

Domestic service in British Columbia, 1850-1914

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1995

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ABSTRACT

From the mid 1850s through the early 1900s, the white middle and upper class inhabitants of British Columbia persevered in their attempts to solve the ‘servant problem’ and to re-create the British domestic sphere in a new land. Some families emigrated with their British servants in tow. There were repeated efforts to import English girls and women *en masse*. And many employers were obliged to tolerate ‘strangers’ (Aboriginal and Chinese servants) in their homes. British Columbia’s peculiar ‘servant problem’ ensured that the Imperial vision of employer-servant relations and domestic order could not be exactly reconstructed.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The predominantly British inhabitants of what was to become British Columbia arrived with the idea that they could transport their comfortable class-based societal structure to the dynamic new world. One feature that they attempted to bring to British Columbia was a domestic situation where the 'mistress of the house' reigned over a work force of compliant domestics who undertook the gruelling tasks of maintaining a middle or upper-class household. These tasks included cooking, cleaning, sewing, preserving food, providing firewood, washing clothes, tending gardens and farm animals, and raising children. According to English precepts, the respectability of the household was partially contingent on the employment of at least one reputable, white (usually female) servant. Servants were a practical necessity as well as a status symbol.

Unfortunately, colonial British Columbia did not have a 'serving class' population that could accommodate the physical and psychological needs of British immigrants. The Hudson's Bay Company employees who first settled in Victoria either took 'brides of the country' from the local First Nations communities or brought out spouses from England. In either case, the managerial class needed a supply of labour to maintain the social sensibilities of their positions. White women and girls from England were the most desirable servants but the many attempts to bring them to the colonies had limited success. There were so few single white women in the colonies that the new domestics were soon married to miners, woodsmen or fishermen. Moreover, continuing industrialization in England reduced the potential supply of white female domestics by

finally giving options to the traditional British 'serving class'; they could take on waged labour in the shops and factories instead of going into service at home or abroad.

In the early years of settlement in British Columbia, the First Nations people were the only labour available to assist British immigrants in maintaining their expected lifestyles. While some individuals were prepared to do domestic service, it was not a favoured occupation among the First Nations people who had secure social positions within their own culture and plenty of seasonal work. Much to the annoyance of the white employers, their responsibilities to their Clans or Nations often took precedence over their domestic duties. Thus, the English immigrants could not count on the First Nations population to help them maintain ordered households.

By the 1860s, Chinese immigrants were also a potential source of labour. The Chinese first arrived with the gold rush in the late 1850s along with other gold seekers from California. In the early 1880s, large numbers of Chinese men were brought in to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway. When the railroad was completed in 1885, many of them remained. The Chinese were diligent workers, kept to themselves and often lived frugally in order to send money home to support families in China. They were predominantly male and they tended to maintain their distinctive language, culture, clothing style and even the 'queue' hairstyle. These factors, and the supreme arrogance of white English settlers, led to discrimination. However, Chinese men made exemplary domestic servants. They would take on all of the heavy tasks of the frontier household, from splitting wood, to gardening, to washing clothes and cooking the meals. They were conveniently stereotyped as being feminine and submissive, which made them 'safe' domestic workers. While individuals who worked with the Chinese often lauded their

character and performance, other whites in British Columbia virulently espoused anti-Chinese sentiment. The provincial legislature frequently attempted to restrict Chinese immigration or to impose discriminatory taxation but most of these efforts failed because the courts found them to be unconstitutional or the federal government disallowed them. However, the federal government finally acceded to the political demands of the racists in British Columbia and enacted a 'head tax' of \$50 in 1885, which it raised to \$100 in 1901 and to \$500 in 1903. The head tax curtailed the supply of Chinese domestic servants; the exclusionary Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 halted any new supply.

Much information about B.C.'s Chinese, First Nations and white domestic servants appears in the letters, diaries and reminiscences of the women who maintained the middle-class and upper class homes in the early years of British Columbia. While descriptions of these households are not a true indication of the situations for less wealthy families, such materials do provide insight into employer-servant relations. Two of the most prolific upper-class sources are Florence Baillie-Grohman and Jennie Phillips-Woolley whose writings were included in their husband's books. Both wrote about their own and other employer-servant interactions in British Columbia.¹ The letters of Mary Moody,² the diaries of Susan Holmes³ and the reminiscences of Susan Allison⁴ also provide first-hand descriptions of maintaining a

¹ Florence Baillie-Grohman, "The Yellow and White Agony," in W.A. Baillie-Grohman, *Fifteen Years' Sport and Life: In the Hunting Grounds of Western America and British Columbia*, (London: Horace Cox, 1900), 333-361. Jennie Phillips-Wolley, in Clive Phillips-Wolley, *A Sportsman's Eden* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888), 28-29, 181-186.

² British Columbia Archives, (hereafter, BCA), MSS-1101, Mary Moody, to her mother and sister; 18 February, 21 March, 1 September and 18 September 1859; 12 September, 14 November and 18 December 1861; 23 September 1862 and 26 February 1863.

³ BCA, MSS-2576, Susan Holmes, *Diaries 1865-1911*; 8, 11 and 24 August 1874, 28 January 1875.

⁴ Margaret A. Ormsby, ed., *A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1976).

household. Other early observers, including the missionary Robert Brown⁵ and immigration-promoters Duncan MacDonald,⁶ Frances MacNab⁷ and Frances Herring,⁸ made similar comments. The vibrant local press also provides a window on the changing view of domestic service in general, and of the fluctuating need for domestic servants. Victoria's newspapers, the *British Colonist* (the *Daily British Colonist* from 1866-1886 and the *Daily Colonist* from 1887), the *Daily Press*, the *Daily Times* and the *Gazette* (later the *Weekly Gazette*), include articles, editorials and letters-to-the-editor addressing the attitudes of the community toward white female, First Nations and male Chinese domestics.

British household advice manuals of the time, such as *Cassell's Book Of The Household*,⁹ Flora Klickmann's, *Mistress of the Little House*,¹⁰ James W. Laurie's *Home and Its Duties*¹¹ and Julia Wright's *The Complete Home*,¹² offer insight into the class consciousness involved in the construction of the mistress-servant relationships in the late nineteenth century. Such manuals, of course, often reflect the aspirations of the writers rather than the actual workings of the home environment. Edward Higgs has rightly equated their use as primary sources with "using Vogue to reconstruct the life-

⁵ Robert Christopher Lundin Brown, *Klatsassan and other Reminiscences of Mission Life in British Columbia* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1873).

⁶ Duncan George Forbes Macdonald, *British Columbia and Vancouver's Island* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1862).

⁷ Frances MacNab, *British Columbia for Settlers: Its Mines, Trade, and Agriculture* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), 76-95.

⁸ Frances E. Herring, *Among the People of British Columbia: Red, White, Yellow and Brown* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903).

⁹ *Cassell's Book Of The Household: A Work of Reference on Domestic Economy*, Vol. 1 (London: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1889).

¹⁰ Flora Klickman, ed., *The Mistress of the Little House: What She Should Know and What She Should Do When She Has an Untrained Servant*, ([circa 1900]).

¹¹ J.W. Laurie, *Home and Its Duties; a Practical Manual of Domestic Economy for Schools and Families*, (Edinburgh: Thomas Laurie, 1870).

¹² Julia McNair Wright, *The Complete Home: An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Life and Affairs* (Brantford, Ontario: Bradley, Garretson & Co.).

style of the 'typical' modern family."¹³ Nevertheless, combined with other primary sources, the manuals can illuminate the context for employer-servant relationships.

No secondary sources deal exclusively with domestic service in British Columbia. However, in their broader works Lisa Chilton,¹⁴ Adele Perry¹⁵ and Peter Johnson¹⁶ discuss the immigration of white domestics. Johnson provides details of the 1862 immigration schemes and the reactions of Victoria's single male population. Perry argues that the absence of white female servants from white households ensured that "supposedly normal gender, racial, and class relations were disrupted."¹⁷ Chilton examines the motivations of British female emigrants and emigration promoters. Eric W. Sager has provided another valuable source with his article, "The Transformation of the Canadian Servant." He examines the changes in the supply of servants and the "relative material advantages"¹⁸ of domestic service

Unfortunately, few secondary sources include information about British Columbia's First Nations and Chinese servants, but Patricia Roy¹⁹ and Terry Abraham²⁰

¹³ Edward W. Higgs, "Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England," in *Social History*, ed. Janet Blackman and Keith Nield (Hull: University of Hull, 1986), 203.

¹⁴ Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 141.

¹⁶ Peter Johnson, *Voyages of Hope: The Saga of the Bride-Ships* (Victoria: British Columbia Arts Council, 2002).

¹⁷ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 141.

¹⁸ Eric W. Sager, "The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871-1931," *Social Science History* (December 2007), 1.

¹⁹ Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989).

²⁰ Terry Abraham. "Class, Gender and Race: Chinese Servants in the North American West." Paper presented at the Joint Regional Conference Hawai'i/Pacific and Pacific Northwest Association for Asian American Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 26 March 1996 (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Library Special Collections).

offer some insight into the Chinese ‘situation,’ and John Lutz²¹ and Rolf Knight have written about Aboriginal labour. In her book about the political and economic machinations behind the ‘Asian question’ in British Columbia, Roy discusses the domestic labour shortage that gave rise to the employment of Chinese men. Although the Chinese in general were thought to be ‘unclean,’ this “did not noticeably reduce the demand for Chinese domestic servants.”²² Studying only male Chinese servants, some in California but mainly from B.C., Abraham attempts a detailed sketch of the daily experiences of a ‘typical’ Chinese domestic. Most of his information comes from a chapter that Mrs. F. Baillie-Grohman wrote in her husband’s book—*Fifteen Years’ Sport and Life*. Abraham and Roy explain the assignment of stereotypes that allowed the Chinese to fill a labour niche that few white people wanted. John Lutz and Rolf Knight refute the stereotype of an ‘indolent’ First Nations population. Indeed, “they were the main labour force of the early settlement era.”²³

Despite a paucity of secondary sources for British Columbia, studies of domestic service elsewhere provide some insights. Particularly useful are those that discuss the British ‘servant problem.’ However, some of these sources do tend to focus on the victimization and perceived immorality of domestic servants, rather than looking at any agency within their positions. For example, in a traditional approach, E. S Turner²⁴ focuses on workplace hardships and the honesty-immorality issues between employers and servants. Rather paternalistically, he contends that, given their conditions of work,

²¹ John Lutz, “After the fur trade: the aboriginal labouring class of British Columbia 1849-1890,” *Journal of the Canadian History Association*, 1992.

²² Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, 36.

²³ Lutz, “After the fur trade,” 70.

²⁴ E.S. Turner, *What the Butler Saw: Two hundred years of the servant problem* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1962).

undisciplined female servants would be prone to immoral activities. Teresa McBride²⁵ is less condemning of the female servants' immorality and of their 'mistresses' irresponsibility, while Jessica Gerard,²⁶ looks at social causality and asserts that class-consciousness created and promoted stereotypes about female servants' moral inferiority.

This class-based categorization of immorality is also a theme in the studies of domestic service in Canada by Magda Fahrni²⁷ and Claudette Lacelle.²⁸ Lacelle gleans a common middle-class perception of servant immorality from plays, novels, periodicals, newspapers and household advice manuals. Fahrni and Lacelle agree that the circumscribed conditions of 'service' might have driven some female servants to acts of resistance – even criminal acts. However, as well as the class-based reasons for victimization or resistance, Fahrni looks at the gendered nature of so-called immorality. Young girls who entered 'service' were supposed to be in a protected environment. In effect, they “were both preparing for their future roles as working-class wives and maintaining the role of daughters – industrious and obedient – for a wage.”²⁹

Over the last half of the nineteenth century, British Columbia evolved from scattered fur trade posts through a raw frontier gold rush society to an economy dominated by resource extraction and agriculture. In 1855, “the total European

²⁵ Theresa M. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernization of Household Service in England and France, 1870-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 73.

²⁶ Jessica Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

²⁷ Magda Fahrni, "Ruffled' Mistresses and 'Discontented' Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1890-1914" in *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997).

²⁸ Claudette Lacelle, *Urban Domestic Servants in 19th-Century Canada* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1987).

²⁹ Magda Fahrni, "'Ruffled' Mistresses and 'Discontented' Maids," 3.

population of Vancouver Island Colony was a mere 744 persons,” and the Aboriginal population of British Columbia was “approximately, 50,000 people.” The discovery of gold on the Fraser River brought a rush of miners in 1858 resulting in estimates of “10,600 in the main mining regions” and about “3,000 more or less permanent residents” in Victoria. Gold production fell off in the 1870s, but development began in “commercial fishing, lumbering and agriculture.”³⁰ These later ventures did precipitate an increased European presence; the Census numbers for the summer of 1870 revealed that there were only 8,576 white residents in B.C., whereas there were 1,548 Chinese, “some 450 blacks”³¹ and an estimated 37,000 Aboriginals.³² The 1881 Census indicated that the latter group remained in the majority at 51.9 per cent of the total population.³³

Despite the fact that the indigenous peoples outnumbered the white residents until the mid 1880s, middle-class and upper class English immigrants were determined to re-create the protected environment that they and their servants had experienced in the home country. The following chapters investigate attempts to recreate an “aspirant squirarchy”³⁴ in British Columbia through the keeping of domestics.

Chapter 2 discusses the efforts to import the English female servants needed to maintain a genteel and influential household in the North American colonies. Individual families brought their family retainers from England. Emigration societies in England

³⁰ Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1848-1930*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996) 82 and 87.

³¹ Knight, *Indians at Work*, 89.

³² Lutz, “After the fur trade,” 93.

³³ Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 379.

³⁴ Knight, *Indians at Work*, 84.

subsidized transportation costs to encourage disadvantaged women and girls (of good character) to relocate. Unfortunately for the employers, those who did come had many opportunities to marry in female-starved British Columbia, or they could strike out on their own as entrepreneurs or teachers in a rapidly growing economy.

The third chapter looks at the attempts of early colonists to co-opt First Nations people into becoming the servant-class that was an expected part of the English lifestyle. Although some Aboriginal men, women and children did participate in paid domestic labour, the colonists' efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. The strong Aboriginal culture did not need to mould itself into a replica of the genteel English countryside. Aboriginal women had enough to do in just providing the necessities for their own families. At best, the First Nations would only participate in seasonal domestic work.

Chapter 4 investigates the attempts of the English immigrants to retain male Chinese servants. The racism and economic fears of white British Columbians resulted in successive laws limiting the rights and freedoms of the Chinese population. Such discrimination periodically allowed British settlers to coerce Chinese domestics into supplying their labour at prices below market rates. Chinese workers were especially vulnerable at the time of their 'release' from building the C.P.R. Eventually, however, the Chinese work ethic and economic forces ruled the day; again, the new world conspired against the old order. The demand for their domestic services ensured that the Chinese could move between employers to seek better pay and working conditions. Others opted for wage labour in the laundries, fish-packing plants and particularly in entrepreneurial market gardens.

