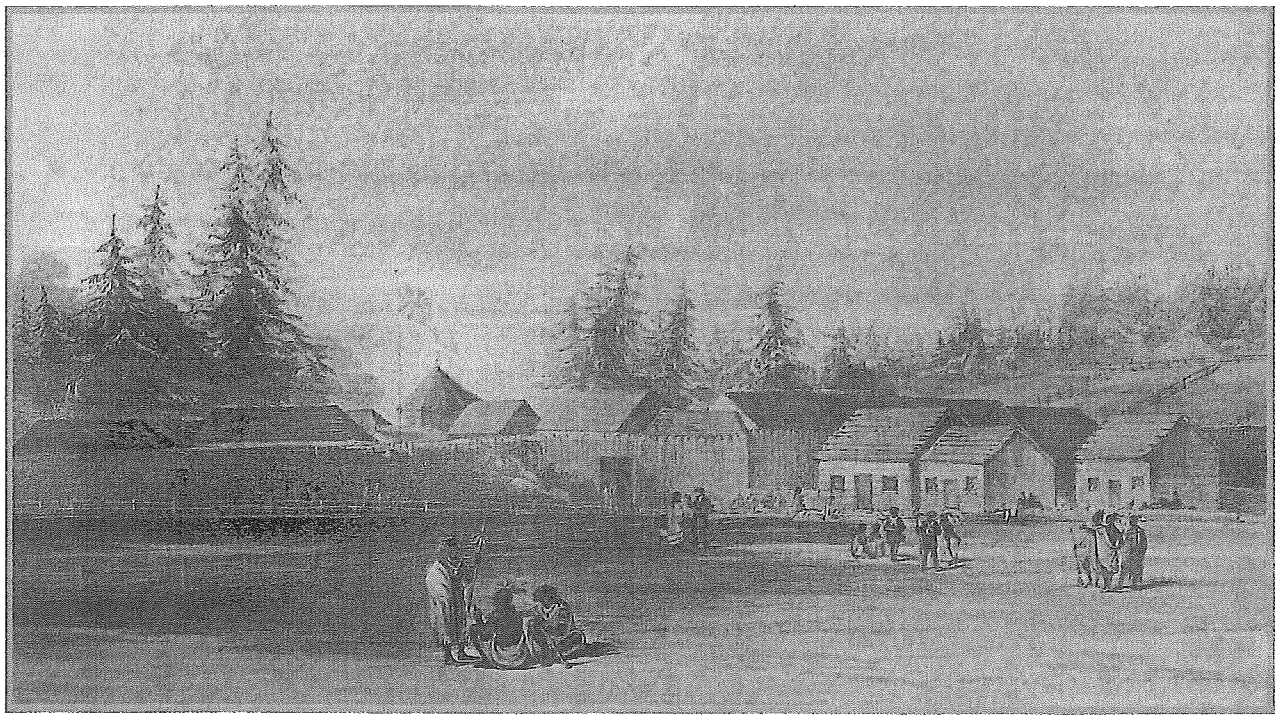
INTRODUCTION

The Pacific Northwest was the last part of North America to be explored and settled by Europeans. Home to more than twenty-five different aboriginal groups for approximately 10 000 years, the area must have dazzled the new visitors—mountains covered with spruce and fir trees, Western red cedars growing to 60 metres, and an abundance of fur-bearing animals.

A Russian ship was the first to record reaching the Northwest Coast in 1741. It landed in the territory of the Tlingit, and the Russians immediately launched a successful trade in sea otter fur. Ships from Spain, Britain, and the United States soon followed, and the trade in sea otter and seal flourished. By 1826, when the HBC sent George Simpson to govern New Caledonia and Columbia—the future British Columbia—the fur trade was a focus of intense rivalry between Britain and the United States.

In this chapter, you will follow the history of our province from the 1820s, when British Columbia was a territory controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company, to the 1880s, when Vancouver became the last stop on the Canadian Pacific Railway. There were many growing spurts along the way—two fantastic gold rushes, the creation of the first Legislative Assembly, and the entry of British Columbia to Confederation in 1871. In the process, immigrants from many parts of the world, including the United States, Britain, and Asia, came here to work. Some settled permanently, creating the dynamic culture we have inherited today.

