

British Columbia Joins Confederation

Before 1867 (Confederation)

In 1867, when the colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec united as provinces of the new Dominion of Canada, the only British **Crown colony** to their west was the colony of British Columbia.*

The British had claimed the Pacific Coast of North America following exploration by such men as James Cook, Captain George Vancouver, Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, and Simon Fraser during the late 1700s and early 1800s. During these years both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company were actively searching for furs in the West.

In 1849 Vancouver Island became a British colony. There were fewer than 1000 settlers living on the island at the time. The mainland area, which was known as New Caledonia, consisted of only a few fur forts. Since there were so few non-Native people in the area, it was considered unnecessary to declare it a colony.

In 1858 a gold rush on the lower Fraser River brought over 30 000 miners to New Caledonia. Many of these miners came from the United States. The British were afraid that the Americans would try to annex Vancouver Island and New Caledonia. James Douglas, the Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company post of Fort Victoria, became the new governor of the British colony of Vancouver Island. He had heard about the lawlessness in California during the gold rush there, and did not want the same thing to happen on British territory. Therefore, he convinced the British government to make New Caledonia into another colony. In 1858, New Caledonia became a colony and was renamed British Columbia. The formation of a colony on the mainland gave the governor authority to punish lawbreakers and to maintain control, in spite of all the new people who were moving into the area.

By 1862 there was a second gold rush in the Cariboo region, bringing more people into the colony of British Columbia. By 1865 the gold boom was nearing its end and the colony of Vancouver Island and the colony of British Columbia were in a financial crisis. By 1866 Britain decided to unite the two colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia under the name of British Columbia. The capital was at Victoria. Frederick Seymour became the new governor.

The united colony had a representative government. The people elected nine members of a 22 member Legislative Council. The Legislative Council and the Executive Council answered to the appointed British governor. The

governor, although he held a great deal of power, answered to the British colonial secretary, who was a member of the British Cabinet. The monarch, who at this time was Queen Victoria, had the final authority.

By 1868 the colony of British Columbia was heavily in debt because roads and other expensive services had been needed during the gold rush. With the gold rush over, there was no money left to pay for these services. Also, the colony spent more money importing goods than they made exporting goods. During the gold rush, gold had been exported; but by the late 1860s the main industries left were farming, coal mining, and lumbering. These industries could not make up for the lack of gold. People in the colony of British Columbia began to consider the economic advantages that could be gained by joining Canada.

There were some people in the area who favoured ties with Britain. There was also growing pressure for annexation to the United States. Britain concluded that British Columbia should be joined to Canada in order to preserve its link with Britain.



The two colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia united in 1866 under the name of British Columbia.

Crown colony—a colony under the direct control of Britain

* Assiniboia was not a Crown colony since it was owned by the Hudson's Bay Company.

Focus On: Gold Rush

The early part of the 1800s found the Native people of present-day British Columbia bringing furs to the trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. In exchange, the fur traders gave them such trade goods as guns, metal pots, beads, tea, and sugar.

In the summer of 1856 the Natives along the Thompson River noticed "shiny stones" in the shallow gravel beds. After collecting some, they took them to the traders at Fort Kamloops. Word soon spread that the traders at Fort Victoria were interested in the yellow stones. By 1858 the Hudson's Bay Company men had collected about 800 ounces of these yellow stones (gold).

These gold lumps were taken by the purser of the Hudson's Bay Company boat *The Otter* to the United States mint in San Francisco to be analysed, weighed, and made into coins.

The first big strike in the British

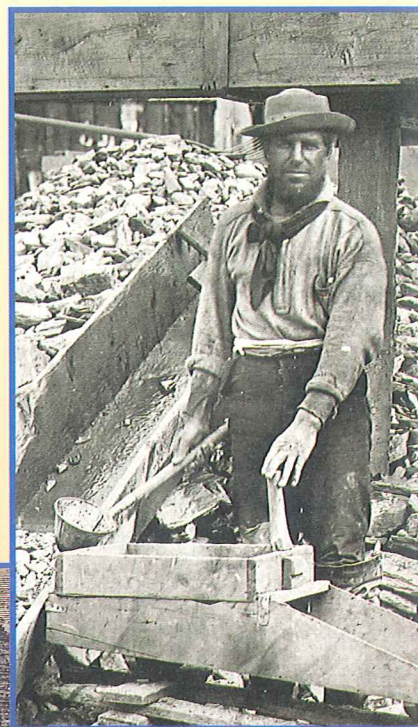
territory was made at a place known today as Hill's Bar. The discovery was made by a small group who had come up from California after the gold rush ended down there. They had heard the rumours of gold found in the Thompson River. Word about the gold in the Hill's Bar area soon spread. This gold mining area became known as the Lower Fraser.

