kind of project and would distract from the broad goals of this study. (I acknowledge that other demographers and historians will disagree.) The method chosen for this book, a combination of aggregate census and vital statistics numbers with details tweaked out from the microcosmic level, allows for a good beginning to be made.

### **Historians, Colonization, and the Linguistic Turn**

Despite the recurrence of themes that are critically demographic in their premises – development, gendered roles, widespread popular and institutionalized racism, the rise of a numerous and militant working class, democratic parliamentary politics, and success measured in population numbers – the underlying assumptions about the province’s population history have not been subjected to systematic scrutiny.<sup>29</sup> What exists is fragmented and mostly cursory. Why is it that so little is known of BC’s population history beyond the most basic “running total” aspects? The case I make briefly here is that the region’s demographic history has been neglected because of the very centrality of population to the project of imperial province building.<sup>30</sup> How and why this is the case is worth considering. As importantly, the consequences of thinking we know whatever it is we think we know need highlighting.

The main works devoted specifically to BC's population history can be briefly enumerated and described. There are no monographs on the subject other than this, although several articles published in scholarly journals make a promising start. The earliest contribution was that of F.W. Howay, who, in 1930, outlined the "settlement and progress" of the province from Confederation to the Great War.<sup>31</sup> In this pioneering effort, as in so many that followed, demography largely serves a political history narrative; as well, numbers are assumed to be clinically objective. *Growth*, in Howay's day, was unquestionably good and synonymous with *progress*. Peter Ward's 1983 introduction to the population history of Western Canada displays more demographic integrity, but it deals principally with the population history of the Prairie West, drawing on the published census reports.<sup>32</sup> A 1990 article by Jean Barman – expanded upon in her book *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* – also synthesizes Canada census material in a useful and necessary fashion.<sup>33</sup> Both Barman and Ward provide historians working on British Columbia with a reminder that population patterns established in the early years of settlement were distinctive in Canada but also of long-term significance to the emerging society west of Alberta.

Of the other works concerned specifically with population issues, a consequential few might be summarized. Early in her career, Barman produced an overlooked study of voter behaviour in Vancouver based on a close reading of the interwar census returns. Galois and Harris' "Recalibrating Society: The Population Geography of British Columbia" deals specifically with the enumerators' census of 1881, challenging in many respects the accepted wisdom on nineteenth-century demographics in the province without, however, extending the implications of their conclusion into later years. The links between empirical demography of the Ward and Barman variety and the ideology of settlement are more clearly spelt out in an article by Allen Seager and Adele Perry. They "mine the connections" between population and divisions in the workforce predicated on race and gender. Perry subsequently broadened the discussion of the implications of a lopsided sex ratio in the nineteenth century. Jeremy Mouat, too, in a keen-eyed study of the Kootenay mining town of Rossland, explores gendered roles and their links with population recruitment and community identity. My own earlier research exploits population studies to devise an understanding of social relations in the province more than one hundred years ago. A distinctive approach has been made by Ruth Sandwell, who applies insights derived from the new cultural history to the question of rural communities in a very urban province, focusing her attentions on demographic clues to the economic and survival strategies of settlers on Saltspring Island. There is also the work of James Gibson, Robert Galois, and Robert Boyd on smallpox epidemics among the indigenous population, and the assortment of studies

on troubled race relations in British Columbia, including Ward's *White Canada Forever* and Roy's three volumes *A White Man's Province*, *The Oriental Question*, and *The Triumph of Citizenship*. An unusual source provides noteworthy insight into twentieth-century developments: in 1984 BC Tel, the province's telephone monopoly at the time, published a study of British Columbia's population with an eye to projecting growth in the regional market. This slim tome begins with a concise but well-crafted demographic history of the province from 1961 to 1981, based entirely on published materials. The author, Robert Malatest, raises many questions that ought to be considered by students of population history, including cohort survival rates and the statistical trade-offs between an aging population and a generation that has enjoyed a greater provision of medical care than any before it. Another unusual study examines the spatial demography of mortality but only for the last five years of the 1980s. Wider in its breadth and purpose is Julie Macdonald's overview of population for the British Columbia Department of Vital Statistics that covers the hundred years between 1891 and 1990. Macdonald's work does not employ a historical methodology, but it is painstakingly assembled and happily relied upon here. Similarly, Herbert Northcott and Jane Milliken's *Aging in British Columbia* tackles the social policy questions associated with a burgeoning seniors population, grounding their study in solid demographic methods.<sup>34</sup>

