

**“A fit judgement for their intolerable wickedness”:
Settler Responses to the 1862 Smallpox Epidemic in Victoria**

by
Wade MacAulay

Supervised by
Dr. Peter Cook

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Introduction

The events of the 1862 smallpox epidemic in Victoria are well evidenced in contemporary press coverage and have been studied by several scholars. Victoria's daily newspapers, the *British Colonist* and the *Daily Press*, reported the appearance of smallpox amongst recent arrivals from San Francisco on 26 March.¹ The *Colonist* went further to advocate immediate quarantine; it feared particularly that the disease should spread to the "horde of Indians on the outskirts of the town".² Certain prudent measures were promptly taken: doctor and local landowner and legislator Sebastian Helmcken vaccinated "King Freezy" and other prominent local Songhees, and Governor James Douglas requested funding from the legislative council to construct a dedicated hospital.³ Reverend Alexander Garrett would also care for the afflicted.⁴ In spite of these measures, by late April the disease had spread to encampments outside the town, where Tsimshian, Haida, Tlingit, and Kwakwaka'wakw people lived seasonally while working in and near the town.⁵ Shortly after this, the *Daily Press* was "happy to state" that Police Commissioner Augustus Pemberton had made plans to remove indigenous people from the town and to expel the "Northern Indians" from the encampments.⁶ It is unclear how this decision was reached and on whose authority. Burning the indigenous migrants' lodgings and backing their authority with a gunboat, Pemberton and the police proceeded to clear camps at Rock Bay, Cadborough Bay, and Ogden Point over the following five

¹ "Small Pox", *Daily Press*, 26 March 1862; "Quarantine", *British Colonist*, 26 March 1862.

² "Quarantine", *British Colonist*, 29 March 1862.

³ "Indians Vaccinated", *Daily Press*, 27 March 1862; "House of Assembly", *Daily Press*, 28 March 1862.

⁴ "The Small-pox among the Indians", *Daily Press*, 17 April 1862.

⁵ "The Small Pox and the Indians"; "Mortality among the Indians", *British Colonist*, 26 April 1862.

⁶ "Removal of the Indians", *Daily Press*, 28 April 1862.

weeks.⁷ Local Songhees retreated, voluntarily it seems, to Discovery Island.⁸ By mid-June, reports returned of the expelled indigenous people dying on their way home, and of the spread of the disease along the north coast; the “Indians at Forts Simpson and Rupert”, it was reported, were “dying like rotten sheep”.⁹ The epidemic would eventually kill an estimated 20 000 indigenous people along the Northwest Coast and Interior Plateau.¹⁰

The subject of infectious disease in indigenous populations is central to Canada’s history. As the area that is now Canada was being settled by Europeans, indigenous peoples suffered a series of epidemics of Old World diseases such as smallpox and measles. Robert Boyd has called these epidemics a “demographic disaster”; he argues “disease was the major cause of Indian depopulation in the Northwest”.¹¹ In populations with no previous exposure, smallpox could have mortality rates well in excess of 30%. The 1862-63 epidemic was particularly critical. As it followed earlier epidemics, and came at a time when settlement on the Pacific Coast was increasing, Boyd argues that it “served as a final blow to the Native peoples of British Columbia and paved the way for the colonization of their lands by peoples of European descent.”¹²

⁷ “Burning the Camps”, *Daily Press*, 30 April 1862; “The Small Pox and the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 1 May 1862; “Migration of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 11 May 1862; “The Indians”, *British Colonist*, 12 May 1862; “Conflagration on the Indian Reserve”, *Daily Press*, 13 May 1862; “The Indians”, *Daily Press*, 15 May 1862; “Compulsory Departure of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 27 May 1862; “Sad Scenes at Ogden Point”, *British Colonist*, 6 June 1862.

⁸ “The Indians”, *British Colonist*, 12 May 1862.

⁹ “From the NW Coast and Stickeen”, *British Colonist*, 13 June 1862; “Lo! the Poor Indian”, *British Colonist*, 14 June 1862; “From Bentinck Arm, Ft Rupert and Nanaimo”, *British Colonist*, 21 June 1862.

¹⁰ Robert Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline among Pacific Northwest Coast Indians, 1774-1874* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 172.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 172.

There is a well-developed body of academic work on smallpox and other introduced infectious diseases in indigenous populations in what is now Canada. F.J. Paul Hackett has contributed a study of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) smallpox response from the 1780s to the 1830s; as the HBC was the primary colonial authority in western British North America in this period and dealt closely with aboriginal groups, it often encountered the disease. Hackett notes that throughout this period the HBC endeavoured to stop the spread of smallpox in aboriginal populations. Building on Arthur Ray's broader study of the HBC role in maintaining aboriginal welfare, Hackett argues that the HBC undertook such a policy in order to protect its supply of furs and labour.¹³ Thus, Hackett notes, the HBC usually took the most effective available response to outbreaks of smallpox. This entailed, for instance, a quarantine of traders in response to a 1782 outbreak near York Factory, which helped to slow the spread of the disease to the local Cree.¹⁴ The HBC began in the 1810s to vaccinate both its white and métis workers and the aboriginal peoples with whom it traded. Commitment to vaccination programs fluctuated depending on the level of threat the disease posed at a given time and on the availability of materiel.¹⁵ Hackett's study is vital to the present work as it makes clear that the HBC was familiar with the measures of vaccination and quarantine, in spite of an incomplete scientific knowledge of the disease, and had at times been committed to employing them in the interests of its aboriginal workers and trading partners.

¹³ F. J. Paul Hackett, "Averting Disaster: The Hudson's Bay Company and Smallpox in Western Canada during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 78, no. 3 (2004): 579.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 586.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 594-96.

Robert Boyd's *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline among Pacific Northwest Coast Indians* is a comprehensive study of outbreaks of smallpox as well as other infectious diseases, complemented by analysis of population data on the affected peoples along the Pacific Coast. His work provides valuable context on earlier epidemics. Boyd notes four smallpox epidemics prior to that of 1862: in 1781-82, 1801-2, 1836-37, and 1852-53. There was perhaps a fifth in 1824-25.¹⁶ Of these, Boyd argues, the epidemic of the late 1700s was "by far the most devastating". Extrapolating from data on better-documented "virgin-soil" epidemics – that is, epidemics amongst populations with no previous exposure to the disease – in conjunction with sparse historical records, he argues that mortality during this epidemic was "certainly in excess of 30%".¹⁷ In studying subsequent epidemics, access to a fuller historical record has let Boyd give further detail. Of particular relevance to the present subject is the response of colonial authorities – including the HBC – to these outbreaks. Regarding an outbreak of measles in 1848, Boyd cites communication from James Douglas, then Chief Factor at Fort Simpson, showing that food and medicine were distributed to the local Tsimshian.¹⁸ During the 1853 smallpox epidemic, HBC doctors at Ft. Vancouver, in what had by then become the Washington Territory, distributed vaccine to the extent possible.¹⁹

Cole Harris has approached the epidemics from a different perspective, studying their effects within Coast Salish societies. His methodology complements that of Boyd: he uses the records of interviews of Salish elders conducted by late-nineteenth and early-