From the mid 1850s through the early 1900s, the white middle and upper class inhabitants of British Columbia persevered in their attempts to solve the 'servant problem.' Certainly, some householders did come to accept the fact that they would have to put up with only occasional help or learned to manage on their own, but this only solved the practical aspect of home making. There was still the need to recreate a British domestic sphere wherein the 'better' households employed at least one respectable and deferent member of the 'serving class.' Given the gender demographics and the unusual ethnic mix in B.C., many employers were obliged to tolerate 'strangers' (Aboriginal and Chinese servants) in their homes. Racial stereotyping was the key to the employers' acceptance of these domestics. Male Chinese servants were feminized and Aboriginal servants were seen to be childlike. Both stereotypes conveniently allowed for their treatment as inferiors. However, throughout this era the urgency to import white female domestics persisted. In accordance with the Imperial project, they would not only stand as a status symbol for their employers, but would eventually marry white settlers and help to perpetuate the ideal as respectable wives and mothers. Although some of these preferred domestics did emigrate, their numbers were not sufficient to satisfy the need and they did not stay long in their positions. Much like the native-born daughters of established immigrants, they were reluctant to 'serve' due to the onerous working conditions and the negative social status. Other than the period when Chinese men and boys were an accepted part of the domestic and social scene, the 'servant problem' was never quite solved in British Columbia.

Chapter 2

WHITE FEMALE DOMESTICS

By the mid-nineteenth century in Britain and its colonies, the keeping of servants was both a practical necessity and a status symbol in most upper class and many middle-class homes.¹ The practice was an Imperial marker of gentility. Ideally, the female heads of such households were not expected to take part directly in domestic labour. At least, a “lady” did not do all of her own housework,² but had to know how to instruct her servants/servant in the correct performance of these duties. However, in British Columbia, the proper instruction of servants was a lesser issue than their availability. During the 1860s and 1870s, the preferred British female domestics were rarely available and the situation had improved very little by the early 1900s. Moreover, while class distinctions did exist, British Columbia’s white domestic servants were more independent than their British counterparts. They were usually employed in one-servant households, often of necessity working with their mistresses on a familiar basis. In an under stocked market, they could also change employers frequently. And, of course, in B.C. there were more opportunities for the ultimate alternative to a life as a paid female servant – marriage.

One of the more obvious explanations for the lack of female servants involves British Columbia’s frontier status. The resource-based economy (initially, the gold

¹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender & Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 224.

² Marilyn Barber, “The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestic for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930,” in *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women’s History Volume 2*, eds. Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1985), 103.

rushes) had complicated the demographics,³ ensuring that more men than women would arrive. The census indicates that females made up only 25.6 per cent of the “non-native Indian adult population” in 1881 and 25.4 per cent in 1891 and increased only slightly to 30 per cent by 1911⁴. Unfortunately for potential employers, where there was a lack of females in general, their potential as wives and mothers had priority over the need for domestic servants.

Complaints about the availability of white, female servants appeared in newspapers and in the diaries, letters and reminiscences of many early settlers. Among the few references to domestic life in the renowned physician John Sebastian Helmcken's reminiscences is a comment that white domestics were “very scarce”⁵ throughout the colonial years. Similarly, Mary Moody, the wife of Col. Richard Moody of the Royal Engineers, wrote in 1859 that when she arrived in New Westminster, her own servant Kitty and “Mrs. Gosset's nurse are *positively* the only two women servants in the place.”⁶ After a visit to Victoria in 1861, Moody complained: “I did not succeed in getting a female servant ..., nor do I see any chance of one at present.”⁷ Similarly, Alexander Rattray, a writer of emigration literature, asserted in 1862 that English servants “can scarcely be had at all, or but for short periods: most of them get married soon after

³ Terry Abraham. “Class, Gender and Race: Chinese Servants in the North American West.” Paper presented at the Joint Regional Conference Hawai'i/Pacific and Pacific Northwest Association for Asian American Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 26 March 1996 (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Library Special Collections), 1.

⁴ Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 385.

⁵ Dorothy Blakey Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975), 213.

⁶ British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), MS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 18 February 1859, 3.

⁷ BCA, MS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 12 September 1861.

arrival in the colony.”⁸ The servant ‘problem’ did not improve. In 1874, Susan Holmes, formerly Susan Nagle (the wife of an Anglican missionary), mused that she would “be so glad if [she] could get help of some kind.”⁹ She had been looking for a few weeks and found it “very vexing that we can’t get a servant here.”¹⁰ Another newcomer in the 1870s, Florence Baillie-Grohman, was also “vexed” at the lack of white domestics. In her reminiscences, she claims that there were not “more than three families in Victoria, the capital, employing white servants.” They “could not be obtained in the country, but had to be imported at their employers’ expense from the Old Country.”¹¹

Employers often “imported” British servants or brought them with them. In a letter to her mother, Mary Moody suggested that Bishop Hills’ wife should bring a female servant with her since she would “get nobody of any description out here.” Fortunately, Moody had had the foresight to bring her English servant, Kitty, along with her even though veteran colonists had warned her that she would not keep her English help for long. They were correct; much like many of her new world contemporaries, Kitty soon left the Moody household. She married the Moody’s former manservant James and the two started a public house in Victoria. Moody complained that such English immigrants were “very little good out here, they get lovers at once.” She offered another example; her young servant, Bessie Bull, was fervently admired by a soldier who, “while on duty,” had “done nothing all day but look at Bessie ironing.” Bessie soon left and was replaced by a domestic who Moody described only as “pretty” and who, she feared, “will ere long

⁸ Alexander Rattray, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Where They Are; What They Are; And What They May Become* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862), 175.

⁹ BCA, MSS-2576, Susan Holmes, *Diaries 1865-1911*; diary, 8 August 1874, 3.

¹⁰ BCA, MSS-2576, Susan Holmes diary, 24 August 1874.

¹¹ Florence Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” in *Fifteen Years Sport and Life*, by W.A. Baillie-Grohman (London: Horace Cox, 1900), 333.

follow”¹² the former servant’s example of marriage. Florence Baillie-Grohman agreed that white servants “seldom stayed in their places long, as they quickly married or left to obtain higher wages.” After ten months of employment, one of her white servants, who she referred to only as “nice-looking,” “went the way of all fair maids and married.”¹³ In fact, after her maid’s departure, Baillie-Grohman discovered that not one, but three men had been engaged to her “nice-looking” domestic. It was not surprising that *she* had chosen marriage over service!

One strategy for retaining domestic help was to avoid hiring attractive females of a marriageable age. Certainly, the younger the servant was, the lesser the chance of marriage. With this idea in mind, Susan Holmes “brought a little girl from Victoria,” Luisa Millington, home with her. Holmes recorded in her diary that “I am to clothe, Teach & give her a home in return for her services. So far she goes along very well.”¹⁴ Luisa, or Lulu, must have been quite a help. After her arrival, Mr. and Mrs. Holmes began to host weekly musical evenings with their friends. Susan Holmes commented that she could even leave her infant son, Harry, in young Lulu’s care while she attended church services and made the social and charitable visits required of a minister’s wife.

Whether or not he had the responsibilities of a clergyman, the male head of the upper/middle class household did have an investment in the domestic environment. After all, the smooth running of his home would ensure a personal haven as well as a social and political asset. Some husbands actually became directly involved in the hiring of domestic servants. For example, before leaving England, Henry Crease, on behalf of

¹² BCA, MSS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 21 March 1859.

¹³ Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 333, 359.

¹⁴ BCA, MSS-2576, Susan Holmes diary entry 28 January 1875.

his wife Sarah, wrote to a prospective servant/nurse, Jane Ellis, describing her expected duties:

Mrs. Henry Crease begs to inform Jane Ellis that if she is to enter her service she ... will rise early (at 6 o'clock) to be constant in her attendance Jane Ellis will also be required to dust her nursery every morning, to light the fire when necessary and always to keep herself and her room very clean and neat. The nursery is scrubbed once a week by another servant.

Crease also stipulated that Jane Ellis would be expected to stay in their employ for two months "unless previously parted with by Mrs. Crease." In her book *Pioneer Days in British Columbia*, Violet Sillitoe, wife of Bishop Sillitoe, reported on a desperate husband in British Columbia who also took direct action. After the loss of one English servant, he wrote to England saying "send us out another girl but for goodness sake, let her be the ugliest one you can lay your hands on, for I am tired of their always getting married."¹⁵

Ironically, the possibility of marriage was an incentive for female immigration. Colonists expected that most of these young women would serve out their terms as domestic servants, then marry and help to increase the white population, thus perpetuating the English economic and moral lifestyle. They would be the "daughters of the Empire' and 'mothers of the race.'"¹⁶ An 1861 *British Colonist* editorial (which would have been read in England) extolled one of the advantages of emigration.

No sooner does an unmarried woman arrive here than a host of admirers offer to make her happy for life ... we have at least a thousand young men willing to get married, the scarcity of unmarried females is an inducement for parents having large families to make this town their home.¹⁷

¹⁵ Violet E. Sillitoe, *Pioneer Days in British Columbia: Reminiscences from 1879 to 1894* (Victoria: Private publication, [circa 1920]), 16.

¹⁶ Sedef Arat-koc, "From 'Mothers of the Nation' to Migrant Workers," In *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*, Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 39.

¹⁷ "Inducements to Families to Settle in Victoria," *British Colonist*. Victoria, 30 November 1861, 2.

The editorial also mentioned the flourishing educational, commercial and religious institutions and the safe and healthy environment. The aggravated editor of the *Daily Press*, however, quickly refuted the *British Colonist's* claim. He admitted that women-centred families are “the most desirable description of immigration,” but claimed that prudence dictated that unmarried female emigrants should not be encouraged until “the road question, the Indian question and the school question have been addressed.” It would be cruel to have young women leave Britain “for a precarious existence in a country that ... offers a severe test to even the hardy ... settler.”¹⁸

Six months later, the *British Colonist* clarified the type of female that would benefit the colonies. It warned that well-educated women and girls would find that “Colonial life has its thorns.” Certainly, if an educated woman such as a governess required a ‘lady’s maid’ to attend upon her, refused to answer the door, or would not stoop to clean the house, she would neither be happy nor useful in the Western colonies. The editorial closed with a description of the ideal female immigrant.

The women we want ... are women prepared to rough it as well as our selves: women who, while acting as domestic servants, the class we particularly lack will possess all the fair graces of womanhood and the virtues which make them an ornament to their sex, at once modest servants as well as modest wives.¹⁹

Another *Colonist* writer advised that if English girls knew that “by accepting service ... they would not shut themselves out from drawing a prize in the great lottery of life,” they would flock to British Columbia and, after all, their performance “as servants shall be the best test of their fitness to enter woman’s highest and holiest sphere of action.”²⁰

¹⁸ “Inducements to Families to Settle in Victoria,” *Daily Press*. Victoria, 2 December 1861, 2.

¹⁹ Editorial, *British Colonist*. Victoria, 1 July 1862, 2.

²⁰ *Daily Colonist*. Victoria, 4 February 1869, 2.

Former servants may well have been fit to take on *their* role in the domestic sphere, whereas many upper-class colonial women had few domestic skills and were often overwhelmed by the unaccustomed drudgery. Even for the women who had some skills, the lack of labour-saving devices required a period of adjustment. In *Henry & Self*, Kathryn Bridge lists the typical duties of a female homemaker. When they were not giving birth or raising children, colonial women were responsible for:

the physical maintenance of the house and furnishings, the cleaning and upkeep of personal items such as clothing, linen and bedding; the acquisition, processing, storage and preparation of food.²¹

They also mended, sewed, grew and harvested crops. A few saw these domestic hardships in a positive light. For example, a Victoria woman wrote to the editor of London's *Daily Telegraph*, that Colonial "women, like men, must work." Indeed, in a young colony where servants are scarce, women have no time for weeping or "fancied griefs." Where there are no nurses, "Children are ... not banished to nurseries and taught defective English, vulgar manners and a fear of ghosts or blackmen."²² Dr. Helmcken would not have agreed. He very much regretted the fact that his wife, Cecilia, had experienced tremendous domestic hardships—especially in the early colonial years. He insisted that household duties were "carried on pretty roughly and Cecilia had more work and less comfort than she ought to have had." When Cecilia died from a combination of pneumonia and childbirth, the doctor mused: "She had been a good mother and wife — but hardly [*sic*] used by the absence of servants ... I am almost led

²¹ Kathryn Bridge, *Henry & Self: The Private Life of Sarah Crease, 1826–1922* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1996), 91.

²² "Marriage or Celibacy," *British Colonist*, 2 September 1868, 3.

to the belief that under more favourable conditions she might have lived – but who knows?”²³

While Susan Allison, Sarah Crease, Susan Holmes, Mary Moody and Margaret Wood did manage with few or no servants, they frequently complained about the hardships of keeping house. In the early days of their new-world adventures, Mary Moody and Susan Holmes were somewhat optimistic about their unaccustomed household challenges and insisted that with their husbands’ help they could manage. Moody admitted that housekeeping without a servant would not be pleasant, but “one can put up with a great deal of inconvenience and trouble ... when one sees everybody doing for themselves, one begins to conclude we can do as well!”²⁴ In her diary, a rather exasperated Susan Holmes recorded that she was tired of hiring servants only to have them leave within weeks or days and that she and her husband David were “determined at any rate for the present to do the work themselves.”²⁵

When Sarah Crease could not obtain servants, she did not have the option of a husband’s assistance. Even if he *had* been inclined to help with domestic chores, Judge Henry Crease was frequently away from home. Instead, Mrs. Crease had to rely on her eldest daughters. Despite her pride in the girls’ domestic abilities, she was concerned about their formal schooling: they were “not learning all that girls of their age should ... for the constant pressure of domestic drudgery”²⁶ As time passed, it became clear to

²³ Smith, *Reminiscences*, 213 and 215.

²⁴ BCA, MSS-2576, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 1 September 1859.

²⁵ BCA, MSS-2576, Susan Holmes diary entry 28 January 1875.

²⁶ BCA, MSS 55, Vol 13/3, Sarah Crease to Emily Crease 10 August 1869, *Crease Family Papers*, 15-19.

these middle-class and upper-class women that even with family help, they would need servants to ease their workload.

Of all the labour intensive and time-consuming duties performed throughout the week, laundry was the most dreaded by women and girls of all 'classes.' The work was physically demanding and often took all day. By the mid-nineteenth century, the advent of sewing machines and the increased availability of manufactured cloth allowed people to own more clothing.²⁷ Of course, these factors only served to increase the amount of laundry in most households. While still living in Britain, women such as Susan Allison, Sarah Crease and Mary Moody did not have to use the scrub boards or carry the boiling water for the washtubs.²⁸ While commercial laundries were sometimes an option, "laundry maids" or other household servants usually performed such chores. In her domestic training manual, *Home and Its Duties*, an English writer, James Laurie instructed his readers (servants and homemakers) on the proper methods of home laundering. His recipe for the washing of 'whites' required that each lot of laundry was soaked over night in one gallon of cold water and "half a pound of soap, half a pound of soda, and a quarter of a pound of quicklime." In the morning, the laundry mixture was transferred to a ten-gallon 'copper' of water and boiled for thirty minutes to one hour. Each lot was then rinsed in "cold blue water" and wrung by hand or put through a 'mangle.' Linens, muslins and "other fine things" had to be starched before being ironed.²⁹ Whether in England or British Columbia, "wash-day" was back breaking work.

²⁷ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 64-65.

²⁸ Terry Abraham. "Class, Gender and Race: Chinese Servants in the North American West," 2.

²⁹ James Werner Laurie, *Home and Its Duties; a Practical Manual of Domestic Economy for Schools and Families*, (Edinburgh: Thomas Laurie, circa.1870), 35 and 36.