Figure 6–1 Fort Vancouver



The Oregon Territory

When George Simpson became governor of the expanded Hudson's Bay Company in 1826, his greatest challenge was the territory of New Caledonia and Columbia. Many interests had a stake in the region. Russia claimed the coast as far south as northern Vancouver Island. West of the Lake of the Woods, the forty-ninth **parallel** drew a firm boundary between the United States and British North America, but the boundary ended at the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. The Americans claimed the Oregon Territory, on the other side of the mountains. The HBC had other ideas—it saw the region as an extension of Rupert's Land, the vast territory granted by King Charles II in 1670.

Both the Americans and the British wanted to use the Oregon Territory to their advantage. The Hudson's Bay Company had no interest in encouraging settlement. It could disrupt a lucrative fur trade, or, even worse, undermine the Company's trade monopoly in the area. On the other hand, America's population was growing rapidly. Having acquired large amounts of territory west of the Mississippi, the United States seemed fated to control all of North America—an idea promoted by Manifest Destiny. As a result, the Americans pursued an aggressive policy towards the Oregon Territory, one that encouraged settlers to move into the area.

From the American point of view, there were two good locations for settlement: north of the Columbia River, to Puget Sound; and south of the Columbia, along the valley of the Williamette River. As the 1830s progressed, more and more American settlers travelled overland along the Oregon Trail, and most settled in the valley of the Williamette.