¹⁶ Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

twentieth-century ethnographers. Though he acknowledges the difficulty of tying such sources to precise events, he remarks a consistency in the stories of a devastating pre-contact epidemic.²⁰ In addition, he takes early Europeans explorers' accounts of abandoned villages as corroborative.²¹ Finally, working backwards from 1830 data, explorers' reports, and remains of villages, he argues that "the great majority" of coastal aboriginal people died in 1780s.²²

Keith Thor Carlson has also worked with less-conventional historical sources to gain insight into the Coast Salish experience of the epidemics. He argues that the epidemics were understood in relation to the disaster stories that formed part of Coast Salish mythology and that, furthermore, these stories helped the Salish maintain a sense of identity in the face of the smallpox crises.²³

The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence also comprises a study of the 1862 epidemic. Boyd's work is foundational; all subsequent scholarship on the 1862 epidemic cites it. Drawing upon the greater range of written sources available in this period, he gives detail on the events in Victoria and the subsequent spread of the disease. He notes that early responses included vaccination of prominent Songhees, and that missionaries including Alexander Garrett endeavoured to stem the spread and treat the suffering amongst the encamped Northerners.²⁴ However, he notes, by the end of April police were ordering Northerners to leave the area around the town.²⁵ From there he tracks the spread

²⁰ Cole Harris, "Voices of Disaster: Smallpox around the Strait of Georgia in 1782", *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 4 (1994): 599.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 600.

²² *Ibid.*, 609.

²³ Keith Thor Carlson, "Precedent and the Aboriginal Response to Global Incursions: Smallpox and Identity Reformation Among the Coast Salish", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 18, no. 2 (2007): 168, 178.

²⁴ Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 176-7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

of smallpox along the coast, resulting in, he estimates, some 20 000 deaths amongst First Nations.²⁶ The expulsion of the Northerners was incongruous with the responses to the earlier epidemics Boyd studies, where settler authorities administered vaccination and enacted quarantine. Nonetheless, Boyd does not attempt to explain in detail this departure from established practice.

Subsequent works have added detail and endeavoured to explain the settler response. Kiran van Rijn focuses on the inadequacy of the response to the outbreak from a medical perspective. He acknowledges that the disease was not fully understood, but argues that colonial authorities failed to enact even the best known treatment and prevention measures. Nonetheless, van Rijn does give a detailed account of vaccination efforts both in Victoria and elsewhere along the coast.²⁷ He ascribes settler response to the crisis to a predominant sentiment of “revulsion”, and argues that settlers acted in “self-interest”, seeking to protect themselves from what they saw as a threat to their health.²⁸ He bases this conclusion primarily on the *British Colonist*'s coverage of and commentary on the outbreak.

John Sutton Lutz nuances the explanation offered by van Rijn. He finds in the *Daily Press* a voice that at times contradicts the *British Colonist*, expressing opposition to the latter's attitudes and responses towards the outbreak.²⁹ He also introduces an economic aspect to his analysis, noting that at least one employer expressed frustration at

²⁶ Ibid., 172.

²⁷ Kiran van Rijn, “‘Lo! The Poor Indian!’ Colonial Responses to the 1862-63 Smallpox Epidemic in British Columbia and Vancouver Island”, *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23 (2006): 551-3.

²⁸ Ibid., 543.

²⁹ John Sutton Lutz, “Victoria, 1862,” *Victorian Review* 36, no.1 (2010), 38.

the loss of cheap labour following the expulsions, and that the land of the Lekwungen reserve had become very valuable.³⁰

Penelope Edmonds goes further, placing the crisis in the context of Victoria's development as a town and of the settler worldview. She notes that aboriginal people were understood by settlers through a theory of development and land use; aboriginal land use was seen to be at an 'earlier' stage of development, and thus their presence in settler cities – the culmination of frontier development – was irksome.³¹ Further, she argues that response to smallpox is best understood in the context of a Victorian-era worldview that associated disease with failings of hygiene and morality.³² In the specific context of Victoria, she places the 1862 crisis in a period of transition from mercantilism to private landholding; later that year, the city would be incorporated and would begin to wrest control of the town land from the HBC.³³ Rate-paying landholders would control the new city, and protection of their property was already becoming a priority around the time of the epidemic.³⁴ Landowners worried that "property would be rendered valueless" by proximity to aboriginal reserves or encampments; Governor Douglas himself described the Lekwungen reserve as a "public inconvenience".³⁵ Furthermore, Victorian-era social mores coloured perception of aboriginal spaces: Edmonds likens travellers' descriptions of the Lekwungen reserve to depictions of London slums in contemporary literature.³⁶ Perhaps most importantly, Edmonds introduces gender to her analysis of the

³⁰ John Sutton Lutz, *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 88.

³¹ Penelope Edmonds, "Unpacking Settler Colonialism's Urban Strategies: Indigenous Peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, and the Transition to a Settler-Colonial City", *Urban History Review* 38:2 (2010), 8.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

crisis. She notes that whereas previously, marriage between fur-trade-company men and aboriginal women was common and the city élite was made up largely of men in such marriages or their offspring, in the time leading up the epidemic the aboriginal woman came to be depicted solely as the prostitute in settler discourse.³⁷

Tom Swanky has argued a radically different interpretation of the epidemic: that it was a genocide perpetrated deliberately by the Douglas government in collusion with a group of land speculators, including Doctor Helmcken. He asserts that smallpox was deliberately introduced from San Francisco, and that once the infected passenger landed he was conducted directly to the Songhees village in order to spread the disease there.³⁸ He notes that a police constable working with the Tsimshian in the encampment was infected and argues that he was placed there intentionally.³⁹ Further, he argues that Douglas was intentionally absent during the expulsions in order to have plausible deniability of his involvement and to protect his reputation.⁴⁰

In his review of the work, Robin Fisher takes issue particularly with Swanky's use of evidence.⁴¹ Indeed, Swanky interprets lack of evidence as itself proof that evidence was suppressed, which he argues points to conspiracy. Furthermore, some crucial claims are poorly supported. For instance, Swanky claims without evidence that Dr. Helmcken argued against quarantine (a known effective response).⁴² In all, it seems unlikely that a plot of this complexity and scale, implicating this many people, was orchestrated by a

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9, 11.

³⁸ Tom Swanky, *The True Story of Canada's "War" of Extermination on the Pacific plus the Tsilhqot'in and other First Nations Resistance* (Surrey, British Columbia: Dragon Heart Enterprises, 2012), 241.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁴¹ Robin Fisher, "Review of The True Story of Canada's 'War' of Extermination on the Pacific plus the Tsilhqot'in and Other First Nations Resistance by Tom Swanky," *BC Studies* 182 (2014): 217–18.

⁴² Swanky, *The True Story of Canada's War of Extermination*, 245.

colonial government with few resources and leaving no conclusive evidence.

Nonetheless, certain elements of Swanky's argument are compelling: on the local scale, desire for land is a cogent explanation of settler response in Victoria. Further, Swanky accuses the alleged perpetrators of conducting a campaign of erasure, both of their plots and of the peoples they decimated. A more passive form of erasure can be seen in the lack of attention given the epidemic publicly. Finally, the result of the epidemics – whether intentional or not – was ultimately to open swaths of the Pacific coast to settlement.