Not surprisingly, the British Columbia residents who had 'servant problems' spent much of their time either arranging to have the laundry done for them or grudgingly doing it themselves. Susan Allison recalled that when she and her mother first arrived in Hope, they did not know how to do the laundry and there was no one to help. "We had a tin bath tub ... that we used for a wash tub and as we were ignorant as to the use of wash boards, we bent over the bath and rubbed with our hands till they bled and our backs felt broken."³⁰ Susan Holmes was delighted when she did get some help with her washing. She wrote that her new "maid was up at 5 O.C & had the washing done by 12." Holmes was pleased that the job had only taken seven hours and expected that if her maid "continues as she has begun I shall think her a treasure." Unfortunately, her "treasure" quit nine days later. Holmes had only intermittent help for the next few months. On one occasion, she hired a servant named Jinny who "came to wash and managed to occupy the whole day in doing the white clothes." Displeased with Jinny's work, or at least the time it took her to do the work, Holmes decided to do her own laundry but recorded in her diary, "Did some washing today, quite an event for me. I haven't done as much for years" Obviously, Holmes did not enjoy washing her own clothes and linens, but she eventually became resigned to the situation. After one particularly exhausting washday, she noted that "strange to say I don't feel any the worse for it, except that my hands are rather stiff." On another occasion, when she was suffering from a cold, she concluded "it is no use being ill if I can't get anybody to do the work, so may as well get *well* quickly and do it myself."³¹

³⁰ Margaret A., Ormsby, ed. *A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1976), 9.

³¹ BCA, MSS-2576, Susan Holmes diary entry 11 August 1874, 3.

Mary Moody was not so resigned to her new domestic situation. Her letters are inundated with complaints about the difficulties of housekeeping and household management. Not long after her arrival in New Westminster, she hoped to hire a nurse who “would do the washing in the house & help in any other little ways” as well as take care of the baby. In the Moody household, washing was a significant chore. In the previous week, she and her servant had washed “27 dozen things.” When yet another servant was leaving to marry, Moody commented that she would not be missed, as “she was too dirty by far.” She ended her complaint: “I am *sick* of Servants out here! I now have nobody to do my washing – A pleasant thing with 7 dirty children!”³² A relatively affluent woman such as Mary Moody did not even have the option of sending her laundry to a commercial establishment as such facilities were not then available.

The burden of housework was never more keenly felt by these women than before, during and after childbirth. Mary Moody and Margaret Wood made both subtle and overt references to the inconveniences posed by their “delicate” conditions. Mary Moody had the assistance of military doctors when giving birth, but only occasional help with the ever-increasing nursery duties. She therefore made use of Colonel Moody’s sappers as nursemaids. In 1861, she wrote “Gentlemen became experienced Nurses here, for they are obliged to help in holding babies” If they did not volunteer to do so, it was “quite customary to say ‘Do carry Baby for me please.’”³³ However, the intermittent help of sappers was not the answer to her children’s care. In September 1862, Mary Moody sent for a maid who could not only help “with the children & the

³² BCA, MSS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 26 February 1863.

³³ BCA, MSS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 4 November 1861.

housework,” but also take her youngest, Mary, on outings. Moody explained that: “I am not fit to do so now and afterwards, I should have the baby to carry.”³⁴ Moody was expecting her seventh child.

Although Margaret Wood was only having her first child in 1886, she too was often “not fit” to carry on all of her household duties. Fortunately, her husband Rev. James Wood was able to take on some of her chores. At about the sixth month of her first pregnancy she wrote: “Was sick this morning, but felt I must not put off the washing any longer, so went at it and managed to get it done with some help in the housework from James.” Her mother eventually came to help and stayed until “the baby was twelve days old” and then sent her own maid Ada “to stay in her place” for a few weeks. After Ada’s departure, Wood complained: “I find housekeeping comes pretty hard now ... I am not strong yet and may have to send for Ada to come again.”³⁵ Excerpts from her husband’s diary confirm the hardships of her domestic situation. On a particular laundry day in 1887, he commented that he had had to help his wife, whom he called Jennie, for she “had a very hard day’s work and was completely used up. It was too much for her.”³⁶ He had tried to hire a domestic help, but none was available.

One of the early schemes to fill the servant void and to increase the population generally was to “import” them en masse. To this end, some of Victoria’s upper-class residents formed a Female Immigration Committee to work in conjunction with London’s Columbia Emigration Society. Victoria’s *Daily Press* explained that both groups intended to facilitate “the emigration of industrious women ... to the colonies of Vancouver Island

³⁴ BCA, MSS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 23 September 1862.

³⁵ BCA, MSS-257A, Margaret Jane (Sweet) Wood diary entry 18 April 1886.

³⁶ BCA, MSS-257A, Reverend James Wood diary entry 26 July 1887.

and British Columbia.”³⁷ This endeavour would solve a colonial deficiency and help to reduce a surplus population of women in the United Kingdom. It reported that an estimated 600,000 females in England had “no lords and masters to look after them.” In addition, in England, Scotland and Ireland combined, “the softer sex have a majority of 855,921 over their sterner lords.”³⁸ The reasons for this imbalance included differing mortality rates (more females than males survived childhood); the enlistment of men and boys in the military; and more male “emigration to the colonies.”³⁹ A change in the emigration statistics would help to ease the surplus.

In the first importation effort, sixty girls and women sailed from Dartmouth on the steamship *Tynemouth*. The *Daily Press* reported that 50 of the immigrants had “obtained free passage from the Female Emigration Society and the remaining ten availed themselves of the protection afforded by the Society, paying their own expenses.”⁴⁰ When they landed in Victoria harbour in September 1862, a large crowd of anxious suitors and hopeful employers were on hand to greet and inspect them. The newspapers followed their every move. On September 19th, a *Colonist* reporter commented that the “lady passengers ... are mostly cleanly, well-built, pretty-looking young women — ages ranging from fourteen to an uncertain figure; a few ... have seen better days.”⁴¹ However, the editor of the *British Columbian* reported that more than a few had seen better days. *Although most of the girls “were neat and tidy,” there were only “a few that might be called good looking.”* The majority appeared to be twelve to

³⁷ Columbian Emigration Society,” *Daily Press*, Victoria, 8 June 1862, 3.

³⁸ “Female Emigration,” *Daily Press*, Victoria, 29 June 1862, 3.

³⁹ Susan Jackel, ed., *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewoman in the Canadian West, 1880-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), xv.

⁴⁰ “Arrival of the Tynemouth,” *Daily Press*, Victoria, 18 September 1862, 3.

⁴¹ “Wouldn’t Let Them Aboard,” *British Colonist*, Victoria, 19 September 1862, 3.

fifteen years old. However, both papers saw the immigrants as commodities. The *Columbian* referred to the women as “the long looked-for and much talked-about cargo,” while the *Colonist* was “highly pleased with the appearance of the ‘invoices.’” The papers agreed that the experiment “will prove to the advantage of the girls, as well as those who may employ them.” They “will give a good account of themselves in whatever situation of life they may be called to fill — even if they marry.”⁴²

Clearly, marriage was on the minds of many of the new arrivals. Not surprisingly, most of the colony’s bachelors were eager to accommodate them. The *British Colonist* reported that when the *Tynemouth* finally arrived, a “large and anxious crowd of breeches-wearing bipeds assembled to see the women disembark, and generally expressed themselves as well pleased with their appearance.”⁴³ One bachelor was so pleased with the appearance of a young Sophia Shaw that he proposed to her on the route to her temporary lodgings — the Marine Barracks. The story is that, with little hesitation, she accepted his proposal of money and marriage.⁴⁴

Of course, the colonists who were desperate to hire the immigrants as domestic servants did not encourage marriage. Sarah Crease’s daughter Susan recalled that the idea had been to send for unmarried “girls of good character and good health” who would “pledge her word to remain in the situation chosen for her for a definite number of months.”⁴⁵ Both the *British Colonist* and the *Daily Press* reported that within three days, approximately thirty of the new arrivals had accepted domestic positions “at wages of

⁴² “Arrival Of The ‘Tynemouth,’” *Daily British Colonist*, Victoria 19 September 1862, 3.

⁴³ “The Tynemouth and her Cargo,” *British Columbian*, Victoria, 24 September 1862, 3.

⁴⁴ Allan Pritchard, ed., *The Vancouver Island Letters of Edmund Hope Verney, 1862-1865* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), 115.

⁴⁵ BCA, MSS-0055 13/3, Susan Crease, “The Brideship,” *Crease Family Papers*.

\$15 per month and upwards.”⁴⁶ Susan Crease commented that a majority of the *Tynemouth’s* sixty females began “colonial life in the way arranged for them.”⁴⁷ However, few stayed in their ‘situations’ for the stipulated period of time. If not right away, they were soon working exclusively in their own households.

The Immigration Committee indicated that those who stayed in service should receive wages commensurate with the wages in England. The recommended rate was £25 per year or about \$120 per year.⁴⁸ The *Daily Press* revealed that the immigrant domestics would be receiving “wages of \$15 per month and upwards”⁴⁹ or about \$180 per year. The *Daily Press* accused Victoria’s elite of short-changing the newcomers. By sending two or three girls to one ‘situation,’ individual wages could be lowered. The Committee had not done “the best in their power for the benefit of their charges.”⁵⁰ However, the quoted rate was 50 per cent above the stipulated wage rate in England, which casts doubt on the *Daily Press* accusation. Undoubtedly, the cost of living in the colonies was greater than in England, but it is likely that the colonists were paying a premium to acquire domestics rather than taking advantage of the new immigrants.

Whether or not the Committee members had the immigrants’ best interests at heart, they did try to control servant-employer negotiations. On September 24th, 1862, a week after the *Tynemouth’s* arrival, an announcement appeared in the *Daily Press*:

Persons desiring GOVERNESSES or SERVANTS are requested to apply in writing to Mr. Graham ... stating the description of service needed, and

⁴⁶ “The Female Immigrants,” *Daily Press*, Victoria, 21 September 1862, 3.

⁴⁷ Susan Crease, “The Brideship.”

⁴⁸ Peter Wilton Johnson, *Voyages of Hope: The Saga of the Bride-Ships* (Victoria: Touch Wood Editions, 2002), 169.

⁴⁹ “The Female Immigrants,” *Daily Press*, Victoria, 21 September 1862, 3.

⁵⁰ *Daily Press*, Victoria, 22 September 1862, 3.

the rate of wages offered. Fee payable to Office on engagement of a servant to be \$10.

By order of the Committee.
J.C. Davie, Hon. Sec.⁵¹

The extra ten dollars, probably to cover the costs (and profits?) of the Committee, would have ensured that only the wealthiest colonists would have applied. Some of the elite “put in their orders” even before the *Tynemouth* arrived. Through a cousin on the London Female Middle-Class Emigration committee, Louisa Twining,⁵² Mary Moody sent for one of the *Tynemouth* girls, preferably “a *young* girl both on account of her being less likely to marry and also as she would require less wages than an old girl.” Her young servant turned out to be “only fourteen, very small for her age, neither fit for nursery maid nor house maid and can’t sew at all.” Her friend, Mrs. Grant, had not fared better; she had been sent a “dirty-looking girl.” Moody was disgusted with the ‘quality’ of the servants provided by the Immigration Committee, and demanded that the Committee take her young servant back. She then “packed off the little girls.”⁵³ Moody did not comment on what happened to these girls.

Despite their dissatisfaction, employers such as Mary Moody still needed domestic help. Town officials and potential employers did not abandon the plan to import female servants en masse. Just three and one half months after the arrival of the *Tynemouth*, another ship, the *Robert Lowe*, entered Victoria’s harbour. The passenger list included thirty-six unmarried women and girls who, it was hoped, would soon enter

⁵¹ “Arrival of the Tynemouth,” *Daily Press*, Victoria, 24 September 1862, 3.

⁵² Jackie Lay, “To Columbia on the Tynemouth: The Emigration of Single Women and Girls in 1862,” in *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women’s History in B.C.*, eds. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), 35.

⁵³ BCA, MSS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 23 September 1862.

service. The editor of the *British Colonist*, Amor de Cosmos, expected that the newcomers “will be welcomed by many families ... who have been in need for some time of respectable female servants; and we trust the poor friendless creatures will be placed in no other kind of establishment.” The ‘other kind of establishment’ probably meant work in a hotel, a public house or perhaps even a brothel. De Cosmos carefully pointed out that the girls had emigrated under the auspices of philanthropist Maria Rye, who typically sought employment opportunities for ‘lower-class’ females. Although the girls were from Manchester, De Cosmos believed, “they must have conducted themselves at home with exemplary propriety, to be entitled to the assistance which their benefactress bestowed upon them.” He assured potential employers that while on board the *Robert Lowe*, the girls were not “allowed to mingle with the other passengers,” and the Captain had maintained an “unceasing regard for their strict propriety and behaviour.”⁵⁴

Similar assurances (or warnings) from the British Parliament about “appropriate” emigrants appeared in a British article reprinted in the *Vancouver Times* in 1865. In part it reads:

The select committee on emigration have reported in favour of His Excellency’s granting £3,000 for this purpose and have recommended the following classes.

Class A – Experienced unmarried female Domestic Servants, between 18 and 35 years of age, of good moral character selected from some of the Agricultural Districts of Great Britain and not from the manufacturing towns⁵⁵

Classes B, C, and D were Farm Families, single farm labourers and single females (under 35) respectively. Immigrants with farming experience were preferred in the

⁵⁴ "Arrival of the Robert Lowe," *British Colonist*, Victoria, 12 January 1863, 3.

⁵⁵ "Emigration," *Vancouver Times*, 28 February 1865, 3.

expectation that they were used to extremely hard work and had not had urban experience that would inform them of realistic employment options. They would also be less likely than urban females to be lax in their morals. Female domestics, “of good moral character,” were a priority. In his book about Vancouver Island and British Columbia, Matthew MacFie, informed intending English emigrants that: “Respectable females, neither afraid nor ashamed to work as domestics, are greatly in demand.” Indeed, if 500 girls of good character and industrious habits could be sent out in detachments of fifty ... at intervals of a month, they would be absorbed almost immediately on their arrival.” MacFie emphasized that, along with their value as servants, such “unmarried virtuous females” could eventually enter “that state upon which every right-minded woman cannot but look with approval.” They would become the much sought-after wives for the “many well-disposed single men prospering in the various trades and professions.” Certainly, this would have been a tempting emigration incentive. However, it is likely that few females “of this class” had access to MacFie’s book or had the ability to read it.⁵⁶

By 1869, the servant ‘situation’ had not improved. Newspaper accounts clearly reveal the continuing desire for female immigration despite some controversy over the effectiveness of importing women and girls *en masse* – especially through Female Immigration/Emigration Societies. The *Colonist* suggested that it was no longer sensible to bring females “out in batches of forty; they could be sent out in every vessel that came direct, a few at a time.” Therefore, they would be more easily provided for on the

⁵⁶ Matthew MacFie, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Their History, Resources and Prospects* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Grant, 1865), 496 and 497.

voyage and the cost would be less. The *Colonist* asserted that those colonists who desired servants should make more direct arrangements with the potential servant as an individual than had been the case in earlier immigration schemes.⁵⁷ However, another scheme was soon launched under the endorsement of Governors Anthony Musgrave and Frederick Seymour.⁵⁸ A local board set the cost for each immigrant at \$150; the Colonial Government would contribute a grant of \$50. The employer would be expected to pay the balance – \$50 – “in advance upon the acceptance of the application, and a \$50 promissory note ... payable on the arrival of the ship.”⁵⁹ The servant would be expected to pay back \$50 of the employers’ \$100 through a lien upon her wages. These servants would be bound to their employers for two years, after which time they might take advantage of the fact that “our settlers want wives.”