parallel: an imaginary line north or south of the equator

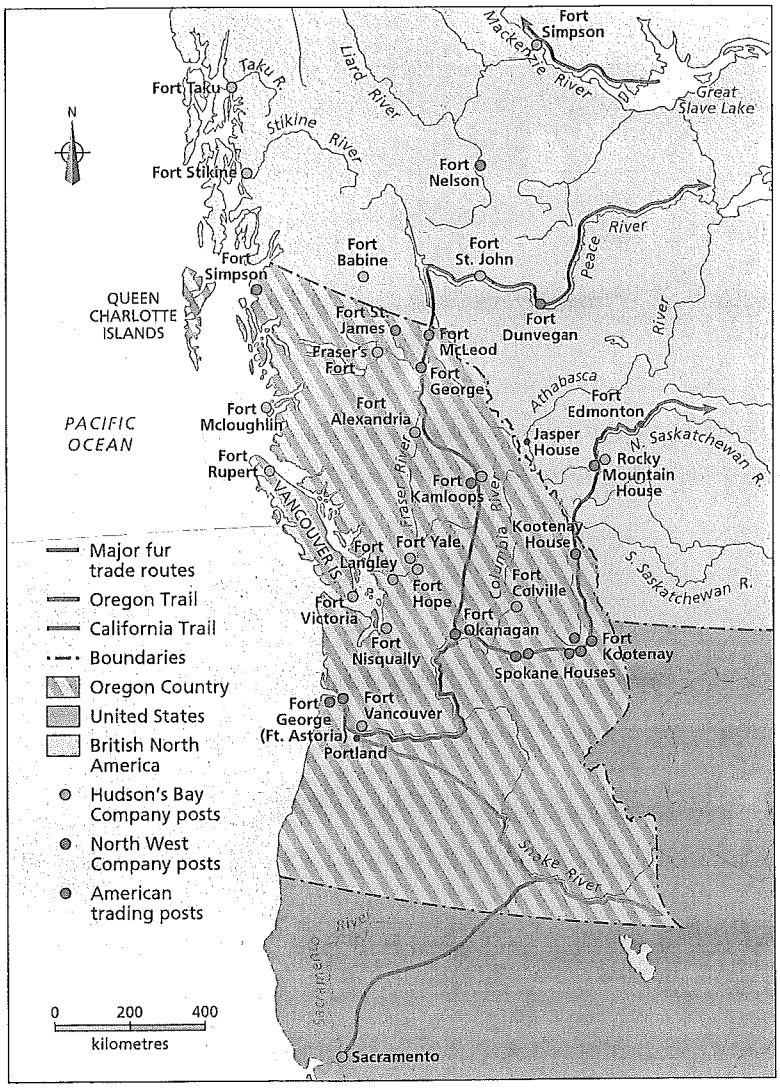


Figure 6–2 The Oregon Territory in 1835

unnerving: unsettling

When Simpson toured the Company's forts in the Oregon Territory, he decided that the HBC was not making the best use of area resources. He created a new post on the north bank of the Columbia River, opposite the Williamette River. Fort Vancouver was immediately placed under the direction of Chief Factor John McLoughlin. Simpson also ordered HBC employees to open up trade in the Fraser Valley and to expand trading networks with the Native peoples in the region. The area seemed to be rich in furs, and dwindling fur stocks had become a real problem.

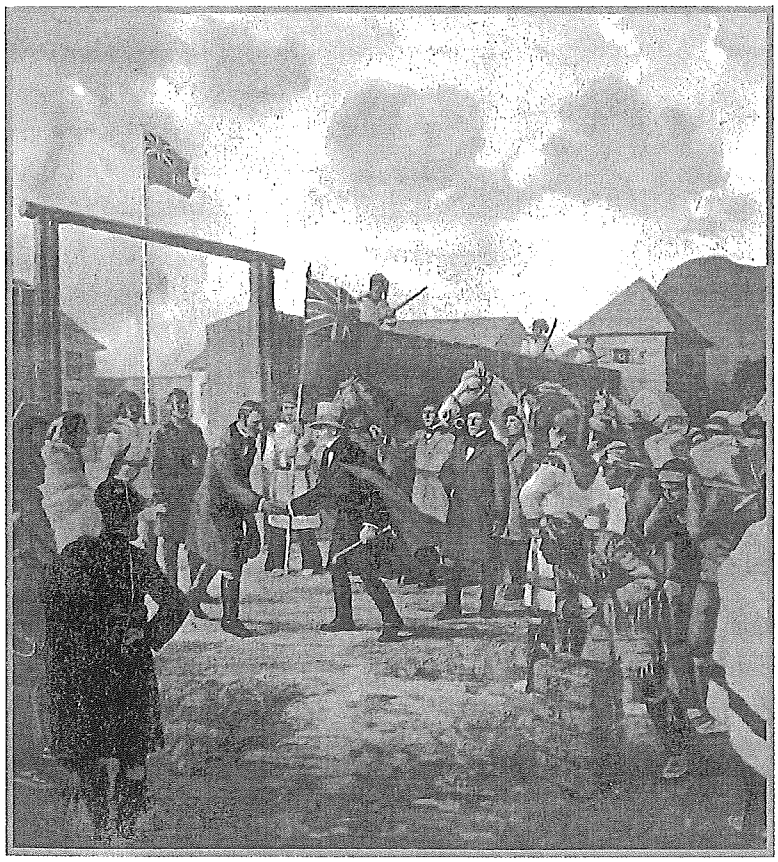


Figure 6–3 While he was HBC governor, Simpson made a point of touring most of British Columbia. Here, he arrives at Fort St. James in 1828. He is greeted by James Douglas, who would eventually become the first governor of British Columbia. Simpson reportedly enjoyed a "cracking pace" on tour. If you were a member of his expedition, you would be woken at two in the morning and travel at least six hours before breakfast.

In 1827, Simpson established a second HBC post, Fort Langley, on the Fraser River.

McLoughlin was a capable administrator with an **unnerving** physical presence. With his mane of white hair and smoldering eyes, he resembled a character from a Dickens novel. He favoured patched clothes, and often forgot to bathe. Even Simpson found McLoughlin's appearance alarming.

Nevertheless, McLoughlin was known for his fairness, and for rewarding employees with parties and banquets. He was also something of a political realist. He saw that the Americans were going to settle the region south of the Columbia River. In order to reduce American competition with the HBC, he encouraged Americans to go there and to stay out of HBC territory north of the Columbia. He offered money and supplies to Americans arriving overland, although he was supposed to extend help only to HBC employees. Simpson, by contrast, thought the American immigrants should be treated harshly. By the end of the 1830s, McLoughlin's plan had led to a very strong American presence in the Oregon Territory. Neither Britain nor the HBC, however, paid much attention to this development because McLoughlin managed the fur trade in the region effectively.