Soon there were 10 000 miners in the Lower Fraser. With all these people arriving, the Lower Fraser changed. The river banks were soon covered with miners as far as the eye could see. Some of them were digging in the sand, others were working at their **rockers**, others were at their **sluice-boxes** taking out anywhere from five dollars to 100 dollars worth of gold a day. Thirty dollars was about average.

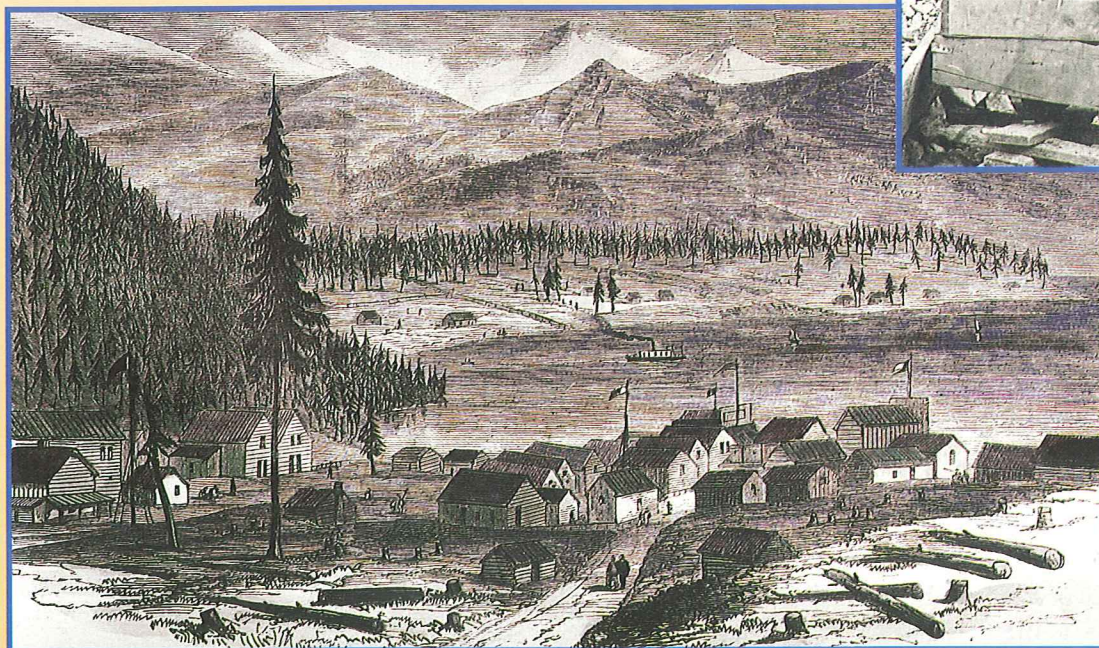
Eventually the Lower Fraser had all been claimed and the miners searched northward into unclaimed areas. By the end of the year many

an unsuccessful miner had turned homeward, convinced that the tales about gold in the Fraser River were a hoax. Luckily for the miners, the gamblers, the businesspeople, and the merchants, the Cariboo soon became the next big gold area.

Some of the hardier, more hopeful prospectors ventured northward up



Above: This miner is separating gold from sand and dirt.