If there is a common thread to be found in most of these studies, it is a sense that British Columbia's population history – characterized by substantial and sustained growth – is implicitly (and for good or ill) a tale of victory, of the triumph of a particular imperial and/or national goal. European and Asian occupation of British Columbia and its subsequent economic transformation were carried on within an ideological context in which demography and power continually overlap. Dorothy Chunn puts it extremely well: "During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, strategies aimed at recruiting white Anglo immigrants were implemented. Concomitantly, repressive strategies for *othering* non-Anglo racial and ethnic groups were put in place, including denial of entry to British Columbia, expulsion from the province, and segregation/containment within the province." Chunn's focus is on citizenship and, in this instance, the rise of eugenics, but her observations apply with equal force to demography. Similarly, in a study of colonial gender relations, Perry has shown how "imperial discourse that accorded white women a special role as harbingers of empire rendered this demographic problem a political one." Tina Loo demonstrates elegantly how the abstract notions associated with British justice and colonialism came to have concrete manifestations that impacted populations in BC. In a similar vein, Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown* reveals the ways in which racial segregation was linguistically conceived, actualized, and

reinforced. The extent to which this was also true of the larger demographic project is evident in Barman's earlier studies of the better-off British immigrants in BC. The imperial ethos is clearly announced in Bishop Hills' boast of Victorian-era Victoria that "the great heart of the people beats with that of England." It echoes, as well, in historic documents that reassure potential upper-class immigrants that "a similarity of race and character, of manners and customs, of sympathies in aim, in those among whom the newly-arrived emigrant from England is cast, [will] all combine to make him feel at home." And it can be seen inscribed in Latin above the front doors of pretentious Britons in British Columbia: "Those who cross the seas change their clime, not their mind." That this discourse had a demographic agenda as well as a cultural one is beyond dispute.<sup>35</sup>

Just as "the whites ... largely constructed the social categories and ... dominated the province" by 1881, so too has their vocabulary dominated historical thinking.<sup>36</sup> In very few – quite possibly none – of the nineteenth-century Colonial Office papers dealing with proposals to insinuate Britons into British Columbia is the desired population described as *workers*. *Settlers*, instead, is the term used almost exclusively.<sup>37</sup> The *frontier* describes the then boundary of European occupation. *City*, especially in the parlance of boosters, could refer to any settlement that was, or might shortly become, incorporated, regardless of population size or economic sophistication. Throughout the twentieth century, *development* and its close relations indicate a stage in, or a state of, linear progression from labour-intensive, technologically simple economic activities to more complex activities in which economies of scale are affirmed and recognizable, whether in mining, logging, fish packing, distribution, energy production, or farming. The *populating of British Columbia*, a phrase that appears in a variety of guises over 150 years, ignores the depopulating of Aboriginal communities, emphasizes the rise of (especially) Euro-North American numbers, and identifies growing immigration from Asia as a *false* population, one that needs to be subsumed. (One can burrow deeper: according to a 1907 edition of the *Saturday Sunset*, white Vancouverites "lived in homes"; Chinese Vancouverites "infested warrens.")<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the term *whites* was itself employed in curious ways: insofar as it stands in for anyone who is not Asian or Aboriginal, its catchment sometimes extended to include blacks and ethnic Hawaiians. All of these terms remind us that British Columbia was historically and consistently a demographic project.