The HBC also had to contend with the Russians on the Pacific Coast. By now the Russians had established a number of fur-trading posts in Alaska and had extended their influence south along the northern Northwest Coast. In 1839, the HBC and the Russians agreed that the Russians would cease operations south of the 54° 40′ N. In exchange, the HBC would supply

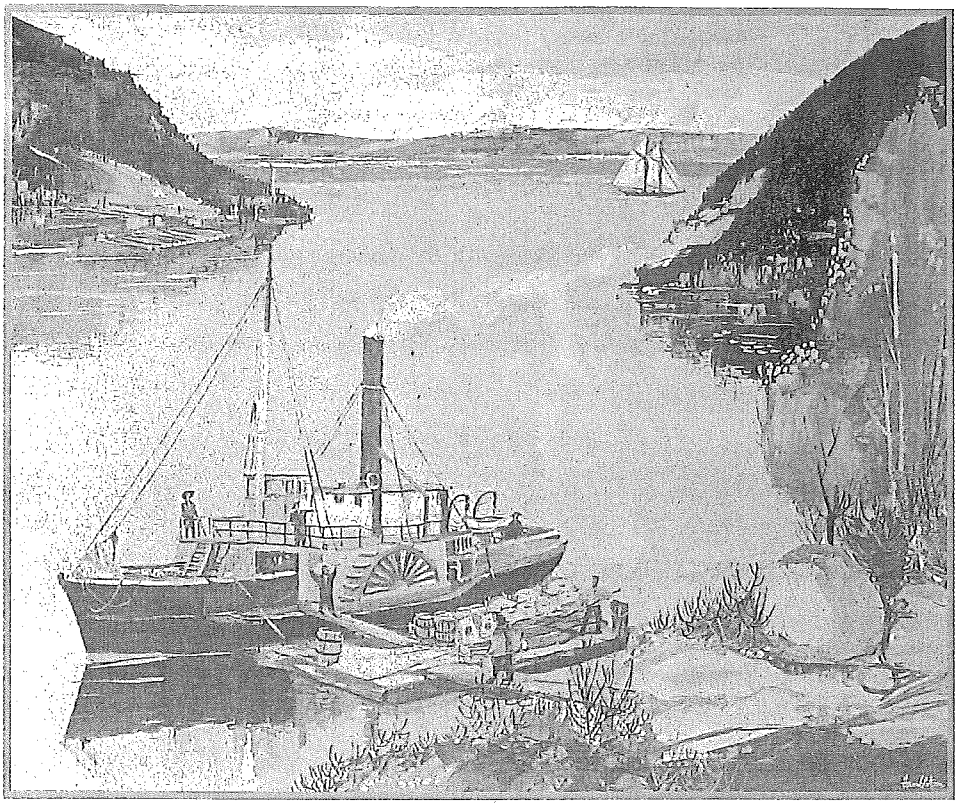


Figure 6–4 The *Beaver* changed a great deal during its fifty-three years on the BC coast. The ship eventually sank off Prospect Point, in Vancouver, in 1888. A commemorative plaque on the Stanley Park seawall tells the ship's story.

Russian posts in Alaska with food. The *Beaver*, an HBC steamship that had arrived on the coast in 1835, supplied the Russian posts. It was also used as a mobile base for trading with the Northwest Coast peoples. It also, of course, added to the British presence in the area.

In 1841, Simpson toured the area again and discovered that the fur trade was not expanding as he had hoped. He decided to consolidate the operations of the maritime fur trade. All coastal posts were to be closed, with the exception of Fort Simpson, and the *Beaver* would be used as a floating fur-trade post to trade with other villages on the coast. McLoughlin was furious; he believed that the chain of forts along the coast made the HBC strong. Simpson had eliminated all the hard work he had done in the last fifteen years.