Much work remains to be done on the smallpox epidemic of 1862. Carlson and Harris, by focusing on the Salish perspective on the disease, have provided a promising model for future study. A diversity of peoples was profoundly affected by the epidemic; a diversity of academic approaches, accounting for aboriginal as well as settler understandings of the past, will be necessary to develop our understanding of the events of 1862-63 and their ramifications.

My intention has been to continue in the same direction as Edmonds, and develop the context of a Victoria in transition. In the absence of explicit explanation in primary sources, and in the obscurity of a racist settler discourse, this context will be vital in explaining the decision to expel aboriginal people from the town's environs – a decision which was not in keeping with earlier HBC policy, as the works of Hackett and Boyd demonstrate. Specifically, I have delved into Edmonds' themes of the relationship between race, disease, morality and development in the settler worldview; Victoria's changing economy and markets of property and labour; and the ideals of the family and

of gender. In addition, I have endeavoured to explain the differing treatment of “Northerners” and local Songhees, a question not explored in depth in existing literature.



Detail of “Map of Victoria and Part of Esquimalt Districts, 1861” (National Archives of the UK, C0700-BRITISH COLUMBIA-10). Locations of camps added by the author.

1. Haida encampment (“Sad Scenes at Ogden Point”, 6 June 1862.)
2. Songhees Reserve – also inhabited by “Northern Indians” (“The Small Pox”, *British Colonist*, 14 May 1862.)
3. Approximate Site of Northerners’ Encampment and Miners’ Encampment (Boyd, *Spirit of Pestilence*, 174; “Robberies at ‘Canvastown’”, *British Colonist*, 19 May 1862.)
4. Northerners’ Encampment (after clearing of other encampments) (“Indians at Cadboro’ Bay”, *Daily Press*, 27 May 1862; “Sickening”, *British Colonist*, 28 June 1862.)

Settler discourse around the smallpox epidemic

The settler population of Victoria had some accurate knowledge of smallpox. As discussed above, the Hudson's Bay Company had extensive experience with the disease, and HBC workers were familiar with the best available methods of prevention and containment of outbreaks. It seems logical, then, that the inhabitants of Victoria – founded in 1843 as an HBC fort and still in large part populated by current or former HBC employees – should share in this knowledge. Indeed, coverage of the crisis in the newspapers and the responses of both missionaries and colonial authorities confirm this. The mechanism of the spread of smallpox was poorly understood; it was attributed to “miasma” and thought to be associated with the presence of rubbish and “bad smells”.⁴³ Nonetheless, measures for preventing the spread of the disease were widely known. From the first reports of an infected man in the town, both daily newspapers recommended vaccination of the uninfected and quarantine of the infected.⁴⁴ Further reports restated the efficacy of vaccination, even after an outbreak is noticed, and reminded readers to be re-vaccinated.⁴⁵ The benefits of quarantine were also recognized by the authorities in Victoria. On 27 March Douglas asked the Colonial Legislature to allot £400 for the construction of a hospital where the infected might be isolated.⁴⁶ Had these measures of vaccination and quarantine been extended to all inhabitants of Victoria and the

⁴³ “Small Pox”, *Daily Press*, 26 March 1862 p.4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; “Quarantine”, *British Colonist*, 26 March 1862.

⁴⁵ “Vaccination and Re-Vaccination”, *Daily Press*, 10 April 1862; “Small-Pox Vaccination and Re-Vaccination”, *Daily Press*, 29 April 1862.

⁴⁶ “House of Assembly”, *Daily Press*, 28 March 1862.

surrounding area, regardless of race, as was HBC policy in earlier epidemics, it is likely that the effects of the disease could have been mitigated.

But the Victorian settler understanding of disease, grounded though it was in practical knowledge, was also coloured by racial and moral theory. It was thought that people of certain races or classes were more susceptible to disease and more likely to spread it to others. Douglas's request for funding for a hospital was questioned by the House Speaker, who argued that the only cases where a patient would need to be isolated were when "poor persons are taken sick, and when cases occur in lodging houses."⁴⁷ The *British Colonist* framed its call for quarantine as a measure to prevent the spread of smallpox to the "the horde of Indians" near the town, whose "filthy habits would perpetuate the evil".⁴⁸ Though the lack of acquired immunity was a real factor in increasing vulnerability to smallpox amongst aboriginal people, the *Colonist's* understanding was racialised and moralised, evincing a detachment from even contemporary medical knowledge. As the disease spread into the Northerners' Encampment, the *Daily Press* urged readers not to worry, as the disease was still outside the town and largely confined to aboriginal people.⁴⁹ In the minds of these settlers, the effect of disease would be fundamentally different amongst people of different races and classes.

The association of disease and immorality in the settler worldview became more visible as the crisis progressed. Reports on the developments at the encampments note drunken disorder as much as smallpox itself.⁵⁰ A Tsimshian man was described "covered

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Quarantine", *British Colonist*, 26 March 1862.

⁴⁹ "The Small Pox among the Indians", *Daily Press*, 27 April 1862.

⁵⁰ "Indians at Cadboro' Bay", *Daily Press*, 27 May 1862.

with corruption and sores”, with “the death rattle sounding in his throat”, while “not five paces away” the unafflicted sat “engaged in gambling, quite...unconcerned.”⁵¹ Further, both newspapers link the epidemic to the moral failings of the *white* population: the *Colonist* called it a “fit judgment” for the settler population’s “intolerable wickedness in allowing such a nest of filth and crime to accumulate within sight of their houses, and within hearing of our churchbells”, referring to the Songhees reserve; the *Daily Press* ascribed the spread of disease into the town to the whites’ “disseminating vice profligate” in the form of whisky to the aboriginals.⁵² This preoccupation with questions of morality distracted from the pressing need to enact effective quarantine and to vaccinate both white and aboriginal in and around the town. Further, the focus on the immorality of the aboriginal victims dehumanized them and distracted from the disease’s true (and understood) means of communication: contact with the infected.

Indeed, the measures taken to combat smallpox – and the press’s judgement of them – reflect more this racist-moralist conception of disease than contemporary medical knowledge. The *Daily Press*, in spite of having espoused quarantine early in the outbreak, expressed “great hope” that the spread of disease had been stemmed following expulsions in early May, “the centre of contagion having been effectively scattered.”⁵³ Further, it praised the “sanitary precaution” of barring white settlers from visiting the Reserve, though it noted that there was little medical attention and no medicine for the afflicted there.⁵⁴ Quarantine, as enacted in Victoria, separated settler from indigenous rather than

⁵¹ “The Small Pox”, *British Colonist*, 28 April 1862.

⁵² “Small-Pox among the Indians”, *British Colonist*, 28 Apr 1862; “The Indian Mortality”, *Daily Press*, 17 June 1862.

⁵³ “The Small Pox and the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 1 May 1862.

⁵⁴ “Small-Pox Among the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 18 May 1862; “Small Pox on the Reserve”, *Daily Press*, 8 June 1862.

infected from healthy. That the disease would spread in the indigenous population seems to have been taken as a given; Victoria's settler population sought only to protect themselves.