This framework of discourse is as evident in the historiography as it is in the archival record. According to Allan Smith, the generation of provincial historians whose dominance faded after the Great War produced work that could be characterized as "special pleading on behalf of development, empire and self-made men."<sup>39</sup> His conclusion, that subsequent generations of historians shook off that prejudice, is premature when reckoned in terms of

*demographic* development, which had tenacious imperial roots. And although the ethos of resource exploitation might receive a more jaundiced or at least critical eye from historians, population did not. Just as nineteenth- and twentieth-century promoters gauged British Columbia's progress on the basis of white settlement, a similar measure was graphically rendered on maps in the 1958 magnum opus of Margaret Ormsby.<sup>40</sup> The imperial agenda could be seen as well when Norbert MacDonald framed poor Asian-white relations on the coast in such a way as to exclude the former from their own city: "over the years Vancouverites and Seattlites showed little difference in their opinion and treatment of migrants from the Orient."<sup>41</sup> "Vancouverites" in this context are whites concerned to control the racial composition of *their* growing city; Asian residents, however long they might have been based in the west coast cities, are depicted as non-citizens, or (as Anderson sharply observes) as a "counter-idea."<sup>42</sup> Although Roy took as her objective the task of explaining "why white British Columbians wanted to make theirs a 'white man's province,'" she configured her analysis in a manner that isolates economic and cultural imperatives from purely demographic ones. References are repeatedly made to the Euro-Canadians' fear of being "overrun," a sure sign that the numbers game was at the forefront of attempts to secure white capitalist hegemony.<sup>43</sup> Studies like Roy's, which emphasize economics, and Ward's (which posit a more cultural explanation for institutional racism in BC) miss the linguistic point: *development*, a euphemism for capitalism, is both an economic program and a cultural artifact.<sup>44</sup> And it barely conceals a demographic objective as well, one that Arthur Lower critiqued as long ago as 1962, when he wrote, "Our attitude towards population has simply been that of 'The Boosters' Club; 'bigger and better,' has been virtually the only criterion."<sup>45</sup>

There are other examples from the historiography on which to draw. In Robert McDonald's study of community formation in proto-Vancouver, the definition of "frontier" refers "loosely to the period when settlement was beginning and the social order was relatively unfixed." "Frontier" thus presumes a successful outcome of the settlement process (a "beginning" suggests an end or, better still, *ends*) without questioning its implicit ideological ambition. To quote Norbert MacDonald once more, the flow of immigrants from the British Isles, especially from the Edwardian era on, "has had a profound effect on all aspects of Vancouver's life. Indeed the influence is so pervasive, long standing, and taken for granted that there has been very little scholarly investigation of it."<sup>46</sup> He could not be more right. The problematic of *Britishness* and the objective of *settlement* itself have been invisible because of their ideological precedence: everything that was not of the charter/baseline British community or that did not favour settlement of a particular kind was highlighted by contemporaries as a *social* or *economic* problem and seized upon by historians as a *scholarly* problem. The history

of anti- or counter- or phony settlement has therefore been closely studied; the phenomenon of *population* has not.

The social and symbolic construction of British Columbia's demography raises questions that run to the heart of social and political history. As demographer Roderic Beaujot states, "organized human societies determine how population problems are defined, and these definitions delimit legitimate solutions." Similar concerns were raised in the 1960s by Michel Foucault, who alerted scholars to the "biopolitical" agenda of the nineteenth-century state that incorporated whole panoplies of metrics. In British Columbia the definitional process occurred in the context of British imperialism, and, in that framework, *race* was early defined as a problem. To quote Karen Anderson again, "In the ambition to build a dominant 'Anglo' identity and community, the state sought to secure popular legitimacy by defining people of Chinese origin in opposition to all that could be made to stand for 'white' Canada." This urge toward exclusionism was summed up neatly in an either/or fashion by a Lower Mainland newspaper in 1900: "are we to be a British Province or an annex of Oriental Kingdoms?" The answer was tied, of course, to numbers. The symbolic use or value of population created a political and social tension between the need for more free labour and the fear of the wrong sort of immigrant (i.e., Asian). Restrictions were imposed that would, on the one hand, limit Chinese immigration and, on the other, discourage wage-labour immigrants from becoming independent farmers. The infamous British Columbian head taxes thus might be usefully considered alongside the provincial legislature's decision to keep land prices higher than on the Canadian prairies or in Washington State. These factors very clearly conditioned the character of the population and affected its ability to increase naturally, to live long lives, to become residentially stable, or to endure long-term transience. Without an understanding of the demographic element of British Columbia's story, the policy and societal outcomes do not make sense; the former is the canvas on which the latter was painted.<sup>47</sup>