McLoughlin's anger deepened when his son was killed in a brawl at Fort Stikine in 1842. When Simpson recommended a charge of "justifiable homicide," McLoughlin was furious. Grief-stricken, he developed an active hatred for both Simpson and the HBC. He continued to promote American settlement south of the Columbia, and discouraged newcomers, including those who arrived from Canada, from settling north of the river.

By now, Simpson was alarmed. With the rising population of American settlers in the Oregon Territory, the British could lose control of the area. Fort Vancouver could be lost. Simpson ordered Fort Vancouver's Chief Factor, James Douglas, to establish a new depot on Vancouver Island. In 1843, it would become Fort Victoria, in honour of Queen Victoria.

Danger at the Fort: Amelia Douglas Saves the Day

The murder of John McLoughlin's son was not an isolated incident of violence at the HBC forts in New Caledonia and Columbia. Brawling and lawlessness were a way of life in Canada's "Wild West." Even in the workplace, people behaved in ways that we would find repugnant today. Bosses such as McLoughlin often enforced order and discipline with their fists, and there was no union or human rights code to protect workers.

One of the most intriguing episodes of violence occurred at Fort George and Fort St. James in the 1820s. A chain of events was set in motion when a young clerk, James Yale, was invited to visit another clerk, John Macdonnell, at Fort Fraser. Although Yale was not supposed to leave his post, he decided to make the 200-kilometre journey because Macdonell was feeling gloomy about being stuck alone at his post.

During the visit, Yale heard that two murders had been committed at his fort. He hurried back to find that the men left in charge had been killed with an axe, and that one of the men had been "eaten by dogs, partially so ..." Following the murders, some people claimed that Yale had become too interested in a woman loved by another man, but Yale also learned that there were bad feelings between the murdered men and one of the suspected killers.

Yale wrote to his boss, who promised to exact revenge in the form of a small army of Dene from the Peace River area. The men accused of the murders were from the Carrier nation. In the meantime, other traders heard that the killers were waiting to ambush Yale at Chinlac, a camp located where the Stuart River flows into the Nechako River. Yale's boss learned that one of the accused had "lately purchased a gun with part of the property he stole, and declares his intention of killing Mr. Yale."

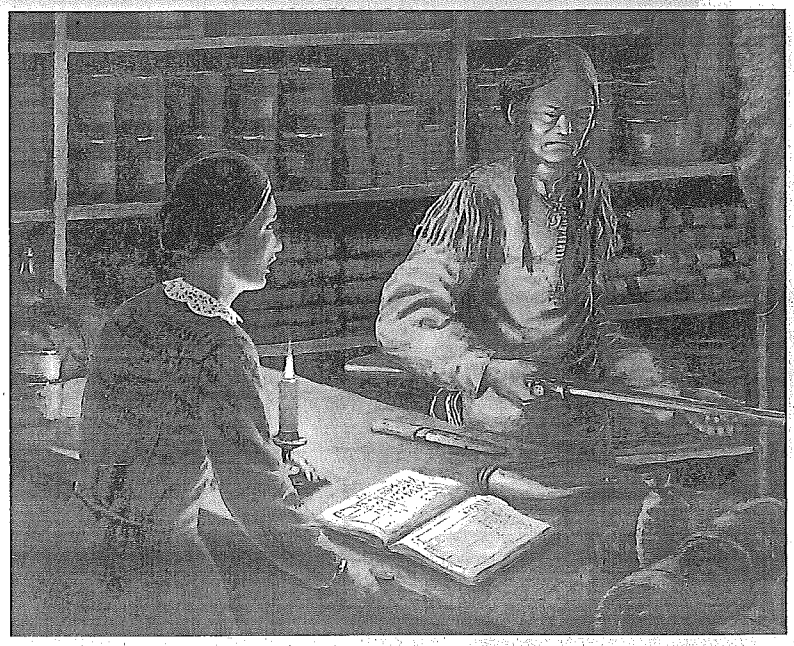


Figure 6–5 Amelia Douglas is said to have saved her husband's life when she negotiated with Chief Kwah by offering him merchandise at the post.