De facto segregation under the guise of measures to protect public health and order was not new to Victoria. The sale of liquor to "Indians" was prohibited under 1854 and 1860 acts of the Colonial Legislature of Vancouver Island.⁵⁵ Indigenous people were seen as particularly susceptible to alcoholism. An indigenous man found dead in the town in June likely "met with his death through indulgence in the red man's most fatal vice."⁵⁶ The offense of selling liquor to Indians was taken seriously. Reports of such cases appear frequently in the press, and offenders could be punished with up to a year's hard labour.⁵⁷ Reports of drunk and violent white men appeared often, but without the use of the same racial language. That these were construed as public order and health measures rather than racial segregation is clear; following a dispute in the town, the *British Colonist* asserted that a black man could not be refused drink at a bar "on account of his colour".⁵⁸

Public inaction was further excused through a notion of the inevitability of aboriginal deaths. The *Colonist* wrote that it would "not be surprised" if the disease destroyed "every tribe of Indians between here and Sitka." Later, it predicted that "a Northern Indian [would] be an object of curiosity in two years".⁵⁹ The *Press*, likewise, upon learning of the spread of smallpox along the coast, predicted "the destruction

⁵⁵ *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1851-1871*, vol II, ed. James E. Hendrickson (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1980), 14-15; 58-69.

⁵⁶ "Death from Drinking", *Daily Press*, 4 June 1862.

⁵⁷ "Giving Liquor to Indians", *British Colonist*, 5 April 1862.

⁵⁸ "Shall a Black Man Drink at a White Man's Bar?", *British Colonist*, 28 June 1862.

⁵⁹ "The Small Pox", *British Colonist*, 27 May 1862.

perhaps of the whole Indian race in the British Possessions on the Pacific.”⁶⁰ Though these predictions bear a tone of regret, the question of preventing the loss of life was never raised in a meaningful way. Indeed, as Daniel Francis has noted, an attitude of concern but above all of resignation towards indigenous mortality was characteristic of settlers in mid-nineteenth-century British North America.⁶¹ Discussion of the purchase of the Songhees reserve in the Colonial Legislature in 1859 was put off as it was predicted that, in any case, the Songhees would “become extinct”, probably “in a very few years.”⁶² The expulsion of the “Northern Indians”, which was recognized as propagating smallpox along the coast, was thus cast as simply the hastening of an inevitable (if regrettable) process.

Some criticism was leveled against the authorities for their inaction and the public for their lack of concern. The *Daily Press* argued that the town authorities had acted not as the “Good Samaritan” by enacting quarantine and administering vaccination, but instead had driven “these people away to death, and disseminate[d] the fell disease along the coast.”⁶³ Though it might be tempting to construe this as genuine concern for indigenous welfare and a call for better response to disease, the broader context of *Press* coverage demonstrates otherwise. Not two weeks earlier, the *Press* itself had been calling for the expulsion of the “Northern Indians”. Further, any criticism of the response to the crisis is offered in the context of a broader criticism of government. The *Press*’s favourite issue – the town’s failure to incorporate – is a common theme, invoked as a factor in

⁶⁰ “The Indian Mortality”, *Daily Press*, 17 June 1862.

⁶¹ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 16-17.

⁶² *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures*, 80.

⁶³ “The Indian Mortality”, *Daily Press*, 17 June 1862.

almost all coverage on smallpox response.⁶⁴ While the image of the “poor Indian”, victim of white vice, was often invoked, this paternalistic rhetoric was rarely used to recommend real responses to the crisis, but was instead exploited in the criticism of government.

Those like Reverend Garrett, who showed both a willingness to help the infected and an awareness of the nature of the disease, appear to have been in the minority.

A similarly racist and moralist conception of disease was common across Victorian-era British North America. The unfounded association of smallpox with the Chinese led to race riots and the expulsion of the Chinese from Calgary in 1892.⁶⁵ Here, the rhetoric evinced a familiar settler mindset: the infected Chinese men ran a laundry, a livelihood that ran counter to Victorian-era norms of gender, while their living habits were seen as “filthy”.⁶⁶ These facts were seen as inextricable from the disease. Leprosy, too, was constructed in racial-moral terms. In Atlantic Canada, as Joanne Hamilton notes, the disease was publicly associated with Acadians. Dr. A. C. Smith, charged with management of the disease, assured authorities that “hard-working” Icelandic immigrants, by contrast, would not pose a threat to public health.⁶⁷ In Victoria in the 1890s, leprosy was particularly associated with Chinese men: of 49 men exiled to the D’Arcy Island lazaretto between 1891 and 1924, 43 were Chinese.⁶⁸ This was in spite of Dr. Helmcken’s recognition that the Chinese were not particularly susceptible to the

⁶⁴ for instance, “Sanitary”, *Daily Press*, 27 March 1862; “Small Pox in Town”, *Daily Press*, 2 June 1862.

⁶⁵ Kristin Burnett, “Race, Disease and the (Un)Making of Calgary’s Chinatown, 1892”, *Social History of Medicine* 25 no. 2 (2012), 392.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁶⁷ Joanne Hamilton, “Race, Contagion, and Discrimination: Endemic Leprosy in 19th Century New Brunswick”, *University of Western Ontario Medical Journal* 78 no. 1 (2013), 77.

⁶⁸ Renisa Mawani, “The Island of the Unclean’: Race, Colonialism and ‘Chinese Leprosy’ in British Columbia, 1891 – 1924”, *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal* (2003),

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2003_1/mawani/>

disease.⁶⁹ The settler tendency to understand disease in racial and moral terms was not confined to Victoria, nor to the specific case of smallpox, but was a recognizable theme in British settler towns in the Victorian era.

The understanding of race, then, was clearly essential to the settler understanding of and response to the smallpox outbreak. The press manifests a complex racism in the settler worldview. Though it is clear that white lives were more highly valued, not all non-whites were understood equally. A pseudo-scientific theory of race underlay distinctions between Chinese, blacks, and sub-groups of “Indian” in the town.

In the settler understanding, race was tied to supposedly innate physical and behavioural characteristics. The *Colonist* reported in March 1862 on a trial in San Francisco in which a man claiming to be a Portuguese Jew had been determined to be, in fact, a “quadroon” after a doctor had examined his hair.⁷⁰ The judge excluded his testimony because of this; the *Colonist* reproduced the story uncritically. Locally, too, similar pseudo-scientific methods of racial identification were employed. A dead body was found in the harbour in “an advanced state of decomposition” in May 1862. “Several locks of coarse black hair remained attached to the skull (which was not that of a Flathead Indian)”; based on the skull shape and hair the body was determined to be that of a “Northern Indian”, a designation not relating to any single First Nation, which will be discussed in greater detail below.⁷¹ Two “Cariboo Indians” visiting the town were described as “a shade or two darker than the Northern Indians”.⁷² It is clear that in the settler understanding, such physical characteristics were linked to distinct and codifiable

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “A Medical Test”, *British Colonist*, 27 March 1862.

⁷¹ “The Foul Murder”, *British Colonist*, 29 May 1862.

⁷² “Cariboo Indians”, *British Colonist*, 1 April 1862.

“races”. More important in our understanding of the smallpox epidemic, however, are the behavioural or moral attributes that were also linked to race.