In a letter to the editor, “A Family Man” disagreed; he insisted that neither servants nor civic officials should undertake such a scheme. Indeed, the proposed \$100 investment was absurd; this was “a mere lottery” wherein “the officials have the first choice” of any immigrant servants. Instead, he suggested encouraging the immigration of families. The much-needed servants could be drawn from their midst. Servants “so obtained” would possess the additional advantage of parental restraints, which ... would be far more effectual in keeping the girls to their engagements than any written bond.”⁶⁰ And, of course, the time that a single indentured servant did spend in service would not allow for a significant population increase. “A Family Man” claimed that within ten years,

⁵⁷ "Untitled," *British Colonist*, Victoria, 26 March 1869, 3.

⁵⁸ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 162.

⁵⁹ “Assisted Female Immigration,” *British Colonist*, 14 April 1869, 2.

⁶⁰ “Immigrants,” *British Colonist*, 26 April 1861, 3.

an immigrant family would cause the population to “blossom like the rose” and that a family would produce more wealth in two years than the cost of importing seventeen unmarried servant girls.⁶¹ “

A Family Man” was only one of the unenthusiastic middle-class residents. Consequently, the board reduced the cost to both the employer and the emigrant, empowered Anglican Bishop George Hills to recruit servants in England and encouraged “bourgeois families to select their own servants or have British friends do so.”⁶² In June 1870, twenty-one females arrived on the *Alpha*. The *British Colonist* reported that they were “all cleanly, healthy, and well behaved.” Potential female employers were urged, “as far as circumstances may permit,” to act in a maternal fashion towards the girls. “Do not quite lose sight of the sister in the servant.”⁶³ It is unclear as to whether or not they fulfilled their initial domestic roles. However, this appears to have been the last attempt to import British females *en masse* for another two decades.

The ‘servant problem’ had not been solved by the 1890s. In her book for intending settlers, Frances MacNab commented that the employment of white servants “is so rare that they cannot be reckoned as a class in the country.”⁶⁴ Emigration schemes were revived in 1890 and 1899. The Anglican Bishop of New Westminster, the Rev. Arthur Beanlands and B.W. Pearse of Victoria formed the Pacific Coast Employment Society in 1890 specifically to secure domestic servants. Unlike previous

⁶¹ “Immigration,” *Daily Colonist*, 26 April 1869, 3.

⁶² Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 162.

⁶³ “Arrival of Female Immigrants” and “Arrival of the Alpha,” *British Colonist*, 15 June 1870.

⁶⁴ Frances MacNab, *British Columbia for Settlers: Its Mines, Trade and Agriculture*, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), 76.

immigration groups, they were not interested in procuring wives for the province but rather to recruit English “girls of good character, able and willing to work” and to be “a comfort ... to the ladies who employ them.” Each young woman would be advanced sixty-five pounds for her ship and rail fees, which she would later repay from her earnings. The *Colonist* warned that if the women “are unwilling to do their work well, if they are untidy, impudent and lax as to their morals, they will not be of any benefit to the housekeepers, and they will be anything but a desirable acquisition to the community.”⁶⁵ In fact, “John Chinaman” would be more desirable “than such women as these.” In 1899, the *Colonist* announced a proposal “to bring a number of girls from Eastern Canada to take places as household servants.” The paper noted the ongoing demand for their services, but cautioned against hiring girls who were of ‘uncertain’ quality. It suggested that any deficiencies in their characters might be the fault of their employers.⁶⁶ Neither of these schemes appear to have succeeded; at least, no significant discourse appeared in later newspaper accounts.

The ‘quality’ and the moral regulation of their serving staff was an accepted responsibility of employers in both British and colonial homes. Employers in British Columbia were expected to follow the example of their British and eastern American/Canadian counterparts in treating their servants with paternalistic/maternalistic supervision. Household manuals warned about the possible dishonesty or immorality of the ‘lower-class’ servants. In her manual, *The Mistress of*

⁶⁵ “Domestic Servants,” *Daily Colonist*, 31 May 1890, 4.

⁶⁶ “Domestic Servants,” *Daily Colonist*, 30 April 1899, 4.

the Little House, a British writer, Flora Klickmann warned about the dishonesty of the “lower classes:”

It is the girls from the lower class home who need the most supervision. In so comparatively few cases has she been trained to be honest ... she feels, perhaps, that she is quite justified in helping her family at your expense ... the girls from such homes have often a kink in their moral nature⁶⁷

Along with the emphasis on dishonesty was a long established stereotype that female domestics (typically from the ‘lower classes’) were naturally prone to promiscuity. In her work on sexual harassment, Kerry Segrave denounces the idea of inherent immorality. She contends that because of “the obvious inequities in the master-servant relationship,” the intimate position in the home and “the lack of privacy” female domestics were subjected to “flatteries” and sexual harassment from male co-workers and male employers. Some female domestics (especially those in an over-stocked European market) did submit to “private indignities” in order to keep their jobs. Ironically, female servants were often seen to be “blameworthy.”⁶⁸ If their ‘situation’ was discovered, they were usually “let go by their employers.” Their ‘character’ thus compromised, such servants would not easily find another serving position in eastern Canada or England. A loss of virginity or even a pregnancy would also greatly reduce the chances for marriage. Moreover, the negative nature of domestic service “partially explained the entry of” some former servants into prostitution.⁶⁹ When office or factory

⁶⁷ Flora Klickman, ed., *The Mistress of the Little House: What She Should Know and What She Should Do When She Has an Untrained Servant*, (London: The Girl's Own Paper & Woman's Magazine, circa 1900]), 50.

⁶⁸ Kerry Segrave, *The Sexual Harassment of Women in the Workplace, 1600 to 1993*, (London: McFarland & Company, 1994), 26, 27.

⁶⁹ Lori Rotenberg, “The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century,” In *Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930*, (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 40.

jobs work were not available (or practical), the selling of sexual services offered some hope of earning a living.

Not surprisingly, mistresses were urged to take a personal interest in their domestics' working and private lives, and to be "an example of good conduct after whom the servant should pattern himself or herself."⁷⁰ It was a mistress' responsibility to protect her servant from any indication of impropriety, much as she would protect a child. Indeed, another writer of household manuals, Julia McNair Wright (a Canadian) maintained "in many respects our servants come to us on the plane of children."⁷¹ Certainly, as in the case of a wayward child, an employer was duty-bound to instruct and reform any "ignorant" or "shiftless" domestic. Wright insisted that failure in this endeavour would ensure a young, female servant's future as a "dirty and wasteful wife ... bringing into the world a brood of semi-beggars, filthy, ragged and unschooled, to be the criminals and paupers of a generation to come." It was a mistress' duty to her household as well as the state. In a less dramatic vein, Wright appealed to the "common humanity" between a mistress and servant; each should respect the other's position.⁷²

From the 1860s through the early 1900s, respect and respectability were key issues for both maids and mistresses.⁷³ In 1863, Victoria's classified advertisements typically requested "A Respectable Young Person" or "A Respectable Woman"—as "a Dry Nurse for an infant." There were similar requests in the Situations Wanted columns:

⁷⁰ Theresa M. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernization of Household Service in England and France, 1870-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 24.

⁷¹ Julia McNair Wright, *The Complete Home: An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Life and Affairs*, (Brantford: Bradley, Garretson & Co., 1879), 447.

⁷² Wright, *The Complete Home*, 436-437, 438.

⁷³ Magda Fahrni, "'Ruffled' mistresses and 'discontented' maids: respectability and the case of domestic service, 1880-1914, *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 39, (Spring 1997), 3.

“Two Respectable Women” wanted positions as Housekeepers or children’s nurses and “A Respectable Female Wishes for a situation as Housekeeper, in which capacity she has had considerable experience.”⁷⁴ Given the shortage of servants in B.C., it is surprising that the latter ads appeared. Perhaps this is an indication that ‘respectable’ women could be choosy about where they worked. More than thirty years later, there was more emphasis on the applicants being “competent” or “general” servants. However, there were still advertisements that read: “Wanted--Respectable girl as nurse for two children ...” and “Wanted—good girl, wages \$20: nursemaid kept.”⁷⁵

The appearance of respectability and propriety included the need to recreate an English home in a colonial location as another important aspect of the Imperial project. In his book, written for intending emigrants to the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, Alexander Rattray claimed, “the general tone of society and style of life is, with some not very important exceptions, thoroughly English.” Certainly, on Vancouver Island, English emigrants could expect a “similarity of race and character, of manners, customs, of sympathies and aim.” Rattray also pointed out that a generous endowment from the English Baroness Burdett-Coutts had ensured that Victoria’s dominant Church was “that of England.”⁷⁶ She also endowed Angela College where Victoria’s ‘elite’ young women could learn in a ‘proper’ English setting. Almost forty years later, in *The Sport and Life*, W.A. Baillie-Grohman wrote that a “Devonshire-like” atmosphere existed in Victoria. He described homes that imitated “England’s old manor houses” and gardens with “old-fashioned flowers so dear to those who have turned their

⁷⁴ “Classified Advertisements,” *British Colonist*, 4 February and 18 March 1863.

⁷⁵ “Classified Advertisements,” *British Colonist*, 8 March and 11 March 1899.

⁷⁶ Alexander Rattray, M.D. Edin., R.N., *Vancouver Island And British Columbia, Where They Are; What They Are; And What They May Become*, (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., Cornhill, 1862), 171.

backs on their native land.” He commented that the men he met on Victoria’s streets “were of the English country-town type.”⁷⁷ Similarly, Jennie Phillips-Wolley wrote from her Victoria home in a room “full of English trifles ... and photograph-albums, full of honest English faces.” She could hear from the outside lawn, “‘Well played,’ ‘Love thirty,’ ‘Deuce,’ and other scraps of tennis jargon from lips of English men and women.” In a letter to her friend, Lena, she described her home as “a specimen of the best to be found in the island ... there was certainly ample accommodation for a moderate-sized family (e.g., father and mother and four children, with servants), and a spare room” with interior decorations “in the very best taste and style.”⁷⁸

Of course, outside of the urban centers such as Victoria, houses and other physical surroundings were not always of ‘the very best taste.’ In letters to her family, a ‘sojourning’ Jessie McQueen complained that the overall environment in the Nicola Valley, near Kamloops, compared miserably with the Imperial ideal that existed in her beloved home—Pictou County, Nova Scotia. McQueen wrote to her mother that the houses in Kamloops had a general “scarcity of paint and the unpainted buildings do not turn a soft grey as they do at home, but are more the colour of toastA dismal tint I think.”⁷⁹ She described a generally dark, dry and dusty landscape—markedly unlike the green of Nova Scotia or Britain. Both Jessie and her sister Annie McQueen also wrote about some of their less than ideal household experiences in B.C.’s interior. For

⁷⁷ W.A. Baillie-Grohman, *Fifteen Years Sport and Life: In the Hunting Grounds of Western America and British Columbia*, (London: Horace Cox, 1900) 318-319.

⁷⁸ Jennie Phillips-Wolley, “Correspondence Outward” in Clive Phillips-Wolley, *A Sportsman’s Eden* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888), 29, 28, 29 186.

⁷⁹ Jessie McQueen to Catherine McQueen, Lower Nicola, 27 March 1888, Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia quoted in Jean Barman, *Sojourning Sisters: The Lives and Letters of Jessie and Annie McQueen*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 87.

example, in 1889, the only domestic help available to a newly married Annie Gordon was “a Klootchman” who was “a great old chatterbox,” but managed to clean the stoves and wash the floors; two Chinese men performed the outdoor work.⁸⁰ The McQueen sisters discovered that, whether in rural areas or urban centers, ‘familiar’ white, female servants were not easily obtained. When they were available, they were not always deferent.

There is ample evidence that the expected employer-servant relations in the late nineteenth century did not always transfer from England or eastern Canada to British Columbia. As in colonial times, the male-female demographics were still a factor; non-native adult females only made up 25.4 per cent of the population in 1891 and 29.1 per cent in 1901.⁸¹ Frances MacNab asserted that whenever white domestics “are found to have any merit they are certain to secure situations.” When dissatisfied with their situations, these servants were also known to demand “better wages.” MacNab indicated that white servants who came to B.C. tended not to work as hard as their British counterparts.⁸² In 1899, a *Colonist* editor wrote that everyone “who has had much experience with the class of girls who ordinarily apply for places in households will admit that a very large portion of them discharge their duties as though under protest.”⁸³ *Westward Ho! Magazine* warned that it was not uncommon for a servant who had the best English credentials to “assume a very different attitude” in the West. She may “adopt the American idea that the man is as good as the master” or that she is doing her

⁸⁰ Annie Gordon to Catherine McQueen, Kamloops, 19 January 1889, quoted in Jean Barman, *Sojourning Sisters*, 77.

⁸¹ Barman, *West Beyond The West*, 385.

⁸² Frances MacNab, *British Columbia for Settlers: Its Mines, Trade, and Agriculture*, (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1898), 76.

⁸³ “Domestic Servants,” *Daily Colonist*, 30 April 1899, 4.

employer a favour by accepting his/her wage offer. This servant's independent attitude is sure to conflict with her employer's wishes. Then, thinking to "better herself," she will leave service altogether. The writer then contrasted this type of domestic with a "capable, energetic and refined English servant" who will not "want to be treated as one of the family ... is independent in the best sense ... and knows her place, but will not submit to be treated like a drudge."⁸⁴

There were practical ways in which unhappy domestics dealt with unbearable drudgery and social discrimination. In Britain, typical responses to frustrations and ill treatment included unruly behaviour, a change of employer and, although rarely, individual or collective defiance of their superiors.⁸⁵ Although there was a measure of agency, or at least revenge, in the extreme acts of "drinking or theft," servants more often gained reassurance of their humanity through minor acts of resistance—such as veiled sulks, disobeying household edicts, answering back and, as in Britain, defying dress codes.

For these serving women and girls, dress was not only an expression of individuality and self-respect; it was also a mark of status within their own class-conscious occupation.⁸⁶ Often on their days off, and against the wishes of their employers, female servants from the larger households would go on public outings dressed in their own "fashionable" clothes. This expression of self-respect translated to British Columbia. On one occasion, Mrs. Baillie-Grohman's servant stepped out "in a pearl-grey cashmere dress of the latest fashion, with a picturesque grey straw hat

⁸⁴ "Verita," *Westward Ho! Magazine*, April 1908, Vol. II, No. 4, 55.

⁸⁵ McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, 109.

⁸⁶ Jessica Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 261, 264-265, 264.

trimmed with white and grey ostrich feathers to match.” Even the “char” woman, “who could only be induced to come as a great favour,” blackened the grates and polished the floors while wearing a “flowered cretonne gown” and a feathered hat. The same woman told a co-worker, Mrs. Baillie-Grohman’s nursemaid, that her “print dresses” and “large aprons” were out of style in B.C. At least three social aims drove these actions – impressing co-workers, attracting husbands and defying employers.

Florence Baillie-Grohman and Mary Moody describe a variety of white servant-types (from submissive to defiant). At one time Baillie-Grohman was fortunate enough to have “a typical old English servant” as a nurse for her two children. There was no lack of praise for this servant’s domestic and personal virtues; she was never “daunted ... [but] took everything quietly, and the children were looked after as if they were in their English nurseries.”⁸⁷ That is, the nurse had all the qualities of a Christian female – “faithfulness, good temper, patience, truthfulness, cleanliness and purity of manner” and could teach the children by good example as well as keeping them and the nursery clean and orderly.⁸⁸

Mary Moody’s experiences with the nurses that she hired for her children were less positive than those of Mrs. Baillie-Grohman or than the ideal presented in the guides to household management. Although for three months she enjoyed the services of Annie a “nice, well-behaved, quiet girl,”⁸⁹ who performed her nursery work adequately, Annie’s independent nature offended Mrs. Moody who complained: “Canadian ... helps are very independent ... I assure you & allow the children to have

⁸⁷ F. Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 360.