This book revisits the history of Canada's Pacific province through a demographic lens. To that end, the overall patterns and causes of population change are described and assessed. What this book is *not*, is a highly technical exercise in statistics. The data used and presented here are meant to be accessible while inviting further refinement and debate. The organization of the chapters that follow is meant to serve readers whose demographic interests are not comprehensive. Chapter 2 provides a historical demographic narrative of the region since the eighteenth century. I believe this is an important exercise in demonstrating how the story – familiar to historians and to many British Columbians – might be recast by paying closer attention to demographic themes and concerns. Subsequent chapters deal with thorny aspects and/or scholarly problems in demographic history as they apply to

the situation in the Far West. The first of these, Chapter 3, examines the decline of Aboriginal populations down to the twentieth century, raising questions about both the reliability of what data we have and the methodologies available to historians of pre-census populations. Chapter 4 describes the contours and implications of a long-term male surplus in the population as a whole. Trends in fertility, including the vexed question of British Columbia's fertility transition, are examined in Chapter 5. The growth of the population by means of immigration is a critical part of the British Columbian story, aspects of which are examined in Chapter 6. The penultimate chapter explores mortality rates and is followed by a chapter of conclusions in which the cynical treatment of populations by the state in this province is laid out for dissection. Throughout this study, two mid-sized British Columbian communities – Kamloops and Nanaimo – are used to illustrate the diversity of demographic experiences across the province in the pre-First World War period, although this evidence is augmented by materials on Vancouver, Rossland, Victoria, Kincolith, and other centres.<sup>48</sup> An effort has been made here to render the statistical information in such a way as to be accessible to a general readership while providing academics with grist for various mills.

The spelling of Aboriginal place names merits a brief note. Wherever possible, I have favoured the forms most widely used at the present time. Thus, *Nlaka'pamux* rather than *Nlha7kápux* or *Thompson Indians*. In other instances, versions that are more faithful to and respectful of Aboriginal self-descriptions – such as *Tsilhqot'in* rather than *Chilcotin* – are privileged, regardless of popularity. There is no single hard and fast rule in these matters, a reflection of the point to which post-colonialism has brought us. As well, I have elected to give the island named for Vancouver a possessive apostrophe when referring to it as a separate colonial entity prior to union with the mainland colony in 1866.

I will close this introduction with yet one more caveat. Whatever advantages population histories provide to an understanding of the past, they contain a dangerous tendency toward reductionism. This is part of a tradition that goes back to Malthus, if not to the Old Testament. The library shelves groan under the weight of alarmist accounts (*The Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich), oversimplified links between demography and economy (*The Pig and the Python: How to Prosper from the Aging Baby Boom* by Cork and Lightstone), and more scholarly studies that, despite significant strengths, treat some aspect of demography as though it were the grail, pitching a particular population-driven thesis of human history that ignores/minimizes/glosses over a host of other historical agencies. In this lattermost camp, I would include the otherwise delightful *Boom, Bust and Echo* by David Foot and Daniel Stoffman and *The Household and the Making of History* by Mary S. Hartman.<sup>49</sup> The present study does not offer up One Big Theory of population, but it does maintain that population forces played – and continue to play – a key

role in the history of British Columbia. Again, the message *here* is that population forces are important underlying structures – the foundations – of what is built on top. And, as is commonly the case with faulty foundations, their defects are transmitted throughout the whole of the structure. The choices that are made thereafter – including decisions to limit immigration, to impose racist sanctions, to embrace pro-natalist policies – are the points where conscious human agency intersects with demography, where choice takes the helm again.