The category of “Northern Indian” was frequently used in settler discourse. Most often, it referred to the inhabitants of villages and camps on the outskirts of Victoria who migrated there seasonally to work in the town. These camps in fact comprised indigenous people of a few distinct nations: Tsimshian, Haida, Tlingit, Heiltsuk and Kwakwaka’wakw.⁷³ While markers denoting specific groups – such as “Chimsean” or “Hydah” – were sometimes used in the press, “Northern Indians” or “Northerners” were more common. In the Victorian settler theory of race, these “Northern Indians” were defined by shared characteristics in addition to their geographic origins in a large area to the north of Victoria. In addition to the physical attributes detailed above, the Northerners were seen as especially violent and lacking in moral conviction. It was assumed that the man whose body was found in the harbour, being a “Northern Indian”, had “fallen a victim to the jealous or revengeful promptings of some fellow countrymen.”⁷⁴ This conclusion was reached with no evidence; the body appeared to have been strangled with a rope, but there was nothing substantial to identify either the victim or the murderer as a Northerner. Unidentified burglars on Salt Spring Island were similarly presumed to be Northerners.⁷⁵ Even James Douglas, discussing the encampments in the Colonial Legislature in 1856, called the Northerners “armed savages, who have never felt the restraining influences of moral and religious training and who are accustomed to follow the impulses of their own evil natures”.⁷⁶ This was in spite of the fact that the seasonal

⁷³ Lutz, “Victoria, 1862,” 36.

⁷⁴ “The Foul Murder”, *British Colonist*, 29 May 1862.

⁷⁵ “Indian Robberies at Salt Spring Island”, *Daily Press*, 15 June 1862.

⁷⁶ *Journals of the Colonial*, ed. James E. Hendrickson, 6.

migrant workers had “been quiet and orderly in their deportment”; it is clear that the propensity for violence was seen as *innate* in the “Northern Indian”.⁷⁷

Given the conflation of morality and health in the settler worldview, this construction of “Northern Indian” informed perception of the smallpox crisis. Before retreating with his people to Discovery Island to wait out the crisis, “King Freezy” of the Songhees opined that the Chimseans had been “visited with the small pox as a punishment for their many sins”.⁷⁸ Though less explicitly, the settler press likewise linked the supposed immorality of the Northerners to their particular suffering in the epidemic. During the expulsions of the Haida from Ogden Point, perhaps the climax of settler irresponsibility in the crisis, the *British Colonist* took the opportunity to relate a history of the particularly “warlike” nature of the Northerners, and averred that the Haida chief had actually *requested* an escort by gunboat to protect his people from the enemies they had made along the coast.⁷⁹ This may have been a factor in the differing treatment of the local Lekwungen and the “Northerners” by settler authorities. As noted above, “King Freezy” had been vaccinated early in the outbreak, whereas help to the inhabitants of the encampments was minimal and slow to arrive.

The two newspapers expose a Victoria that was increasingly concerned with the appearance and propriety of the town space. Seemingly minor concerns such as puddles on public roads and garbage disposal merit mention in both the *Press* and the *Colonist*. These concerns are framed as potential deterrents to immigration: a puddle on Store Street renders the street unfit “for the traffic which is increasing every day”, and,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “The Small Pox”, *British Colonist*, 29 April 1862.

⁷⁹ “Goodbye to the Northerners”, *British Colonist*, 12 June 1862.

facetiously, “strangers arriving by the next steamer will be delighted at the beautiful inland lake”.⁸⁰ Further, access to the town space was increasingly regulated. Both white and aboriginal men were arrested for “wandering about” at night and charged as “vagrants”.⁸¹ When the order was given to expel indigenous people from the town in late May, those working for whites would be excepted; only the “vagrant members of the tribes” would be required to leave.⁸² Penelope Edmonds has argued that the category of “vagrant” was “born of racialized municipal codes” that enforced segregation and were typical of “urbanizing settler colonialism.”⁸³ Such rules were racialised as Victoria police began in 1861 to remove all indigenous people found in the town after 6pm except those who were, as Adele Perry has articulated it, in a “subservient relationship” with the town’s settlers: that is, those who could prove they were employed by whites.⁸⁴ As Victoria’s settler population strove for development and white immigration, the town space was reordered to meet these goals. Indigenous people not needed for development were defined, both legally and rhetorically, as out of place.

The language around the presence of infected indigenous people in and around Victoria is notably similar to that used in describing the town’s physical aspect. News of disease in the Northerners’ Encampment was “calculated to alarm immigrants, and not improbably have a tendency to keep them away.”⁸⁵ Indeed many of these “immigrants” were themselves transient workers on their way to the goldfields; nonetheless, the miner’s encampment at Rock Bay was not seen as a threat to town order as was the Northerners’

⁸⁰ “A Mud Hole”, *Daily Press*, 25 March 1862; “Store Street”, *British Colonist*, 24 March 1862.

⁸¹ “Vagrant”, *Daily Press*, 24 March 1862; “Night Wanderer”, *Daily Press*, 1 June 1862.

⁸² “Compulsory Departure of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 28 May 1862.

⁸³ Edmonds, “Unpacking Settler Colonialism’s Urban Strategies”, 6.

⁸⁴ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 113.

⁸⁵ “The Small-Pox among the Indians”, *British Colonist*, 28 April 1862.

Encampment, in spite of the fact that smallpox had been brought to Victoria by a miner.⁸⁶ In criticising the town authorities for inadequate refuse disposal programs, the *Colonist* compared them to Indians, and the town to the reserve.⁸⁷ Even healthy indigenous people were seen as out-of-place in the developing town, and detrimental to town order. “For four years,” the *Press* wrote in June, “Victoria has suffered to an extent unknown in any civilized town in the universe from an Indian population...Thefts were committed with utmost impunity”.⁸⁸ Thirty Indigenous people camped in Esquimalt caused “a world of trouble”, though no mention was made of whether any were infected nor exactly what sort of trouble they were causing.⁸⁹ Though the “poor Indians” are cast not as villains but as victims of bad colonial government, the message is clear: both indigenous and white lose through contact, and Victoria’s future is as a white city.⁹⁰

Furthermore, Victoria’s settler population was preoccupied with the value of property, which was rising. In March of 1862 a lot on Store Street sold for \$7500; the *Colonist* asserted that a year previously, it “would not have brought \$3000.”⁹¹ The security of property value was a running concern. Frequent articles deal with speculators’ interest in agricultural land.⁹² Indigenous people were seen as a threat to this agricultural development. “Indians” were immediately blamed for the deaths of a few head of cattle in Saanich in March.⁹³ A subsequent report found this to be false; the cattle had died of disease following the harsh winter.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ “Robberies at ‘Canvastown’”, *British Colonist*, 19 May 1862.

⁸⁷ “Nuisance”, *British Colonist*, 5 June 1862.

⁸⁸ “The Indian Mortality”, *Daily Press* 17 June 1862.

⁸⁹ “Can’t Get Rid of Them”, *British Colonist*, 30 June 1862.

⁹⁰ “The Indian Mortality”, *Daily Press*, 17 June 1862.

⁹¹ “Sale of Real Estate”, *British Colonist*, 22 March 1862.

⁹² for instance, “The £4,000 Loan”, *Daily Press*, 6 May 1862.

⁹³ “South Saanich”, *British Colonist*, 26 March 1862.

⁹⁴ “South Saanich”, *British Colonist*, 31 March 1862.