⁸⁸ Laurie, *Home and Its Duties*, 23, 24, 27-28.

⁸⁹ BCA, MSS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 14 November 1861.

pretty much of their own way, while they amuse themselves.” Annie also flaunted tradition by refusing to eat her meals in the kitchen. She insisted on having breakfast with her employers, and to “dine & tea with the children.” Moody was irritated by the social infraction, but found “the comfort of having her is more than the nuisance of her company at breakfast.”⁹⁰

Florence Baillie-Grohman had an even more upsetting experience with one of her ‘general’ servants who insisted on serving breakfast wearing a dressing gown and “curl papers.” Baillie-Grohman voiced her husband’s (not her own) objections to the morning attire. Eventually, her servant did give “in to his fads” and removed the ‘curl papers’ before breakfast, but the dressing gown would not be “discarded until after twelve o’clock” each day. Baillie-Grohman should have been aware of this servant’s independent nature. During the hiring interview, she had boldly told Mrs. Baillie-Grohman that she had no intention of responding to the employer’s first advertisement for a “general servant,” but when she saw the request for a ‘home-help’, she “thought she would come round and have a look.” Then, before she committed herself, she inquired as to what portion of the work would be done by the employer. Having received the ‘correct’ answer (that she would not have to wash floors) the woman remarked “Wal, I reckon we’ll suit each other,” and took the job. Baillie-Grohman admitted to being “somewhat taken aback” by this unconventional domestic; she “was so pretty and languid and lady-like” and she often left the house without permission. However, Mrs. Baillie-Grohman was “loath to do without the woman’s cooking and light housekeeping.”

⁹⁰ BCA, MSS-1101, Mary Moody to her mother and sister 18 December 1861.

When the servant did leave, the employer received the character reference. She was told that: “you’ve suited me better than anyone I’ve come across yet”⁹¹

The fact that any upper class, or even middle-class, white employers needed a character reference would have seemed odd in Britain. However, where white female servants were scarce, and where there were options to domestic service, employers could not afford to be quite as autocratic as their British counterparts. In 1899, the *Vancouver Daily News* observed that the young women could now become clerks, typewriter operators, dressmakers, stenographers, “and, last but not least, housekeepers ” a term which seemed preferable to “servant girl” because it better described such an honourable occupation. The paper denounced the British tendency to see female servants as menial workers, and delivered a strong warning to local employers:

Now the freeborn Canadian or American girl has objections to accepting employment under conditions which relegate her to a position of social inferiority ... I pity the class of mistress who mourns over the difficulty of obtaining satisfactory assistance ... simply because they insist on retaining and aggravating the conditions which are false and unnatural in a free country⁹²

Similarly, Samuel M. Robins, Manager of the New Vancouver Coal Company in Nanaimo told a 1902 Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese immigration that while certain persons had difficulty obtaining white female servants, others did not. The difficulty, as he saw it, was “with the mistresses.” A.R. Milne, a Victoria customs officer, added that thoughtless mistresses did not consider the emotional or physical needs of their female domestics. “The girls are driven to take other work because of the long

⁹¹ F. Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 359, 358, 360.

⁹² “Advice to Girls,” *Vancouver Daily News*, 30 December 1899, 2.

hours and inconsiderations on the part of their employers.”⁹³ In her book of household advice, the Canadian Mrs. Julia Wright counselled that while there were obvious and unalterable differences between mistresses and their domestic servants, she believed in an old adage: “A good mistress makes a good maid.”⁹⁴ A writer in the *Westward Ho Magazine* agreed that when white female domestics could be obtained it was up to the “mistress of the house” to keep them. Of course, she did have to acquire them first!

The demand for servants in Western Canada continued into the twentieth century. In 1908, the Salvation Army brought out young European women but “in spite of the clamour for domestic servants, surprisingly few matrons” chose to hire them. Much like the immigration scheme of 1869, the employer was expected to advance fifty dollars and the servant had to stay until that money was repaid thus, only wealthy employers could afford domestic help. Another problem was only hinted at; these *were* “young women of European countries.” An employer might find herself burdened with “an unsuitable or incompetent servant”⁹⁵ from a country other than Britain. Of course, the preferred domestics were still English girls from respectable homes. Sedef Arat-koc points out that the energy and planning involved in bringing out British domestics reflects how desirable they were “in terms of their racial/ethnic stock.” Their “morals and manners” would help to define B.C. as a “British society.”⁹⁶

⁹³ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration: Session 1902* (Ottawa: King's Printer), 168, 170.

⁹⁴ Julia McNair Wright, *The Complete Home: An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Life and Affairs* (Brantford Ontario: Bradley, Garretson & Co.), 441.

⁹⁵ “Verita,” *Westward Ho! Magazine*, April 1908, Vol. II, No. 4, 55.

⁹⁶ Sedef Arat-koc, “From ‘Mothers of the Nation’ to Migrant Workers: Immigration Policies and Domestic Workers in Canadian History,” 287.

There was some encouragement for employers in that, by the early 1900s, the surplus of females in Britain was even larger than it had been in 1862. By 1911, the imbalance had risen to “over 1.3 million more females than males.”⁹⁷ However, the lot of the English “servant class” had changed. The status of domestic service had declined.⁹⁸ It was no longer seen as a protected haven for ‘working-class’ females, but as a job of last resort. Many former domestics took up factory, retail or clerical work, thus causing a shortage of female domestics in Britain as well as in the colonies. Naturally, the British domestics who did remain in ‘service’ were discouraged from leaving their positions or their country. Emigration proponents were sensitive to the needs of upper and middle-class British employers; they usually refused emigration loans to the “traditional serving class.”⁹⁹ Emigration agencies and individual philanthropists came to focus on the middle class or even upper class gentlewomen--the educated “Blue stockings.”¹⁰⁰ British Columbians had not wanted them in the 1860s because they were thought to lack the “attitudes and abilities appropriate” to their serving positions. By the late nineteenth century, however, emigration proponents insisted that the emigration of gentlewomen would alter the gender imbalance that plagued Britain and help ‘civilize’ the colonies. With these goals in mind, emigration societies tried to convince colonial employers that educated ‘home helps,’ ‘mothers’ helps’ or ladies helps’ would solve some of the ongoing ‘servant problems’ while also providing “valuable social interaction.” After all, many of the immigrant gentlewomen would “be of similar class backgrounds to the

⁹⁷ Jackel, *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*, xv.

⁹⁸ Magda Fahrni, “‘Ruffled’ Mistresses and ‘Discontented’ Maids,” 3.

⁹⁹ A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830- 1914* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979) 154.

¹⁰⁰ “Hope for Educated Women,” *British Colonist*, 1 July 1862, 2.

women for whom they worked.”¹⁰¹ They would be assets to both the household and the wider community. Writing about Victoria, Clive Phillips-Wolley suggested that if Britain’s influence was to prevail on the Pacific coast, “a proportion of the more polished elements of English society”¹⁰² should be sent out.

Of course, along with the potential employers, the emigration promoters also had to convince the ‘more polished’ women to become ‘home helps’ in Canada. Emigration propaganda often emphasized the precarious social and financial positions of the ‘surplus’ women in Britain and even predicted that their ‘situations’ would worsen as they aged. Realizing that most privileged and educated women would rather starve than become domestic servants in class-based British society,¹⁰³ proponents insisted that these women would ‘help’ rather than ‘serve’ in Canadian homes; and they would at least salvage or perhaps elevate their economic and social status. Emigration literature also promoted the idea that while ‘helping’ to manage Canadian households such women might acquire skills that would allow them “to take on business or farming ventures of their own.”¹⁰⁴ Another promotional ploy involved the prospect of marriage. In this case, the skills learned would prepare immigrant women to run their own homes. Whether or not it was clearly stated in the literature, most of the female immigrants would have known that males far outnumbered females. Indeed, from 1870 through 1911, the percentage of male “non-native Indian” adults in the population of British

¹⁰¹ Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s – 1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 75, 72 and 78.

¹⁰² Clive Phillips-Wolley, *A Sportsman’s Eden* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888), xiv.

¹⁰³ Jackel, *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*, xxi.

¹⁰⁴ Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 80 and 89.

Columbia ranged from 70.0% to 74.6%.¹⁰⁵ The chances of finding a husband did exceed such expectations in Britain. Ultimately, where marital or vocational incentives failed to entice female emigrants, promotional literature focussed on the patriotic (even heroic) duty of single gentlewomen to serve the empire by relieving Britain's gender imbalance while also exporting "the best of British virtues."¹⁰⁶

In 1911, one of the newly formed philanthropic agencies, the Colonial Intelligence League for Educated Women sponsored Ella Constance Sykes (an upper-class gentlewoman) to look into the situations of British "home-helps" in Canada, and to ascertain if there were other openings for educated women. Instead of simply asking questions of recent immigrants, Sykes spent six months in Canada and took up five positions as a 'home-help.' In her advice book for gentlewomen who were intending to emigrate (published in 1912) she admitted that she herself had been incompetent as a "help," having been "trained to do nothing properly that the country wanted." Of course, her ineptitude might explain why she had been "treated mainly as a servant, and was not in any way made part of the family." However, she also remarked that her own ill-treatment had much to do with her employers' lack of appreciation for her status as a "lady." Only "on Vancouver Island and in a few other places" in British Columbia did employers treat their "lady-helps" as equals. She claimed that well-trained and educated women were accepted into B.C. homes; they were "invited to all the dances, picnics and lawn-tennis." Ella Sykes concluded that while the lot of a home help in Western Canada was not accurately portrayed in most of the emigration literature (the work was far

¹⁰⁵ Barman, *West beyond the West*, 385.

¹⁰⁶ Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 74.

harder than anticipated) if a woman had the skills, 'home-help' work could be "a stepping-stone to something better"¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, there were opportunities in British Columbia for a better life (including marriage) that were not available for an educated gentlewoman in Britain. She might even retain some of her social status. It was hoped that they could be "utilized as vehicles"¹⁰⁸ to perpetuate the Imperial ideal. Ella Sykes certainly thought that, despite some hardships, British 'gentlewomen' would "help to build up the Empire."¹⁰⁹

Whether or not they fulfilled their roles as 'Empire builders,' the emigrant gentlewomen who came to British Columbia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries probably improved their social and economic status compared to the 'redundancy' they faced in Britain. Most working-class domestics also improved their lot by emigrating. At the least, there were more jobs available for both groups (especially the traditional domestics) and a better chance for marriage, which might free them from *paid* domestic work. However, by the late nineteenth century, middle-and upper- class British Columbians had experienced little improvement in their quest for their preferred servants. The Canadian census for 1881 reveals a general shortage of domestics in British Columbia – 4.3 servants per 1,000 people, compared to 13.6 servants per 1,000 people in all of Canada.¹¹⁰ Of the servants listed for British Columbia, only 14.8 per cent were female.¹¹¹ The overall female population remained at approximately 35 per cent

¹⁰⁷ Ella C. Sykes, *A Home-Help in Canada* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1912), ix, 225-226, 227, 228.

¹⁰⁸ Rita S. Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 52.

¹⁰⁹ Sykes, *Home-Help*, xi.

¹¹⁰ North Atlantic Population Project and Minnesota Population Center, *1881 Census of Canada* (complete count microdata).

¹¹¹ Canada: *Census of Canada 1880-81*, vol. 2, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer), 316-317.

from 1891 through 1911. Much like the situation in early colonial years, a province with so few women and girls could not meet the demand for white, female servants. When a fortunate homemaker did manage to acquire the preferred white help, they tended not to stay long and were less deferent than most of their British counterparts.

Chapter 3

FIRST NATIONS SERVANTS

Given the dearth of “appropriate” white domestics in the colonies, the early settlers looked toward the First Nations people as an alternative source of such labour. Considering that, in 1855, only 774 of Vancouver Island’s “34,600 or so inhabitants”¹ were non-Aboriginal, it is not surprising that Aboriginal men, women and even children were soon working in the better-off white homes. Some of the Aboriginals who lived close to Victoria even took on *year-round* employment as gardeners, cooks and servants. Rev. R.J Staines had an “Indian Cook”² in 1852 and Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken had “Indian servants”³ from the time of his arrival in 1850. Although many colonists did appreciate their servants’ hard work and practical advice, they also complained that Aboriginals were neither a consistent nor a plentiful source of “help.” In his writings about the colony of Vancouver Island, Alexander Rattray commented that ‘Indian’ labour was “unskilful, fitful and not to be depended upon.”⁴ Some employers did come to understand that Aboriginal lifestyles were naturally seasonal; they moved “from permanent winter villages” to fishing, hunting, trapping and root or berry-gathering sites.⁵ Therefore, they would typically participate as sporadic or part-time workers for the white colonists. Other employers complained about their frequent disappearances. Dr. Helmcken stated, “in those days ... there were no servants save Indians – and they

¹ John Lutz, “After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890,” in *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 3 (1992), 71.

² Lutz, “After the Fur Trade,” 74.

³ Dorothy Blakey Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975), 127.

⁴ Alexander Rattray, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Where They Are, What They Are, And What They May Become* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862), 159.

⁵ Lutz, “After the Fur Trade,” 74.

never remained long enough and would not live in houses.”⁶ Helmcken complained mainly about the inconsistent supply of servants but other white employers railed against the ‘inappropriate’ behaviour of their “Indian” servants. Stereotypes of childlike, indolent, unclean and immoral “savages” were invoked.

The idea of indigenous “savages” was rooted in the white colonists’ European backgrounds. With the rise of “scientific thought” in the seventeenth century, the “Enlightenment” era and then “biological determinism” in the nineteenth century, the concept of a racial hierarchy emerged in Europe. In *Situating “Race” and Racisms in Time, Space, and Theory*, editors Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz point out that: “These ‘scientific’ approaches ... were used to justify racisms and racist practices and to rationalize claims of natural superiority.”⁷ Skin colour became one of the marks of racial position. Whiteness was associated with progress and morality, while “darkness” became associated with backwardness and moral (even sexual) depravity. European civility was measured against the contrasting images of the original non-white inhabitants of the overseas colonies.⁸ For example, many years after a brief trip to British Columbia, an English naturalist, Alice Bodington wrote that she had originally been uninterested in “the subject” of the native inhabitants but after reading Dr. Isaac Taylor’s “Origin of the Aryans,” she noticed the similarities between the “Indians” of British Columbia and “Neolithic Man” in Europe. She compared her perception of

⁶ Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences*, 127.

⁷ Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz eds., *Situating “Race” and Racisms in Time, Space, and Theory: Critical Essays for Activists and Scholars* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 5.

⁸ Nancy Leys Stepan, “Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science,” *Isis* Vol. 77 (June 1986), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 263. Kay Anderson, “The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 77, No. 4. (1987), 388.