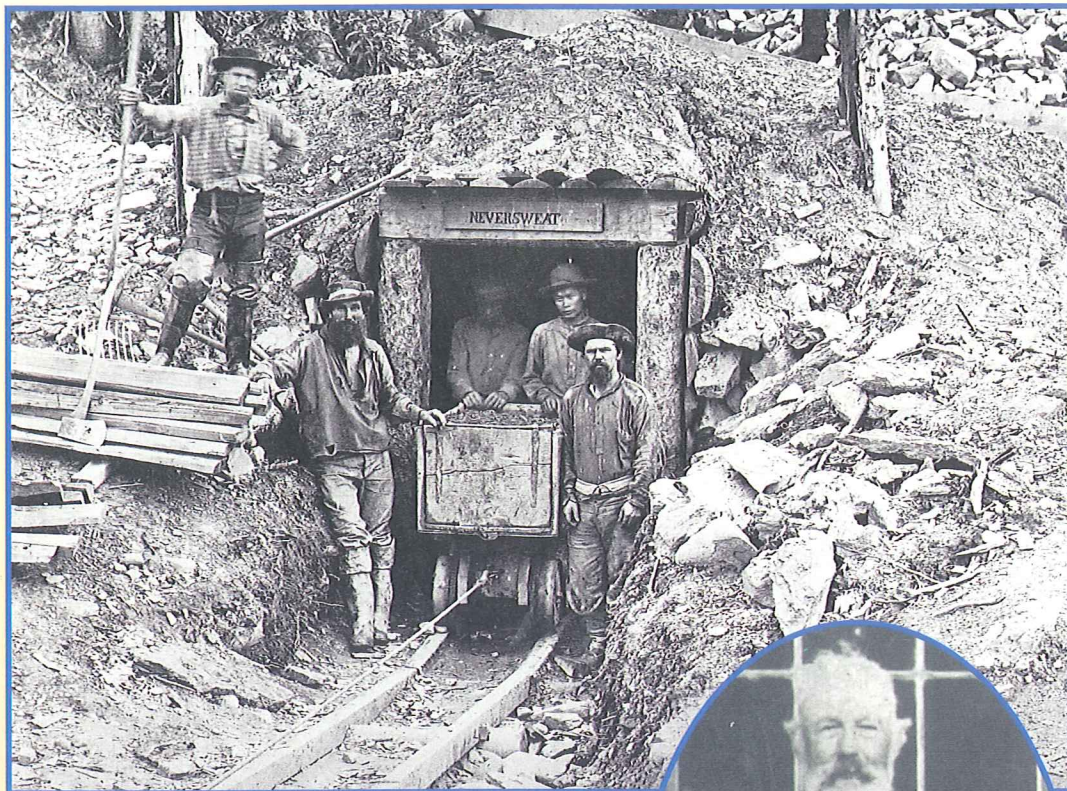


Left: The town of Douglas was a typical gold rush settlement in the Cariboo.

Rocker—a cradle used in mining, whereby the material being mined can be sorted and washed

Sluice-box—a long box-like container in which gold is separated from gravel and mud

Focus On: Gold Rush continued



Above: These miners are bringing gold out of a tunnel mined by the Neversweat Company in the Cariboo, 1868.

Right: Billy Barker.

the Fraser to the Quesnel River in 1859. From there they branched out into Keithley Creek, Antler Creek, Lightning Creek, and Williams Creek, finding many rich bars that they worked with good results.

In the celebrated Williams Creek in 1861, the richest diggings ever discovered in the Cariboo were found by a man known as "Dutch Bill." Many more claims were taken up on this creek. Several of them paid dividends from \$20 000 to \$60 000 a year. One man, Cameron, left the country after a year's work with \$150 000 in gold dust.

One miner who came to the Williams Creek area was Billy Barker.

Barker arrived during the summer of 1862 to find the area humming with activity. Thousands of miners were working furiously at their claims and all seemed to be striking it rich.

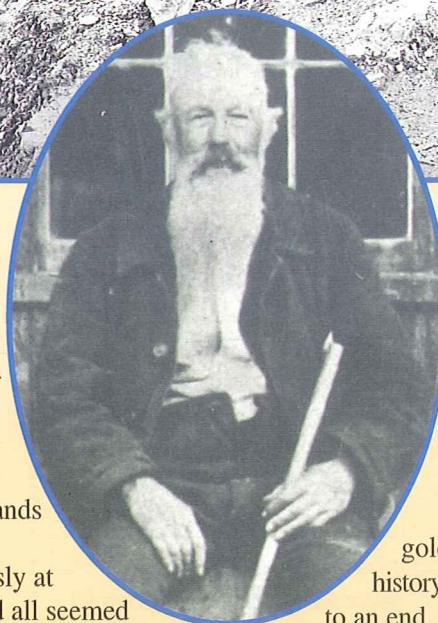
Barker selected a spot set back from the river and away from all the other successful claims. Here he and his partners dug a simple vertical mine.

The other miners disagreed with Barker because they believed gold was always found by the creek, not where Barker was digging. Barker

convinced his partners to ignore the jeers of the other miners, and to continue digging in order to prove them wrong. At 17 metres they struck the richest **pay dirt** to be found in the Cariboo—pay dirt that yielded Barker and his partners a \$600 000 fortune.