The saga continued through 1823 and 1824. The Carrier became involved after the HBC negotiated with community leaders to execute the men. But one of the accused escaped and survived for several years before taking refuge in the home of Chief Kwah. There, a group of HBC employees, including James Douglas (the future governor of British Columbia), confronted the suspect, dragged him away, and killed him with a shovel. The high-handed attitude displayed by the group offended the chief, who immediately set out to confront Douglas at his post. As fate would have it, Douglas did not return home immediately, and Chief Kwah found himself dealing with Amelia Douglas, James's wife. The record shows that she remained calm, and negotiated skilfully in order to end the violence.

Of course, the entire story comes to us courtesy of the HBC and its employees. It is recorded in the *Hudson Bay Archives Correspondence Books* and was discovered by a researcher looking for data on trading-post economics. How might this story be different if told from the point of view of the accused, or from the standpoint of someone from the Carrier nation?

Deeply embittered, McLoughlin retired two years later from the HBC. He obtained a decent pension in recognition of his years of service, and settled south of the Columbia River in Oregon City. His place in history confirmed by his kindness to American settlers, McLoughlin would become known as the "Father of Oregon." Few Americans realize that he was born in Rivière-du-Loup, Quebec.

ACTIVITIES

1. In an organizer, compare and contrast American and British attitudes towards the Oregon Territory.
2. Why do you suppose McLoughlin went out of his way to assist American settlers? Give two pieces of evidence.
3. How could the HBC have changed its policies in the 1830s in order to gain control of at least a portion of the Oregon Territory south of the forty-ninth parallel?

The Colony of Vancouver Island to 1858

By the mid-1840s, the United States wanted to expand its territory. In 1844, a Democratic candidate for the presidency, James Polk, ran on the slogan "54° 40′ or fight." It meant that the US claimed the Oregon Territory up to 54° 40′ N. This slogan proved to be extremely popular with American voters, and Polk won the election.

In 1845, Polk also tried to negotiate with the British government for the Oregon Territory. In spite of his aggressive stance in the 1844 election, Polk had no desire to wage war with the British. When Britain absolutely refused to give up its claim, the old boundary of 1818 was finally extended along the forty-ninth parallel to the Pacific Ocean. Vancouver Island would remain in British hands, but all British territory south of the forty-ninth parallel became US territory, including Fort Vancouver and the farmlands of Puget Sound.

By 1848, the British government decided that its territory on the Pacific coast required a more official presence than the HBC, and it created the Crown colony of Vancouver Island. Britain gave the HBC a trade monopoly in the new colony, but it had to sell land to British settlers who came to live there.

The colony's new governor, James Douglas, was not keen to see any more Americans in the area, so he actively encouraged British settlement of the colony. He thought that free grants of land should be given to prospective colonists. The British government had different ideas. It wanted to recreate the English class system on Vancouver Island. Settlers were required to purchase land at the rate of £1 an acre, with a minimum purchase of 20 acres. Any settler who bought more than 100 acres was required to bring along at least five people to work the