Aboriginal culture (which she actually admitted to having mostly gleaned from two B.C. government “eye-witnesses”) to the imagined culture of European “cave-dwellers.” She surmised that the two groups would have practiced similar social and physical “amusements.” Bodington found nothing interesting to relate about “the Indians as they appear after their contact with civilization.” Noting Charles Darwin’s idea of “survival of the fittest,” she was not surprised that “few members of a race hardly emerging from its Stone Age should be able to take advantage of the complex civilization of the Europe of the day.” Like many of her contemporaries, she expected that the problem would soon be solved as the savage race was “rapidly dying out.”⁹

Such ideas were reflected in British Columbia. Soon after their establishment, urban centres such as Victoria and New Westminster sought to remove the “savage” inhabitants. The Victoria newspapers regularly called for the expulsion of the “northern Indians.” The *British Colonist* expressed concern about the “house-breaking, burglary and pilfering” activities of the “northern tribes.” The women had “rendered the whole outskirts of town a perfect brothel.”¹⁰ The editor of the *Weekly Gazette* claimed that the “northern Indians” had even offered to sell some of the child slaves to the local “hen-roosts”¹¹ (likely a euphemism for bordellos). Another *Colonist* editorial added that the “Northerners” were “much more plague than profit.” The amount they stole far exceeded “the value of their fur and other traffic.”¹² Perhaps “other traffic” could have included their labour or the trade they provided for local merchants.

⁹ Alice Bodington, “Notes on the Indians of British Columbia,” *The Field Club*, Theodore Wood, ed. (London: Elliot Stock, 1893), 90, 106, 107.

¹⁰ “Invasion of the Northern Indians,” *British Colonist*, 18 April 1861, 2.

¹¹ “A Hiyu-Klatawa,” *Weekly Gazette*, 19 May 1859, 3.

¹² “Disorderly Siwashes - Energetic Actions of the Government,” *British Colonist*, Victoria, 3 September 1861, 3.

Yet, the editor of Victoria's *Weekly Gazette* conceded that the local Aboriginals were "the fruitful occasion, not the cause, of many evils and inconveniences"¹³ and that responsible colonists were duty-bound "to raise the aboriginals from their native wretchedness, to a state in which they might be useful." He attributed their depravity to "the lust, vice and brutality of the depraved white men" and reminded readers that the First Nations peoples had a "given amount of bone and muscle" which could be used to provide needed labour and that "their presence might be turned to good account."¹⁴

In 1861, the north coast missionary, William Duncan informed the *British Colonist* that there were "great numbers of Indians occupying posts of usefulness." While Duncan agreed that conditions in the Aboriginal camps were deplorable, he did not approve of using gunboats to enforce expulsions. Reverend Mr. Duncan appealed to the readers' Christian and paternalistic sensibilities. After having corrupted the Aboriginal inhabitants, it was incumbent on the white residents to raise them from their "low condition." Like the editor of the *Gazette*, Duncan recommended a disciplinary solution to the "depravity" – have the police force deal with the "rowdy Indians" as they would deal with the "rowdy whites." He warned that a "driving away policy" would negatively affect a colony that needed Aboriginal labour. Duncan pleaded:

Pray do not rob the people of Indian labourers while there are none other to be had. The ladies in the Colony have more than enough menial work to do; but to what would you reduce them if your take away the Indian servants ... I will refer you to the kitchens and nurseries, the fields and gardens about Victoria, to substantiate what I say.

¹³ Editorial, *Victoria Weekly Gazette*, 10 August 1860, 2.

¹⁴ *Weekly Gazette*. Victoria, 29 September 1860, 2; 10 August 1860, 2.

His main complaint against “Indian” servants was their failure to “stay long enough in their situations.”¹⁵

A pragmatic compromise to the expulsion of Aboriginals from town and the surrounding area was offered by Police Superintendent Smith. He issued a curfew requiring all Aboriginals to stay off the streets between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am and warned that transgressors would be searched and removed. However, the regulation exempted individuals who had passes provided by their white employers.¹⁶ The need for Aboriginal labour (especially domestic labour) outweighed some of the irritations caused by their presence in a white, urban center.

The compromise (the pass system) did not last. In September, a police posse demolished and set fire to forty Aboriginal lodges on the outskirts of Victoria. The former inhabitants, many of whom held “positions as household servants in town” were ordered to leave town right away.¹⁷ The problem continued; a year later, the *Colonist* reported a complaint that even the “honest and well-disposed Indians, who had been vaccinated and were employed in town as servants, had been driven north by the Police for no other reason than that they were Indians”¹⁸ The terms “honest” and “well-disposed” were not commonly used when referring to Aboriginal workers. Negative images were usually invoked.

Of course, negative images were not limited to local newspaper accounts, but also appeared in emigration literature and in the reminiscences of white writers. In his book about missionary life, Reverend Robert Christopher Lundin Brown asserted that all

¹⁵ “The Indian Question,” *British Colonist*, Victoria, 4 July 1861, 1.

¹⁶ “A Much Needed Regulation,” *British Colonist*, Victoria, 20 April 1861, 3.

¹⁷ “Cleaning out the Indians,” *British Colonist*, Victoria, 5 September 1861, 3.

¹⁸ “Prostitution Recognized by Government,” *British Colonist*, 2 June 1862, 2.

of British Columbia's "Indians" lived "in a state of decadence." His description of the "Chilcotten Indians" was especially negative:

A set of men and women more squalid and repulsive I have rarely beheld. Dark faces with big mouths, high cheek-bones, ferocious black eyes, ... long tangled hair ... and sinewy frames with little on them save some dirt and a piece of blanket or a deer skin: no their appearance was not prepossessing.¹⁹

Missionary literature, of course, was inclined to paint harsh pictures in order to generate sympathy for their work and hence encourage donations. However, another, perhaps more vitriolic, image can be found in Duncan Macdonald's book of advice for possible emigrants. Macdonald began his chapter on the 'Aborigines' by defining five races within the human species with the whites being first in the order of civilization and the red or Indian race being last.²⁰ In general, he asserted that the coastal First Nations "exhibit all the traits of the worst form of barbarism." As one proof of this barbarism, Macdonald cited a sensational Victoria newspaper account of horrendous Aboriginal "butcheries" on the road between Victoria and Esquimalt. Disgusted by the Aboriginals' scantily clad and painted bodies, he described a scene in which men, women and children were sitting around a fire "generally as naked as they were born, and not uncommonly covered with a moving mass of vermin of every description." He blamed the vermin and their preference for putrid meat "for the abominable effluvium which their bodies exhale." They were "cunning and adroit thieves, and ever on the watch to steal the property of the white man, and to kill and scalp him."²¹ Given that his book was meant to provide information for settlers, his negative descriptions of Aboriginal culture

¹⁹ Robert Christopher Lundin Brown, *Klatsassan and other Reminiscences of Mission Life in British Columbia* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1873), 3, 4.

²⁰ Duncan George Forbes Macdonald, *British Columbia and Vancouver's Island* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1862), 125.

²¹ Macdonald, *British Columbia*, 125, 131, 152, 137, 132, 140, 125.

and character would have dissuaded many potential emigrants. Readers who *did* emigrate would certainly not want Aboriginal servants in their homes.

Of course, most of the nineteenth-century emigration literature presented the colonies in a positive light. The Aboriginal inhabitants (when they were mentioned at all) were pictured as being harmless and childlike or even a dying race. An 1877 labour guidebook prepared by J.S. Knevett, for example, described the “Indians” of British Columbia as being “very quiet and useful ... but from a number of causes, they are rapidly decreasing.”²² An 1882 government *Guidebook for Intending Settlers* presented a similar view:

The Indians of British Columbia are remarkable for their peaceable disposition ... where can you find any who are so trustworthy in regard to conduct, so willing to assist the white settlers by their labour ... and anxious to learn the secret of the white man's power.²³

A book compiled by Molyneux St. John, mentions the war-like history of the Haidah and briefly explains the effect of spirits and disease on local First Nations. However, St. John declared that some of the “Indians” are employed as servants “at \$15 to \$20 per month, with board and lodging, by farmers who understand their character.” He indicated that any problems with the Aboriginal people would be temporary and their dwindling numbers meant they would “probably soon be extinct.”²⁴ Such ideas were not confined to British Columbians. Mary Inderwick, an Alberta rancher's wife, had a similar opinion about the Aboriginals. In fact, she supported an Imperial vision that included the subjugation (even annihilation) of the so-called ‘lower races.’ She asserted that the

²² J.S. Knevett, *British Columbia and Vancouver Island* (London: Labour News, 1877), 4.

²³ *A Guidebook Containing Information for Intending Settlers*, (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1882), 68.

²⁴ Molyneux St. John, *British Columbia: Information for Miners, Agriculturists, Tourists and Sportsmen* (n.c.: n.p., 1886), 17, 19.

sooner the “Indians” became extinct, the better for themselves “and the country.”²⁵ Ironically, in what appears to be an attempt to identify at least one Aboriginal virtue, Duncan Macdonald assured the reader that “[b]y a law of their nature, they seem to be destined to extermination. They fade away at the approach of white man ... to return no more.”²⁶ Whether or not the indigenous inhabitants did appear to be ‘dying out,’ the idea of a disappearing or extinct race may have relieved some of the emigrants’ anxieties about contact with the new world ‘savages’.

White colonists also relieved their anxiety by evoking a well-used, nineteenth century Imperial stereotype – comparing all Aboriginals to white children who were not yet “fully human beings.” Much like children, the First Nations were seen to be lacking in civility and discipline. Therefore, there was “a moral justification for Imperial policies of ... specific paternalistic and maternalistic strategies of custodial control.”²⁷ The Imperial view also dictated that Aboriginal people could never achieve the level of civilization that a white child eventually would. However, moral, physical and vocational improvements were possible through the white colonists’ protection, guidance and control. The philanthropic work of “civilizing” colonized peoples actually served to confirm the white reformers’ idea of their “own moral superiority and right to authority over the recipients of their benevolence.”²⁸

²⁵ Mary Inderwick, “A Lady and Her Ranch,” in *The Best from Alberta History*, Hugh Dempsey ed. (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981), 69.

²⁶ Macdonald, *British Columbia*, 132.

²⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 151-152.

²⁸ Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 34.

Certainly, this Imperial notion of the First Nations as child-like was evident in British Columbia. In writing about white women's experiences in B.C., (especially in *Among the People of British Columbia: Red White, Yellow, and Brown*), Frances E. Herring, offers insight into the perceived need to control and civilize a people she referred to as "the children of the forest and the stream" and "the children of nature." Herring's character, Agnes, praised the Roman Catholic missionaries for 'reclaiming' the Aboriginals of British Columbia by subduing their passions and vengeance and ensuring that "their bodies [were] clean and well clothed." Such education, she said, raised their talents and intellects, "which had lain dormant through want of a culturing hand."²⁹ A similar view is expressed by M. Stannard in her *Memoirs of a Professional-Lady Nurse*. After visiting an Aboriginal village near Victoria, she commented that their "huts did not look very enticing" and the "natives" were not very clean. However, much like Herring, she praised the missionaries for converting and educating the "sons and daughters of wild America" and indicated that the natives had been taught to use kindness when instructing their own children and in their dealings with the white population. They had certainly treated her with kindness when she "went alone" to their village. Indeed, they had not even molested her! Still, as Stannard left the village her "heart welled up" and she recited:

I thank the goodness and the love
That on my birth had smiled
And made me in my infant days
A happy English child.³⁰

²⁹ Frances E. Herring, *Among the People of British Columbia: Red, White, Yellow and Brown* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 141, 152, 151.

³⁰ M. Stannard, *Memoirs of a Professional-Lady Nurse* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1873), 186, 188, 189.

Although Clive Phillips-Wolley and M. Stannard had similar views about the ultimate superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race,³¹ Phillips-Wolley did not hold with a Utopian image of wholesale Christian conversion and cultural assimilation. He commented that while the Roman Catholic priests may have won some respect among the Aboriginals, the average “Indian leaves his Christianity behind him in church.” He “marries as many wives as he chooses ... ‘trades’ them whenever an opportunity offers ... lies as much as he thinks profitable to him, and gets drunk whenever he gets a chance.” However, Phillips-Wolley also noted that some of the younger Aboriginals were at least “aping the whites in house and habits and manner of living.” He described the interior of a young Aboriginal woman’s tent wherein there were “beds of bear-skins, covered with good blankets, and even clean white sheets.” A tablecloth was spread on the earthen floor, “and upon this [stood] the pride of the woman’s heart, a gaily-coloured little china tea-service.” As for her personal appearance, he commented that her “whole person looked bright and clean.”³² Obviously, he approved of the Aboriginal woman’s efforts to imitate the domestic skills of their white, middle-class “betters.”

In order to better facilitate the imitation of white, Anglo Saxon values and skills, both religious and secular leaders called for the domestic education of young, First Nations females. Shortly after his appointment as the first bishop of New Westminster, Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, set out to provide such an education. He insisted that it was the missionaries’ responsibility to cultivate “in these dusky maidens ... the more gentle and tender instincts and attributes of womanhood”—thus making them good Christian

³¹ Peter Murray, *Home from the Hill: Three Gentlemen-Adventurers* (Victoria: Horsdal & Schubart, 1994), 130.

³² Clive Phillips-Wolley, *A Sportsman’s Eden* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888), 154-155, 156.

mothers and wives. With this intention in mind (and, possibly, the idea that their domestic skills would be of value to the white settlers), Bishop Sillitoe addressed a group of Aboriginal girls and women

on the subject of domestic life, the duties and responsibilities of their sex ... and explained to them the object of the girls' school shortly to be established ... Mrs. Sillitoe then distributed among them handkerchiefs, aprons, picture cards, etc., gifts for the purpose from friends in England.³³

A Methodist missionary, Thomas Crosby and his wife Emma also looked to the education of Aboriginal girls. When first living in Fort Simpson, Emma Crosby “schooled” the girls in her own home. In letters to her mother, she revealed that along with religious training, she instructed her students/servants in “civilized” domestic duties. In September 1876, she reported that she had four girls in her care and had “constantly to study to arrange work for them and keep them all employed” with domestic activities. She might even have used domestic training manuals, such as the aforementioned *Home and Its Duties*, as teaching aids. The author, James Laurie, advised teachers that:

A teacher entrusted with the training of young girls who must in course of time exercise more or less influence in households, as servants, or wives and mothers, has much power for good or evil and a corresponding degree of responsibility; for it depends in a great measure on her teaching and example if these girls will become an acquisition to their homes and society

Laurie also advised that although “proficiency in head work” was important, the domestic training of young girls brought “a more and direct return” for themselves, their families and the larger community.³⁴

³³ Rev. Herbert H. Gowen, F.R.C.S., *Church Work in British Columbia: Being a Member of the Episcopate of Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, D.D., D.C.I.* (London: Longmans, Green And Co., 1899), 132.

³⁴ Laurie, *Home and Its Duties*, 2.

While on a visit to Nanaimo in 1877, Emma Crosby wrote her mother that she and Rev. Crosby had purposely brought one of their Aboriginal students along to help with the children. At the time, Mrs. Crosby commented: “This little nurse is of no use to me but is better than no one.”³⁵ However, the girls did learn quickly, eventually taking on much of the housework and becoming competent nursemaids. Relatively free from the daily care of her children, Emma Crosby became more involved with church matters and “engaged socially with the increasing number of newcomers arriving at Fort Simpson.”³⁶ With the practical help of her students, she could better fulfill her role as an Imperial agent—promoting English Christianity and morality in a backwoods setting.

In his book, *Utilization of the Indians of British Columbia*, William Fraser Tolmie, a pioneer fur trader, also called for Aboriginal schools. The word ‘utilization’ certainly set the tone for Tolmie’s work. On behalf of the “poor Indians,” he appealed to the Dominion Government for secular instruction to ensure they quit their “idle, vicious lives” and become useful citizens. Tolmie offered the advice of an American ‘Indian Agent,’ General Milroy, who asserted that Aboriginal children could learn nothing but barbarism from their parents. He believed that minors should be placed in boarding (residential) schools where Christian instructors could teach them “civilized habits and industries.”³⁷ Female students were usually taught the basics of English reading, writing and Christian

³⁵ Emma Crosby to Eliza Douse, Victoria, 29 March 1877 quoted in Jan Hare and Jean Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry: Emma Crosby and the Methodist Mission on the Northwest Coast*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 124.