It is clear, though, that fears of loss of property value due to the proximity of Indians were deeply rooted in Victoria settler society. During discussion in the Colonial Legislature in 1859 of plans to develop land near the Songhees reserve, it was argued that the “contiguity of the Indians would diminish very greatly the value of the land”.⁹⁵ Douglas called the Songhees reserve a “public inconvenience”, but argued that treaty terms prevented the Colony from seizing or purchasing it.⁹⁶ The settler understanding of development did not recognize indigenous land use: Representative James Yates advocated the seizure and sale of the “unoccupied” parts of the reserve, invoking (though not in name) the notion of *terra nullius* which underlay British claims to sovereignty over lands inhabited and used by indigenous peoples.⁹⁷ The presence of the “Northern Indians”, too, had been seen as a threat to development and property value. In the years before the smallpox crisis, landowners in the north of the town petitioned the Legislature to remove Northerners that had settled nearby.⁹⁸ Representatives Yates and Helmcken also put forward motions to petition the governor to have the “Northern Indians”, specifically, removed from the town environs.⁹⁹ That these particular men showed concern over the value of property and the presence of indigenous people is significant. The Legislature represented only propertied men, and the representatives themselves all had significant interest in real estate.

The perception of indigenous people as part of the town space is crucial to understanding the settler response to the smallpox crisis. The desire to expel the

⁹⁵ Hendrickson, *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures*, 80.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71-2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 180, 203.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

“Northern Indians” from the town did not arise in the context of the crisis. The ideal of a white settler town and interest in property value had, over the course of the preceding years, cast the indigenous person into the role of “inconvenience” or “nuisance” in the settler mindset. The specific language is telling: just like poor infrastructure, the indigenous person was seen as an impediment to development and a deterrent to immigration. The expulsion of the Northerners from the town, then, was not only a response to a public-health crisis, but the realization of the goals of segregation and the reordering of the town space.

Changes in the broader economy and labour market also shaped settler attitudes towards indigenous people. First as a fur-trade fort then as a developing settler town, Victoria depended on indigenous labour and trade. John Lutz has rejected the long-held notion that indigenous people ceased to be involved in the development of Vancouver Island and British Columbia after the decline of the fur trade. Rather, he argues, indigenous labour continued to be vital in burgeoning agricultural, primary-resource, and industrial sectors.¹⁰⁰ Arthur Ray has argued that HBC policies that maintained indigenous welfare, whether through smallpox treatment or food distribution, were motivated by the need to protect its labour pool in a context of labour scarcity.¹⁰¹ As the settler response in 1862 was a departure from this practice, the question of labour and trade merits closer examination.

In 1862, new sources of labour were becoming available. Though the Gold Rush was increasing the need for infrastructure development, it was also bringing increasing

¹⁰⁰ John Lutz, “After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 3 no.1 (1992), 69-93.

¹⁰¹ Arthur J. Ray, “The Decline of Paternalism in the Hudson’s Bay Company Fur Trade, 1870-1945”, in *Merchant Credit and Labour Strategies*, ed. Rosemary E. Ommer (Fredricton: Acadiensis, 1990), 188.

numbers of employable white men. The construction of wagon roads to the goldfields, for instance, was discussed constantly in both Victoria newspapers. Advertisements seeking hundreds of labourers for these projects were a fixture during the months of the epidemic. That these advertisements ran in a settler newspaper in Victoria demonstrates that the developers had some expectation of finding white labourers. In addition to gold-rush immigration from the south, immigrants from Great Britain were reported with excitement.¹⁰² The ideal of a white settler city, driven by white labour, was apparently becoming more feasible.

Furthermore, Chinese immigration brought a new source of cheap labour. The *Colonist* reported in June that the contractors on the Yale and Lytton road, “for want of men, [were] compelled to hire Chinamen”.¹⁰³ Though the racial judgement here is clear, the Chinese role in the labour force was viewed pragmatically in the context of the colony’s development needs. In April the *Colonist* had printed a report from its San Francisco correspondent, who argued that racial judgements were best left aside, as Chinese immigrants were important to that colony both as labourers and as bringers of capital and trade.¹⁰⁴ Though it acknowledged settlers’ qualms about Chinese immigration, the *Colonist* suggested that Vancouver Island and British Columbia might too benefit.

Finally, within the town, it seems that convict labour was exploited for many infrastructure and maintenance projects. Men who committed crimes – often those crimes discussed above, of vagrancy and selling liquor to Indians – were given the option of paying a fine or serving time with hard labour. The two newspapers reported on the

¹⁰² “What Will We Do with It?” *Daily Press*, 3 June 1862.

¹⁰³ “Laborers Wanted”, *British Colonist*, 14 June 1862.

¹⁰⁴ “The Chinese Question in California”, *British Colonist*, 1 April 1862.

progress of the chain gangs in maintaining roads under the direction of Police Commissioner Pemberton.¹⁰⁵ This system, through which those seen as out-of-place or inconvenient in the town space were used to remedy the flaws in the space itself, illustrates well the changes the town was undergoing.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that indigenous people – both the local Lekwungen and the Tsimshian, Haida, Tlingit, and other “Northerners” – remained thoroughly integrated into the town and its economy in 1862. Though indigenous people were ordered to leave the town as the epidemic worsened, those working for whites were granted an exemption, if their employers applied.¹⁰⁶ The *Press* noted that the police office received “many” such applications from the employers of indigenous servants.¹⁰⁷ Later, it was reported, townspeople were “harboring Indians, and screening them from the observation of the Police”, showing that some were resistant to the loss of the indigenous element of the town’s population.¹⁰⁸ In addition, though the *Daily Press* had argued that the resulting “new demand in the labour market” would “conduce to the permanent benefit of the colony”, local lumber yards complained that they were having to pay whites more than they had paid indigenous men.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, John Lutz has noted that the white population, increasing though it was during the Gold Rush, was insufficient to meet the developing colony’s labour needs. To meet this demand, northern indigenous people migrated seasonally to Victoria in increasing numbers from 1858 on. These men and women of the Haida, Tlingit,

¹⁰⁵ “The Chaingang”, *Daily Press*, 9 May 1862; “Store Street”, *British Colonist*, 24 March 1862.

¹⁰⁶ “Compulsory Departure of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 28 May 1862.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ “Removal of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 9 June 1862.

¹⁰⁹ “Compulsory Departure of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 27 May 1862; “‘Tis an Ill Wind Etc.”, *Daily Press*, 18 May 1862.

Tsimshian, and Kwakwaka'wakw nations were crucial to economic development, including the agricultural development that so interested the settler population.¹¹⁰

The diaries of Augustus Pemberton provide a specific – and highly pertinent – illustration of this. The man who, as Police Commissioner, oversaw the expulsion of the Northerners from the town's environs himself employed northern indigenous people as farm labourers both before and after the crisis. He hired “Bilbella”, “Stickeen”, and “Hydah” “Indians”, apparently on a day-to-day basis, paying them either in cash or in trade goods, such as shirts or sailcloth.¹¹¹ They built fences and dug ditches, and worked with the livestock on his farm.¹¹² Though the records for the year 1862 are missing, Pemberton's 1863 diary shows that he continued to hire indigenous labourers regularly after the smallpox epidemic.¹¹³ Though the press might have decried the “Northern Indians” as a moral blight and disease risk, a settler like Augustus Pemberton could have friendly relations with “Charly” the “Stickeen” and depend on his labour.¹¹⁴

The ideal of a white town that no longer needed indigenous labour, constructed in the *Colonist* and the *Press*, was at odds with the reality of economic development. Indigenous people – both the local Lekwungen peoples and seasonal migrants from the north – remained vital in the town and on the settler farms around it. Nonetheless, the view espoused by the newspapers helps to explain the settler response to the outbreak of smallpox. Whereas in the fur-trade era the central authority in the HBC had recognised its dependence on indigenous labour and meted out support in the form of food, goods and

¹¹⁰ Lutz, “After the Fur Trade”, 78.