£: a British pound, today, about $2.75 Canadian

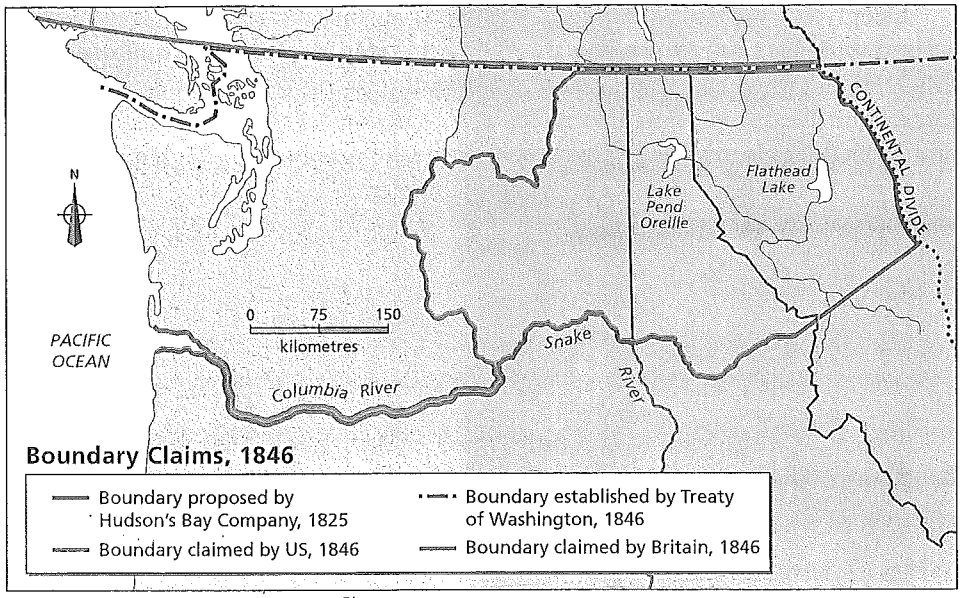


Figure 6–6 This map shows the boundary claims that were made final in 1846.

land. Once again, the old system of rural England was being transported to Canada. A relatively small number of settlers would be landowners, and they would have many servants to farm the land. In reality, the only settlers in Vancouver Island in 1849 were ex-HBC employees. They had already acquired much of the best farmland in the colony.

Though dominated by the HBC in the 1850s, the colony began to diversify economically. Coal had been discovered near Nanaimo in the 1840s and immigrants arrived in the region with the intention of starting a mining operation. They even had a customer lined up—the Royal Navy. Britain had established Esquimault harbour, next to Fort Victoria, as a naval base, and the warships stationed there needed coal supplies. More mines were established in the mid-1850s at Cumberland further north on Vancouver Island.

Figure 6–7 Amelia Douglas

The Royal Navy played a huge role in the social life of Fort Victoria. Its officers were considered to be gentlemen because they came from the privileged class in England—they were always invited to parties and other social functions given by the English landowners in the area. While Douglas encouraged these social activities, he was not impressed by the new upper class. Douglas had been a fur trader and was married to Amelia Douglas, a Métis. His dim view of Victorian high society was shared by many of the former HBC employees, who often were shunned by the prejudiced and class-conscious newcomers.

In 1856, Governor Douglas created a Legislative Assembly in the colony, partly in response to complaints from ex-HBC employees that Vancouver Island was becoming a private club for the **landed gentry**. The Assembly was small, with just seven elected representatives. Because people couldn't vote unless they owned property, only about forty of the colony's 450 adult citizens had the right to vote. Douglas also insisted on retaining final authority in the colony—the Legislative Assembly could pass resolutions, but it had no authority to enforce them. However, the Assembly did have the authority to grant monies for the government's use.

Douglas was worried about another issue. While a census of the immigrant population of Vancouver Island showed a population of just 774 persons in 1855, there were more than 30 000 aboriginal peoples living on the island. In order for the colony to prosper and attract more settlers, Douglas would have to negotiate with the people who had lived there longer than anyone else. This was especially true of the rich farmlands occupied by the Native peoples living between Fort Victoria and Nanaimo.

landed gentry: the British upper class "landed" in another country

Douglas decided to negotiate treaties with the aboriginal peoples: they would surrender their lands to the Europeans, but would retain hunting and fishing rights. The following is an excerpt from one of the treaties he negotiated in 1854. In this instance, "our" refers to the Native peoples.

> The condition of, or understanding of, this sale is this, that our village sites and enclosed fields are to be kept for our own use, for the use of our children, and for those who may follow after us; and the land shall be properly surveyed hereafter. It is understood, however, that the land itself, with these small exceptions, becomes the entire property of the white people forever; it is also understood that we are at liberty to hunt over the unoccupied lands, and to carry on our fisheries as formerly.

DID YOU KNOW?

Of the 774 non-Native persons living in the colony in 1855, almost half were under the age of twenty. Victoria had a total population of 232, and Nanaimo, just 151.