³⁶ Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, 131.

³⁷ William Fraser Tolmie, *Utilization of the Indians of British Columbia* (Victoria: M. Miller, 1885), dedication, 7.

mores, but the emphasis was on learning to run “a proper Victorian home.”³⁸

Emma and Thomas Crosby incorporated such ideas into the running of the Crosby Girls' Home. By 1881, their Aboriginal charges were housed separately from the growing Crosby family. The Crosbys were determined to protect and direct the girls, claiming that they were saving them from “a life of dissipation and shame ... among their friends.” Emma asked the Women's Missionary Society for funding and assured them that the girls would be constantly supervised and trained “in general housework, in needlework of various kinds, in spinning, and weaving ... and whatever else they might be able to turn to good account.”³⁹ Given the limited finances for the running of the Home, it was not unusual for an Aboriginal girl to have “washed, cooked, cleaned and mended her way through residential school.”⁴⁰ The hope was that when they left the school, they would take with them “industrious habits and a Christian spirit” In the mean time, Mrs. Crosby made good use of the girls' domestic accomplishments. She wrote “There is a girl in my kitchen now who makes bread that could scarcely be surpassed; very good butter, can do plain cooking well, and is clean and systematic about all her work.”⁴¹

While some positive images appear in writings about Aboriginal domestics, much of the information gleaned from diaries, reminiscences and even some emigration

³⁸ Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1848-1930*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996), 103.

³⁹ Emma Crosby to Mrs. H.M. Leland (Secretary of Hamilton WMS), 28 July 1881 quoted in Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, 178-179.

⁴⁰ Marjorie Mitchell and Anna Franklin, “When You Don't Know the Language, Listen to the Silence: An Historical Overview of Native Women in B.C.,” in Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia*, (Victoria: Camosun College 1984), 24.

⁴¹ Emma Crosby to Mrs. H.M. Leland [Secretary of Hamilton WMS], 28 July 1881 quoted in Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, 179 and 181.

literature is, at least, condescending or patronizing in tone. The works also contain persistent stereotypes that depict the First Nations servants as being childlike, indolent, immoral and/or just inherently incapable. Alexander Rattray complained that the “Indian” or “half-breed” servants that could be obtained in 1862, “are often too obtuse, dirty and untidy to be of much use.”⁴² Twenty years later, Emma Crosby admitted that some of her girls naturally lacked “all idea of order, and can never be thoroughly neat and clean.”⁴³

Dr. Helmcken’s reminiscences have mainly positive depictions of Aboriginal servants. When he and his wife Cecilia were first married they hired an Aboriginal couple, “Dick and his wife,” as their only domestics. “The Indians were very useful for chopping wood, carrying water and doing odd jobs.” Dick was “really a good boy,” and “was paid two blankets and a shirt per month and Indian provisions occasionally.”⁴⁴ Helmcken obviously appreciated his “help,” but the childlike stereotype is evident in his use of the term “good boy.” Dick was a married man.

Along with the perceived childlike qualities of Aboriginal servants, the white population commonly assumed that they were inherently dishonest. In his book about mid-nineteenth century Victoria, Edgar Fawcett (a resident of fifty years) mentioned that the “Songhees tribe” not only sold cheap and wholesome food to the early colonists, but both the men and women “went out washing by the day, from seven to six o’clock, at fifty cents.” Fawcett lamented, “the one drawback to them was their dishonesty. Small

⁴² Rattray, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia*, 175.

⁴³ Emma Crosby to Mrs. H.M. Leland [Secretary of Hamilton WMS], 28 July 1881 quoted in Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, 179.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*, 131.

articles of clothing, towels and handkerchiefs were easily hidden under their clothing, so that a close watch had to be kept, and if suspected, they were searched.”⁴⁵

When writing about her colonial experiences, Mary Inderwick, an Alberta rancher's wife, consistently depicted the Aboriginal inhabitants as being childlike, unintelligent and lazy. Not unlike some of B.C.'s pioneer women, Inderwick believed that 'Indians' were incapable of understanding the subtleties of white civilization. She even suggested that the 'Indian problem' would be solved if they were "isolated in the mountains ... and never allowed to eat of the fruit of knowledge as revealed by white men." There was evidence of her disdain in the negative stereotypes used to describe her First Nations servant – Araminta. Inderwick complained that she "tried to make use of a squaw ... the nominal wife of a white man" The servant spent one hour "rubbing a table napkin" instead of washing a tub full of clothes. Her efforts to wash the floor had a similar outcome. Inderwick described how Araminta merely "sat in the middle of the floor and aimlessly slopped all round her." The domestic training was soon abandoned. Inderwick explained that "[t]he odds were too much for my courage and patience."⁴⁶ Along with the image of a childlike, incapable and lazy Aboriginal servant, the reference to Araminta being a "nominal wife" intimates that she was immoral.

Similar stereotypes are present in the writings of Florence Baillie-Grohman, Jessie McQueen and Selina Bompas. Mrs Baillie-Grohman hinted at the immorality of a husband who sold the domestic services of his wife in return for food, money and tobacco. She even made a point of imitating what she saw as the husband's childlike

⁴⁵ Edgar Fawcett, *Some Reminiscences of Old Victoria* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 284-285.

⁴⁶ Inderwick, "A Lady and Her Ranch," 69-70.

efforts to communicate with her: “He would murmur ‘muck a muck’ (food), and then ‘mamook wash,’ mamook meaning to make or to do.” She took this to mean that he wanted his wife to wash clothes in return for food. Mrs. Baillie-Grohman’s floors did need washing; she took the “clotchman” (who she and her husband nicknamed mamook wash) “into the kitchen and provided her with hot water, scrubbing brush and soap.” The Aboriginal woman “seated herself on the floor, and proceeded in a diffident manner to scrub a square foot or so in front of her.” After several hours (taking breaks to light her husband’s pipe), the floor was only marginally cleaner. Baillie-Grohman stated that she would rather have had a dirty floor than “the odour of smoke and Indian” in her kitchen. She turned down the Aboriginal woman’s offer to wash her clothes, saying that she was not interested in any method of washing that “the old ‘clotchman’ would be likely to adopt.” Jessie McQueen also derided the efforts of an Aboriginal servant employed by the Woodward family in Kamloops. She explained: “their only help ... is a half-breed girl both slow and stupid, though I suppose she does the best she can.” McQueen also commented that despite “promising to stay another month,” the “girl” left within a few weeks.⁴⁷ In her memoirs, Selina Bompas, the wife of an Anglican missionary, was more complementary about the abilities of her First Nations servant—Julie. The employer admitted that after eighteen months of training, Julie had become an excellent servant. However, she left without any warning and took “in true Indian

⁴⁷ Jessie McQueen to Catherine McQueen, Lower Nicola, 6, 22 August 1888 quoted in Barman, *Sojourning Sisters*, 93.

fashion” things from the house. Mrs. Bompas lamented, “I had hoped for better things of my little maiden, but one has to remember that these are savages—wild Indian girls”⁴⁸

The need for domestic service was not confined to white females such as Florence Baillie-Grohman, Mary Inderwick or Selina Bompas. Some male colonists, especially those who lived outside the urban centres, also required domestic help. In his reminiscences, Reverend Robert Brown devoted a chapter to a “Red Indian” servant named Chenta. Brown explained that he had not hired an “Indian” by choice, but “in such regions one takes what service one can get and is glad of it.” The description of Chenta as an unattractive “specimen of humanity” was very much in keeping with the ‘savage’ stereotype. Brown wrote that Chenta’s countenance was peculiarly sinister because he had only “one eye, and the look it cast was lurid, though piercing – somewhat dangerous and furtive, too – in a word ‘no canny’.” Brown did indicate that Chenta was trustworthy while in his employ. On a few occasions, the servant gave away his employer’s gifts of clothing, and then tried “to extort ... a new change of raiment.” However, he had not actually stolen from Brown (that he knew of) and had not murdered him in his sleep. Brown allowed that considering the unjust treatment of Chenta’s “Indian” brothers, his lack of revengeful or criminal intent was commendable.

Rev. Mr. Brown also praised some of his servant’s domestic abilities explaining that when it came to “doing the rough work about the house – chopping firewood, drawing water and so forth ... these Indians are extremely valuable to colonists.” However, there is a patronizing tone in his description of domestic interactions. Brown

⁴⁸ S.A Archer, ed., *Heroine of the North Pacific: Memoirs of Charlotte Selina Bompas (1830-1917)* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), 58.

“was amused when Chenta was seen to overstep his household “position,” but mustered gravity enough to rebuke the naïve for his mendacity.” Contending that Aboriginal servants could not be trusted with the more refined aspects of domestic service, Brown related how a friend’s servant washed the dishes by spitting on them, and then dried them on his “dark and flowing locks.” Reverend Mr. Brown viewed this method of washing as a clear indication of the differences between the races. “If I was sometimes tempted to forget the hiatus which lay between me and the noble savage, an incident such as the above would remind me of that gulf.”⁴⁹

By the 1870s, the negative images of Aboriginal peoples had eased somewhat. Certainly, the “gulf” between the white population and the First Nations was still recognized, but there was far less emphasis on the latter’s “savagery” or failure to adopt a European lifestyle. In *British Columbia for Settlers*, Frances MacNab even offered an explanation as to why the First Nations had failed to supply “a reasonable portion of the labour so greatly needed in the” province. She began by establishing that many of the “noble savages” can no longer endure “the white man and his ways ... they despise and dislike him ... and care nothing for the Empire.” In addition, in any case, “Indian” men are primarily sportsmen—gentlemen “of leisure--to whom work, especially menial work, is extremely uncongenial.” The women were more than occupied with their own domestic chores and had little time to assist their white counterparts. MacNab suggested that: “so far as furnishing a working class for the white man is concerned A good deal depends upon the individual white man’s power of handling the Redskin.” White employers should use disciplinary measures, but also have a patient

⁴⁹ Brown, *Klatsassan*, 171, 174, 172, 174, 172, 173.

understanding of Aboriginal “peculiarities.” MacNab advised potential employers to learn to understand and speak “Chinook” (a jargon derived from English, French and First Nations languages) so as to more clearly instruct their Aboriginal workers.⁵⁰

In their writings about the First Nations in general, especially their own servants, Susan Allison, Eleanor Fellows and Florence Agassiz reveal a gradual transition from negative perceptions and images to an understanding, and even an appreciation, of the people and the culture that surrounded them. Perhaps their “understanding” stemmed from the fact that these women had ventured outside of B.C.’s “civilized” urban centers. Eleanor Fellows had lived, for a year, in close proximity to an “Indian village” near Esquimalt Harbour. Florence Agassiz spent her adolescent years in Hope and Ferry Coombe, and Susan Allison had settled amongst Aboriginal groups in the “wilds” outside of Princeton. Like most mid-nineteenth century settlers, they arrived in the colonies with preconceived notions of indolent, immoral and/or childlike indigenous inhabitants. It is not surprising that some of these notions did appear in their writings. In her reminiscences, Florence Agassiz commended her mother’s sense of humour at placing three hats on the head “of an old Indian” employee—“to the great amusement of the other Indians who shouted with laughter.”⁵¹ Susan Allison’s prejudices are certainly apparent in her recollection of her first visit with an Aboriginal woman who she described as

Dressed for the occasion ... in mid-Victorian style, a Balmoral petticoat, red and gray, a man’s stiff starched white shirt as a blouse, stiff high collar ... and brass bracelets!...my visitor seemed to think she ought to sit upright, in her chair and fix

⁵⁰ Frances MacNab, *British Columbia for Settlers: Its Mines, Trade and Agriculture* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), 95, 97, 80, 102.

⁵¹ Kathryn Bridge, *By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer: women of the frontier*, (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1998), 40-41.

her eyes on the opposite wall ... "Cha-hi-ya" was the only word she spoke. I felt very glad when her visit was over.⁵²

Allison later discovered that the woman was trying to communicate in Chinook, a language that she had not yet mastered. There is definitely a tone of condescension or (at least) cultural misunderstanding in this excerpt; Allison saw the woman as trying to rise above her "station" through the adoption of European attire. Condescension is also evident in Eleanor Fellows' reminiscence about the family photographs of her Aboriginal servant, Lucy. Fellows commented that the "specimens were the most hideous [she] ever beheld." The blankets worn by the male relatives were secured with a wooden skewer instead of a brooch. "The effect was most funny, but ... to please her I feigned an admiration equal to her own."⁵³

As Susan Allison became more familiar with the Aboriginal population, her observations changed. She explained that First Nations women such as her servant, Suzanne, usually wore chemise-like dresses that "gave them a certain dignity and grace that was absent when they tried to dress like white women."⁵⁴ Suzanne's grace was even evident in her mannerisms when assisting Allison with the birth of her first child. "She smoothed up my bed and ... was very good to me in her way—though I thought her rather unfeeling at the time. She thought that I ought to be as strong as an Indian woman but I was not." Again, there were some cultural misunderstandings. However, Mrs. Allison was very grateful for Suzanne's kindness over the years. She "was a

⁵² Margaret A. Ormsby, ed., *A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1976), 23.

⁵³ Bridge, *By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer*, 89.

⁵⁴ Ormsby, *A Pioneer Gentlewoman*, 27.

perfect treasure and so was her boy, Hosachtem” Suzanne and her son were only two of the many Aboriginal servant-helps employed by Susan Allison.

Florence Agassiz also regularly hired Aboriginal help. When in Hope, there were always “Indian women to do the washing and scrubbing” Even in isolated Ferry Coombe, an “Indian woman with her baby on her back would walk across the river on the ice every Monday morning to do the washing.” Agassiz admitted that she did not know what the family would have done without Aboriginal assistance, but she believed that the servants also benefited from the interaction. “They got two meals and fifty cents and often a piece of liver or kidney.”⁵⁵

Allison and Fellows often hired Aboriginal children as servants, and were usually pleased with their domestic abilities. Mrs. Allison related that: “On washing day one or two boys would come and get the water, fill the tubs and scrub on the washboard.” They eventually “learned to clean knives, polish stoves, and were a great help and amusement.” Allison also hired Aboriginal girls--Marie, Lily “and a host of others”⁵⁶ who helped with the babies and the housework. Eleanor Fellows obviously valued the work of Lucy, “a good girl, and as sweet-tempered, capable and industrious as any maid could be.” Lucy cleaned rooms, washed the household linens, performed odd jobs and (as Fellows put it) had an “appreciation of civilized cookery.” Lucy had developed a taste for cherry pie, which her employer conveniently used as a reward for work well done. On an occasion when Lucy was scalded while washing the “soiled linens,” Fellows administered first aid for the injury and cherry pie as compensation. The young

⁵⁵ Bridge, *By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer*, 35 and 43.

⁵⁶ Ormsby, *A Pioneer Gentlewoman*, 28, 27.

servant then “paddled her way home again, all smiles.”⁵⁷ Here the condescension is combined with affection.

Unlike most of their white counterparts, Susan Allison and Eleanor Fellows made the effort to look at the First Nations people and their culture through a lens not completely clouded by stereotypes. Both women learned to speak Chinook. Their motive was not only to better instruct their servants, but also to communicate with and understand the Aboriginal people around them. For example, Allison came to understand that Aboriginals were not inherently dishonest, but were often curious. Unlike Edgar Fawcett’s suggestion, she did not search the Aboriginals who did her washing. On one occasion when she had hired two boys to help with the wash, she simply gave them the wet stockings that “they took a fancy to.” Allison understood their cultural ideas of exchange. Her knowledge of their culture and the Chinook language also enabled her to record some of the Similkameen First Nations’ legends.