¹¹¹ British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), Augustus Pemberton, PR-1556, E/B/P37a, Diary 13 May 1856; 16 May 1856; 17 April 1858; 10 May 1858.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ BCA, Augustus Pemberton, PR-1556, E/B/P37, Diary 22 August 1863; 29 August 1863; 30 July 1863.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 23 Feb 1863.

medical care accordingly, the settler population of Victoria in 1862 saw itself in a period of transition. The newspapers show a keen interest in immigration – particularly from Europe – and link this to the possibility of new labour sources. A settler population that saw itself as less dependent on indigenous labour (regardless of the veracity of this understanding) was less inclined to protect this labouring class from disease by enacting effective quarantine and providing vaccinations. Instead, it let its racist conceptions of disease and morality drive its response in a departure from the HBC practice that many settlers – particularly those in positions of authority – were undoubtedly familiar with.

The specific attitudes towards indigenous women merit closer attention.

Indigenous women had been an integral part of fur-trade era Victoria, and remained a vital part of the community. Nonetheless, the language used by the press during the months of the epidemic shows that an element of settler society viewed them as out-of-place and an impediment to the development of the white settler town. The newspapers at times used the words “Indian woman”, but more often, indigenous women were referred to as “squaws”, a term that captured the connotations of both race and gender in the settler worldview.

In addition to working as servants, as noted above, it seems that indigenous women were most thoroughly integrated into the town as part of mixed-race couples with white men. The language used by the press in describing these relationships casts them as illegitimate. While the *Press* accepted that men employing or married to indigenous women might keep their servants or wives in the town in spite of the expulsion orders, it argued “those keeping mistresses are scarcely entitled to our sympathy.”¹¹⁵ The choice of

¹¹⁵ “Removal of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 6 June 1862.

words is telling: by referring to the indigenous partners of white men as “mistresses” rather than wives or spouses, the *Press* casts a moral judgement on the relationship. This language is consistent. An infected “squaw” would be identified as the “paramour” of a “debased” or “degraded” white man.¹¹⁶ The indigenous woman was thus cast as a threat not only to the health of the white population, but to its moral rectitude. That these mixed-race couples constituted something that could be understood as a family, however, is clear. The *Colonist* noted that many men had cohabited with their indigenous partners for “many years”, and had children with them. The women showed “true motherly affection for their young” and “naturally refuse[d] to be separated from them”.¹¹⁷ This obviously posed a quandary for the *Colonist*: though it had argued for the expulsion of indigenous people from the town and cast moral judgements on mixed race couples, it could not go so far as to advocate breaking up families. It resolved this issue by calling for the men to “make the best of a bad bargain” by marrying their partners.¹¹⁸ “By this means, if they cannot themselves attain to any exalted status in society, they will at least legitimate their offspring”, the *Colonist* concluded.¹¹⁹ As Adele Perry has noted, however, white men on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia often lived for years with indigenous women without marrying in the European way.¹²⁰ Further, it seems that the original expulsion order was later modified to allow indigenous women living with white men to remain in the town, regardless of whether they were married.¹²¹ A tension is thus evident in settler society. Though some vocal colonialists disapproved of mixed-race

¹¹⁶ “The Small Pox”, *Daily Press*, 19 June 1862; “More Small-Pox in Town”, *Daily Press*, 16 June 1862.

¹¹⁷ “How to Get Rid of a Troublesome Question”, *British Colonist*, 29 May 1862.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 59.

¹²¹ “Prostitution Recognized by Government”, *British Colonist*, 2 June 1862.

marriages and the presence of indigenous women in the town, indigenous women and their offspring remained thoroughly integrated into the Victoria community. This tension is perhaps best exemplified in a June story from the *Colonist*. It noted that a “half-breed boy, said to be a child of Policeman Weihe”, had died.¹²² The author proceeded to call on the police to continue with the expulsion of the indigenous people from the town in order to protect its inhabitants.

Adele Perry has captured the nuance of this tension in settler society. She notes that the main sources available on the issue, missionaries and journalists, “represented mixed-race relations and their children as inimical to the establishment of a respectable white settler colony in British Columbia”.¹²³ She cautions, however, that these writers are almost never people *in* mixed-race relationships, and, further, that they tend towards sensationalism as a product of their vocations.¹²⁴ It is important, then, not to take at face value the animosity towards indigenous women as exposed in the newspapers. Indeed, given the evidence that indigenous women *were* so thoroughly integrated into the town, it seems likely that the settler sentiment was not so universally negative as the newspapers might suggest.

Perry has also noted that Northwest-coast indigenous women, for instance of the Haida and Tlingit, were seen as particularly “licentious”.¹²⁵ This further exposes the intersection of the particular racism and sexism of settler society, and helps to explain the particular hostility towards Northerners during the crisis.

¹²² “Small Pox in the Ravine”, *British Colonist*, 10 June 1862. Emphasis mine.

¹²³ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 49.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

As the epidemic worsened, the indigenous woman was increasingly identified solely as a prostitute. Jean Barman has argued that this rhetorical tactic, common “around the colonized world, ... was used by those who sought to meddle in Indigenous lives. Sexuality was not to be talked about openly, but prostitution and all that it implied could be publicly condemned.”¹²⁶ The nature of relationships between white men and indigenous women likely varied widely from sex work to transient cohabitation to long-term cohabitation; Barman’s interpretation emphasises the agency of indigenous women, who sought to gain advantage in the “tumultuous world” of the Gold Rush.¹²⁷ However, all mixed-race relationships were cast as “prostitution” by those who sought to regulate sexuality in Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Indeed, the Victoria daily newspapers used the term “prostitute” liberally and did not restrain their moral condemnation. When the expulsion order was modified to allow indigenous women living with white men to remain in the town, the *Colonist* wrote:

Honest and well-disposed Indians, who had been vaccinated and were employed in town as servants, have been driven north by the Police for no other reason than that they are Indians, while squaws, with neither decency nor cleanliness to recommend them, are allowed to remain because they wear hoops and are prostitutes.¹²⁸

The invocation of the term “prostitute” allowed the *Colonist* to condemn unequivocally the complex practice of cohabitation. Further, it manifests a particular aversion towards indigenous *women*. Whereas some indigenous *men* had been productive members of the community, and merely the unfortunate casualties of a necessary medical measure, the indigenous woman was an active moral detriment as well as a threat to public health. The

¹²⁶ Jean Barman, “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900”, *BC Studies* 115/116 (1998), 242.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 244, 245.