A town soon grew up around Barker's mine. The miners named it Barkerville in honour of Billy Barker. It was a typical gold rush town with blacksmith shops, laundries, butcher shops, banks, **assay offices**, log shanties, churches, saloons, and hotels. The buildings were built on stilts along a long, narrow, and usually very muddy street.

Just like all great gold rushes throughout history, the Cariboo rush came to an end. With the end of the gold rush, the Pacific Coast experienced great financial difficulties. Because of these financial problems, the issue of whether to join the new Confederation (Canada), or to remain as a British colony, or to join the United States were the options open to the colony of British Columbia.



Pay dirt—earth or ore containing valuable minerals such as gold

Assay office—a place that examines gold or other minerals for its quality

An Exercise in Decision-Making



The following is an imaginary conversation between Dr. John Helmcken and Amor de Cosmos about whether British Columbia should join Confederation. The date is 1868. Dr. Helmcken was a doctor in Victoria. He was the first president of the British Columbia Medical Society. Dr. Helmcken was strongly in favour of British Columbia

remaining a colony of Britain. Amor de Cosmos was a newspaper editor and a strong advocate of Confederation. Dr. Helmcken ran against de Cosmos for a seat in the legislative council in 1868 and won. Start by reading what Dr. Helmcken says. Then read what Amor de Cosmos says directly across the page. The exercise continues on the next page.

Dr. John Helmcken



Mr. de Cosmos, you are wrong to try to convince the people of the colony of British Columbia that we should join the Dominion of Canada. Confederation is only an experiment so far. Why should we ally ourselves with something that has not yet been proved to be workable?

Rupert's Land, with its vast area, is between us and the Dominion of Canada. There is no road or railway to join us. If we unite with Canada, the other four provinces that are near to one another geographically will make decisions for their own benefit. They are not going to worry about British Columbians who are 2000 kilometres away.

The American trading centre of San Francisco is much nearer to us than the Canadian trading centres of Montreal and Toronto. California would be a good market for British Columbian goods. What's more, the people of this colony care little for the difference between the form of government in Canada and that in the United States. Eventually, we may become part of the United States.

My loyalty cannot be bought. I won't agree to join the Dominion of Canada just so our debts will be paid. As for your point about government, the British government will probably grant us a government where the voters have more influence. There is no reason to join Canada just to get better government.

Amor de Cosmos



My dear Dr. Helmcken, the people of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick put a lot of thought into their decision to join together to form the Dominion of Canada. Confederation has been successful so far and will continue to be successful.

If British Columbia becomes part of Canada, the other provinces will have to consider what we want, because they will not want us to leave Confederation. Besides, eventually Canada will be one nation that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. There will be a railway to join the provinces and transport goods from one province to another.

You must remember, Dr. Helmcken, that our colony is in debt. We are importing more goods than we are exporting. If we join the Dominion of Canada, the Canadian government will pay our debts and we will be off to a fresh start. Also the government may grant us the type of government we want where the decision-makers are responsible to the voter's representatives.

I hope that one day you will come to see the advantages for British Columbia of joining the Dominion of Canada.



The main street of Barkerville in the 1860s

Three Choices

The people of the colony of British Columbia had three choices:

Choice One: They could remain a British colony and hope to gain a government where they had more influence in the future. A small but powerful British group of Hudson's Bay Company and government officials supported this position.

Choice Two: They could become part of the United States. This appealed to the Americans in the colony who had arrived during the gold rush. The United States was south of British Columbia and, since the **annexation** of Alaska in 1867, to the north as well. California would be a good market for British Columbian goods, and the American trading centre of San Francisco was much nearer than the Canadian trading centres of Toronto and Montreal.

Choice Three: They could join Canada. The British government favoured this choice. Some people in the colony of British Columbia felt threatened by the United States that was both north and south of them. They thought they might be forced to become part of the United States if they did not have the protection of being part of Canada. Also, they could ask the Canadian government to pay the colony's debts if they joined Confederation.

Note: The decision-makers in Ottawa did not ask the minority peoples of British Columbia their opinions. The 25 000 Native people and the 1500 Chinese were not consulted.

In groups, decide which choice you would have made had you lived in the colony of British Columbia in the 1860s. Would you have considered the wishes of all the people living there? Why or why not? Use a decision-making model to chart the decision facing British Columbians. You could use a model from this textbook as an example, or design your own.

Annexation—joining of one territory to a larger political entity