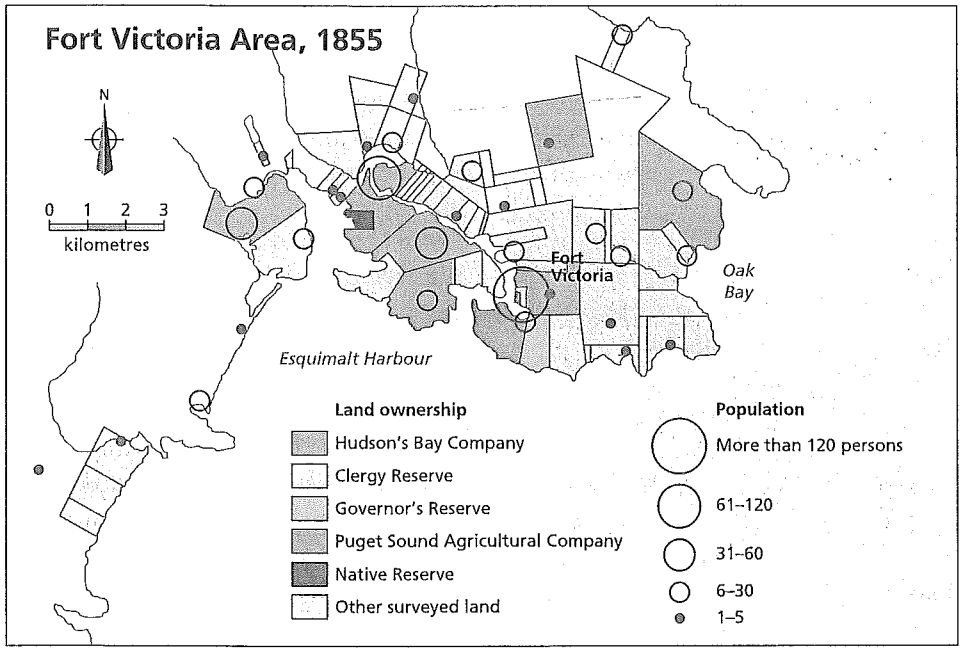


Figure 6–8 Landholdings and population concentrations around Victoria in 1855. How successful had the British government's policy of settlement been?

Because Douglas seemed to be leasing the land from the Native peoples—there was an annual compensation of £2 10 **shillings** per family—some people say that he confirmed that the aboriginal peoples had title to these lands. In fact, the governments of Britain, Canada, and British Columbia have all acknowledged this title. The Douglas treaties on Vancouver Island were the only treaties of this nature negotiated in British Columbia in the nineteenth century.

ACTIVITIES

1. Why do you think the British government granted a trade monopoly to the HBC on Vancouver Island?
2. What was unusual about the landholding policy in the colony? Why would immigrants from Canada object to such a policy?
3. How was the Legislative Assembly set up by Governor Douglas not a representative government? How do you think the inhabitants of the colony would react to this state of affairs?
4. Why did Governor Douglas make treaties with many of the Vancouver Island First Nations?
5. Examine the primary source on page 215. With a partner, discuss how this text could be interpreted as meaning First Nations peoples owned their lands. Do you agree with this interpretation? Discuss your findings with the rest of the class.

THE CARIBOO GOLD RUSH

shilling: an old British coinage, about one twentieth of a pound

title: established or recognized right to something

infomercial: an extended commercial that seems like a news show

Today, many people believe or hope that they can "get rich quick." Some Canadians assume they will never have enough money to retire, or buy a house, or go to school—and they are counting on winning a major lottery to top up their savings. Television also provides hundreds of **infomercials** on ways to accumulate wealth quickly. These infomercials feature interviews with men and women who have been lucky enough, or smart enough, to have done the impossible. Although any good financial advisor will tell you that getting rich quick is nearly impossible, many people choose to believe otherwise.

In the nineteenth century, people were just as susceptible to the idea of quick wealth. After all, many immigrants had rejected old ideas about class and money. If you could survive the trip to Canada or America, and those difficult first years, who was to say you couldn't become a millionaire? This optimism was fuelled by a series of gold rushes in western North America between 1849 and the end of the century. One of these rushes was directly responsible for the early development of British Columbia.