¹²⁸ “Prostitution Recognized by Government”, *British Colonist*, 2 June 1862.

note on “hoops” is particularly telling. Crinolines were a mark of European femininity (a report promising increased female immigration was entitled “A Shower of Crinoline in Prospective”),¹²⁹ but clearly the author disapproved of indigenous women wearing them. He thus dismissed the idea that indigenous women could be part of the “British” society to which he aspired, the idea that they might fill the role of idealized femininity in the settler family. The conflation of indigenous women with prostitution, solidifying this rejection, was thorough and frequent in both newspapers.¹³⁰ “Squaw dance-houses” were a particular target of disapproval and were equated with “brothels”; further, they were seen to be part of the moral degeneracy that had brought smallpox upon the town.¹³¹ Even when they posed no threat of disease – real or imagined – indigenous women were reviled by the press. A report of “Indian Prostitutes” on Esquimalt road makes no mention of smallpox, but asks “why were not the squaws sent off with the bucks?”¹³² Indeed, even before the smallpox outbreak, town segregation measures, such as the racialised curfew noted above, were aimed particularly at indigenous women, who were seen to pose a particular threat to the mores of the settler population.¹³³ Clearly, though the expulsions were enacted under the pretense of a public-health measure, the ultimate goal in the minds of some settlers was the removal of indigenous people – and particularly indigenous women – from the town.

The ideal was a space that was “safe” for the white settler family. One of the first letters to the editor to call for the expulsion of indigenous people was signed simply “A

¹²⁹ “A Shower of Crinoline in Prospective”, *British Colonist*, 14 May 1862.

¹³⁰ for instance: “Assaulting a Squaw”, *British Colonist*, 5 April 1862; “More Small-Pox in Town”, *Daily Press*, 16 June 1862.

¹³¹ “The Indian Mortality”, *Daily Press*, 17 June 1862.

¹³² “Indian Prostitutes”, *British Colonist*, 13 June 1862.

¹³³ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 114.

father”.¹³⁴ Settler families near the encampment at Cadborough Bay were in “daily dread”, not only of disease but also of “outrage”.¹³⁵ The *Press* hoped that the ejection of indigenous people would effect “a marked moral change in the town”.¹³⁶

As was the case with the labour market, the situation in 1862 looked hopeful for those who sought to realize a white settler society based around the family. The *Colonist* reported with excitement that a British society was planning to send women to British Columbia and Vancouver Island to marry single men.¹³⁷ The women immigrants were written of as a “commodity”, in much the same terms as the capital the paper saw as vital to the development of the mines.¹³⁸ Adele Perry has argued that those promoting female emigration in the metropole sought to portray a colonial society of sexually frustrated white men lacking access to partners.¹³⁹ The whitening of the town – and the removal of indigenous women that this entailed – was likely seen as vital to its appeal as a destination for white, female immigrants. Whereas previously, in the absence of white women, indigenous women had been a necessity in Victoria society, the changes occurring in 1862 were making the ideal of a settler society based around the white family ever more feasible.

Thus it is clear that the conceptions of gender and the family were in an uneasy period of transition in 1862. Indigenous women remained thoroughly integrated into the town, both as workers and as the partners of white men. Nonetheless, a racist

¹³⁴ “The Small Pox”, *Daily Press*, 27 April 1862.

¹³⁵ “Indians at Cadboro’ Bay”, *Daily Press*, 27 May 1862.

¹³⁶ “The Compulsory Departure of the Indians”, *Daily Press*, 27 May 1862.

¹³⁷ “A Shower of Crinoline in Prospective”, *British Colonist*, 14 May 1862; “Wives for our Bachelors”, *British Colonist*, 4 June 1862.

¹³⁸ “A Shower of Crinoline in Prospective”

¹³⁹ Adele Perry, “Oh I’m just sick of the faces of men: Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia”, *BC Studies* 105/106 (1995): 34-35.

understanding of indigenous sexuality cast these women as a threat to the town's morality and to the ideal of the white settler family. Because of this, the pre-existing desire to have them removed became heightened in the context of the smallpox crisis; this sentiment is clearly illustrated in the press. However, resistance to the expulsion orders, by both white men and the indigenous women themselves, demonstrates that not *all* elements of town society viewed the indigenous woman with distrust and fear. The settler response to the epidemic is best understood in the context of this tension.

Conclusions

The decision to clear the camps of Tsimshian, Haida, Tlingit, Heiltsuk and Kwakwaka'wakw people would have disastrous consequences. As Robert Boyd argues, the resulting epidemic, which claimed 20 000 indigenous lives, opened the Pacific Coast for settlement. It accelerated a demographic transition that would see the number of settlers in British Columbia surpass that of indigenous people in the 1880s.¹⁴⁰ The motivations behind this decision are obscure in the historical record, however. The expulsion of the northern indigenous people was a departure from earlier HBC practices, which had employed quarantine and vaccination to protect the indigenous labour force from outbreaks of smallpox. Further, the reasoning of settler authorities is unclear.

Instead, the context of settler discourse helps to explain this decision. The daily newspapers manifest an understanding of disease that was inextricable from moral judgement and a pseudo-scientific classification of races. The "Northern Indians" were seen as both particularly susceptible to smallpox and particularly deserving of it, due to their supposed tendencies towards violence, drunkenness and poor hygiene. Further,

¹⁴⁰ Lutz, "After the Fur Trade", 70.

indigenous people, diseased or not, were increasingly cast as out-of-place in the developing town by an element of the population that was preoccupied with the price of property, the promise of immigration and the propriety of the town space. For those who held such views, the situation looked hopeful: immigration was increasing, offering alternatives to the town's dependence on indigenous labour. Finally, indigenous women were especially reviled by the press. Their presence in the town and especially their cohabitation with white men were an affront to the era's sexual mores and the ideal of the white settler family. By casting the indigenous woman as a prostitute, the press could argue that she was a threat, regardless of whether she was working or living with her family in the town.

However, the attitudes expressed in the press give only one perspective on the indigenous-settler relationship in Victoria in 1862. Some settlers, like Reverend Garrett, showed concern for indigenous welfare and the willingness to take effective (if insufficient) steps against the disease. Further, as they had been since the fur-trade era, and would remain in future economic development, indigenous people were vital to the town and colony as labourers; this is illustrated in the reports on labour shortage following the expulsion. Finally, less explicit evidence in the press shows that indigenous women were thoroughly integrated into the town as workers, spouses and mothers. Though the more vocal segment of the settler population saw them as an impediment to development and a threat to morality, other men continued to cohabit with and employ indigenous women in spite of the expulsion order.

Victoria, then, was in a period of transition. In 1862, as a legacy of Victoria's development as a fur-trade fort and then as a town with a small settler population,

indigenous people had become thoroughly integrated into the community, both economically and socially. Nonetheless, the daily newspapers show that a vocal portion of the population aspired to a settler town built around the white family and driven by white labour, where the mercantilist mentality of the fur trade would be replaced by private landholding and agriculture. In this vision of the town, indigenous people were out of place and an impediment to progress. The desire to remove them from the town and environs thus antedated the epidemic of 1862. The prejudices that underlay this desire were merely heightened during the crisis, leading the settler population to ignore the standards of smallpox response and instead, ultimately, to bring about the spread of the disease along the coast.

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