Through an understanding of their culture and seasonal lifestyle, Susan Allison even came to accept the fact that her First Nations servants would occasionally leave her employ or just disappear for a while. Moreover, unlike William Duncan and other disgruntled white employers, she rarely complained about the disappearances. In fact, she mentioned two occasions when she did not attempt to restrain her servant, Lily, from going “back to her people.” And, when her Aboriginal boys left her, she simply said, “I missed them when they went away—there was no keeping them, they were like wild birds.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Bridge, *By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer*, 88.

⁵⁸ Ormsby, *A Pioneer Gentlewoman*, 28, 27.

Few of Allison's contemporaries shared her acceptance of her servants' seasonal and mainly outdoor lifestyle. They tended to resent the fact that many First Nations servants preferred to be outside 'helps,' choosing farm or yard chores over housework. That work benefited the 'master of the household more than the 'mistress.' In addition, many domestic servants preferred not to 'live in' under the watchful eye of their employer. They would typically return to their own homes in the evening, thus reducing their hours of work and affording no guarantee that they would return in the morning. The relationship between white employers and First Nations domestics probably frustrated both parties. As time passed, fewer First Nations men, women and children took on serving jobs. And, this was not because they were lazy, incapable or a 'dying race.' In 1881, the Aboriginal population was estimated to be 29,000 while the non-Aboriginals numbered 23,798.⁵⁹ In 1891, Aboriginals formed an estimated 27.8 per cent of the total population of the province and in 1901, they were 16.2 per cent.⁶⁰ Although the indigenous people were being gradually outnumbered, they had not been bystanders but had become increasingly involved in the capitalist labour force. In fact, an 1885 report estimated that 85 per cent of B.C.'s Aboriginal population "belonged to bands that earned substantial incomes through paid labour."⁶¹ However, instead of "domestic service" jobs, they opted for better paying work on farms and public works, and in the fisheries, sawmills, mines and canneries. Desperate white employers, who could not rely on a supply of white female or Aboriginal servants, came to hire the next

⁵⁹ John Lutz, "After the fur trade," 93.

⁶⁰ Barman, *The West Beyond The West*, 379.

⁶¹ Lutz, "After the fur trade," 75 and 81.

available source of domestic help that British Columbia had to offer – Chinese men and boys.

Chapter 4

CHINESE DOMESTIC SERVANTS

The first Chinese immigrants arrived in the colonies via the United States in 1858; thereafter, others came from Kwangtung Province in Southern China.¹ Most of the (almost exclusively male) newcomers had come to seek their fortunes in the mainland gold fields, but by the mid 1860s, the financial returns from some of the mines had diminished. Although many Chinese immigrants continued to look for gold, others moved into the urban centers—especially Victoria—where they filled the need for labour. In the early years, they were seen to be the “respectable merchants, helpful domestic cooks and industrious peddlers” who supported the newly forming infrastructure.² Unfortunately, the tenor soon changed; as early as 1865, there was a proposal for a Chinese head tax. From 1865 on, fluctuations in anti-Asian sentiment often coincided with perceived economic threats to the white community. When railroad construction jobs ceased in 1885, there were concerns within both the white and the Chinese sectors of society. However, many of the Chinese immigrants had found their niches within the economy. The Chinese boys and men who took up domestic service were particularly difficult to dislodge from the labour market. By 1901 in Victoria, “60 percent of live-in domestics were men, many of them Asian immigrants.”³ Although they were usually underpaid (compared to white female domestics) and often endured racial,

¹ Chuen-Yan David Lai, “Home County and Clan Origins of Overseas Chinese in Canada in the Early 1880s,” in *BC Studies*, No. 27, (Autumn 1975), 3.

² Charles P. Sedgwick, “The Context of Economic Change and Continuity in an Urban Overseas Chinese Community,” Master’s Thesis, Department of Anthropology University of Victoria, (April 1973), 21-22.

³ Eric W. Sager, “The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871-1931,” *Social Science History* (December 2007), 17.

sexual and class prejudices (both on and off the job), there was more than enough work for the Chinese in white households. The demand for their services gave male Chinese servants some leverage with which to negotiate better domestic 'situations.'

According to Edward Said, Asian stereotypes ensured that 'Orientals,' including the Chinese, were depicted as being "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, and different." They were also seen to exude "dangerous sex" and to threaten hygiene and "domestic seamliness." Europeans, in contrast, claimed to possess the opposite characteristics.⁴ Such stereotypes travelled with European immigrants to British Columbia.

Stereotypes of the Chinese as being feminine, childlike and/or submissive, even asexual, profoundly affected the lives of male Chinese domestics. Effeminate stereotypes justified the prejudicial and condescending treatment of Chinese and rendered them relatively 'safe' to be of service in white homes. These negative stereotypes originated in the late eighteenth century as European businessmen, diplomats and missionaries in China "relayed home reports of Chinese resistance to their evangelical and commercial entreaties."⁵ Britain's victories during the Opium Wars further cemented the idea of China's decline or decay from what once had been perceived as a magnificent civilization.

There is some disagreement as to the causes of anti-Asian sentiment within nineteenth-century British Columbia. One viewpoint, supported by scholars such as Patricia Roy, and Rennie Warburton, is that negative sentiment varied with the

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 40, 167.

⁵ Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 96.

economic and political shifts. Warburton argued that discrimination against Chinese workers was more “a product of the employers’ quests for cheaper or more productive labour”⁶ than a race-based issue. There were contradictory interests between white labour and capitalists. Roy asserts that the white population’s prejudice was largely spurred by a “fear of Asian superiority”⁷ as workers and entrepreneurs. Irene Zaffaroni agrees with Roy that “racial prejudice was most blatant and vitriolic when white economic interests were threatened.” However, she adds, “prejudice was not exclusively a function of this competition.” With so few white workers available or willing to take on servant’s jobs, anti-Chinese racism could not have had a solely economic or a class (labour) base.⁸ W. Peter Ward admitted that economic issues sometimes fuelled anti-Asian sentiment but argued that the Europeans’ desire to maintain “racial purity” was at the heart of the problem. Whatever the initial reason for the prejudice, most scholars agree racial cleavages between the white and Chinese populations were further widened by residential patterns (Chinatowns), the formation of separate social organizations, lack of intermarriage and by job segregation.⁹

As if the negative notions were not well enough entrenched, the white population, especially the Sinophobes, drew “on an international repertoire of” anti-Asian sentiment, especially from Australia and California, which helped to perpetuate the stereotypes.¹⁰

By the mid-nineteenth century in the United States, notions of the Chinese as a

⁶ Rennie Warburton, “Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia,” in *A History of British Columbia*, Patricia E. Roy, ed. (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman, 1989), 283.

⁷ Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858–1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989), 285.

⁸ Irene Genevieve Zaffaroni, “The Great Chain of Being: Racism and Imperialism in Colonial Victoria,” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1987), 173.

⁹ W. Peter Ward, “Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939,” in *BC Studies*, 45, 1980, 17-35.

¹⁰ Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, 286.

degenerate people were common. In 1854, for example, the *Daily California Chronicle* ran a series of editorials in which it variously described the Chinese as “a miserable race ... allowed to crawl among us like so many social lice.” It stated categorically, “the white men are naturally of the dominant race; they are fitted to be masters. Who shall be their slaves – or if the mere word be objectionable – their servants? The Chinese are such a people.”¹¹ Undoubtedly, the early European and American immigrants to British Columbia were aware of such ideas but in the early days of the gold rush, some Victoria observers anticipated their arrival more as a curiosity than a threat. The *Victoria Gazette*, in a somewhat condescending tone, anticipated that “the familiar interrogations of ‘Wantee Washee’? will be added to our everyday conversation library.”¹² Similarly, a correspondent from Yale reported that many Chinamen were working upon deserted and improbable claims for a dollar or two a day. He was struck by their “grotesque” appearance “with their curious shaped hats—and pieces of duck fastened around the neck.”¹³

As long as the Chinese in British Columbia remained few in number, were somewhat out of sight, accepted an inferior social status and did not take jobs wanted by white labourers, British Columbians tolerated them. By 1865, the economy was rapidly declining and Chinese labourers were seen as a threat. Along with the proposed imposition of a poll tax, there was an anti-Chinese riot in Victoria. However, the riot was subdued; the City Council must have listened to the arguments of such men as Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken and Dr. William Fraser Tolmie. They insisted that the Chinese

¹¹ San Francisco, *Daily California Chronicle*, 22 April 1854, 2.

¹² “A Pioneer Chinaman,” *Victoria Gazette*, 30 June 1858, 2.

¹³ “Letter from Yale,” *Victoria Gazette*, 29 September 1859, 3.

were a “useful” and “valuable addition to the population.” Dr. Helmcken even suggested, “our aim should be to elevate the Chinese to our own standard.”¹⁴

However, by the 1870s, as the economy continued to deteriorate, arguments for taxing or excluding them appeared more frequently in the press and often had a distinctly moral flavour. In 1876, the *British Colonist* offered a typical portrayal of Chinese men as “sexual deviants.” The author was a miner who claimed to have witnessed the “Chinese evil” in both San Francisco and Australia. In the *British Colonist* he wrote that the “animal propensities” of the Chinese in the cities of Melbourne and Ballarat ... have led them to make acquaintance with the vilest and most debauched of “Christian” women to entice ... young girls of the tender age of 10, 11 and 12 years into the clutches of Chinamen for immoral purposes.” The miner warned that employing Chinese men as domestic servants would have both economic and moral ramifications. “What poor man would like to see his daughter going to service, knowing she would be brought into contact with Chinamen?”¹⁵

Three years later, a *Daily Colonist* writer stated that “the contagious example of immorality constantly to be seen in the Chinese quarter has exercised and still is exercising a most baneful influence.”¹⁶ The *British Columbian* reprinted an article from the *San Francisco Bulletin* that reinforced the image of lecherous Chinese men by telling of Sarah Isabella Burke, a previously “decent and sensible girl,” who had been “debauched” by a “repulsive” Chinese man--Wong Suey--who seems “to have made her a slave” and his mistress. The *Columbian* ominously commented: “In our own city facts

¹⁴ “Poll Tax on Chinamen,” *Victoria Gazette*, 19 May 1865, 3.

¹⁵ “The Chinese Question Economically and Socially Considered,” *Daily British Colonist*, 13 June 1876, 3.

¹⁶ “The Chinese in New Zealand,” *Daily Colonist*, 4 February 1879, 2.

have come to light which lead to the suspicions that the Chinamen of British Columbia can be as base and disgusting as the Chinamen of San Francisco.”¹⁷

Sinophobes were also treated to a plethora of negative propaganda and complaints originating in their own province. Images of moral and sexual depravity included alleged Chinese activities such as endemic gambling, treachery, opium use, infanticide, slavery, prostitution, polygamy and “noonday orgies.”¹⁸ British Columbia newspapers repeatedly condemned the social and sexual practices of local Chinese men. The words “Chinese,” “yellow” and “evil” often appeared in tandem. A letter to the editor of the *Daily British Colonist*, entitled “The Chinese Evil,” commented that “the heathen Chinese is peculiar ... they live in dens of the filthiest description and with more of the vices of humanity than any people under the sun.”¹⁹ In 1883, the *Daily Colonist* reported that twenty white railroad workers clubbed seven Chinese co-workers in their sleep; one died and five sustained critical head injuries. While such “unlawful proceedings” were condemned, the *Colonist* still called for “the removal of the Chinese evil from our midst.”²⁰ Even the colour used to describe the Chinese was not value-neutral. Constance Backhouse points out the correlation between the “unsavoury” terms: ‘yellow-belly,’ ‘yellow-streak,’ ‘yellow dog,’ ‘yellow press’ and the supposed

¹⁷ “One Phase of the Evil,” *British Columbian*, 25 April 1883, 1.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 97.

¹⁹ “The Chinese Evil,” *Daily British Colonist*, 6 May 1876, 2.

²⁰ “An Atrocious Crime,” *Daily Colonist*, 16 May 1883, 2.

yellow skin of Chinese immigrants.²¹ A *Cariboo Observer* editorial, entitled “More about Yellow Peril,”²² advocated further restrictions on the immigration of Chinese labourers.

After the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, many thousands of Chinese labourers were released into the community. The public worried about potential competition for the jobs of white settlers. There was strong agitation for the exclusion of the Chinese. British Columbia “repeatedly ... solicited the Executive and Parliament ... to enact a law prohibiting the incoming of Chinese” to the Province. The 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration was charged to “make enquiry into and concerning ... the whole subject of Chinese Immigration.” The Commissioners concluded that there was “no evidence ... of any immediate danger to the country or of any pressing necessity for immediate stringent legislation.” But there was another consideration – public sentiment. “Masses of people do not always reason logically ... and the public in British Columbia have almost unanimously ... expressed a wish that some legislation should be had on this subject.” Later that year, Canada imposed a \$50 dollar head tax on Chinese seeking to enter the country effective 1 January 1886.

Sir Matthew Begbie, Chief Justice of British Columbia, responded to the Royal Commission’s printed list of rather leading questions. Question number four read: “Are they industrious, sober, economical and law-abiding, or are they lazy, drunken, extravagant or turbulent?” Begbie provided an extensive answer to this question.

Lazy, drunken, extravagant and turbulent: this is, by the voices of their friends and foes, exactly what a Chinaman is not. This is ... the real cause of their

²¹ Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 135.

²² “More About Yellow Peril: Restriction of Immigration Still a Necessity,” *Cariboo Observer*, 15 May 1909, 3.

unpopularity ... for, looking to their universal employment as domestics ... and the unguarded condition of our houses, the pilfering by Chinamen servants is really quite inconsiderable. I believe that two of the white servants I have had have pilfered more from me than any twenty Chinamen in Victoria ever stole from their employers.²³

In a letter to the editor of the *Victoria Daily Times* 'One Who Is Interested' took umbrage with Begbie's testimony by claiming that the Chief Justice's comments had maligned the memory of his recently deceased "poor unfortunate Christian white servant." who was "degraded beneath the brutish Chinese idolater, whose morals are those of the dog without that animal's fidelity." The writer called upon Begbie to "vindicate the character" of the dead white servant.²⁴ Unlike Begbie, Hon. M.W.T. Drake alleged, "the Chinese are utterly unacquainted with truth, and it is a universal comment ... that you cannot believe anything they say ... Prostitution of the most flagrant character is carried on whenever a few men are collected. The women are slaves and sold by their importers The complaint of inveigling boys into these dens of infamy, and the diseases which are there caught are numerous and painful."²⁵

Given that there was controversy over Chinese labour and that anti-Asian sentiment appears to have been rampant in the 1870s and 1880s, how did this affect the Chinese servant-white employer relationships in British Columbia? In his study of Canadian domestic service, Eric Sager looked at 1901 census figures, which indicate that ethnic, and religious "preference influenced the selection of employees" in the rest of the country. However, the situation was very different in B.C. where the Chinese were the major source of domestic help. In fact, by 1901, almost two-thirds of B.C.'s servants

²³ Quotations in the previous two paragraphs are from Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (Ottawa: Printed by order of the Commission, 1885), vii, lxxxii, 69.

²⁴ "The Voice of the People," *Daily Times*, 14 March 1885, 3.

²⁵ "The Chinese Question," *Daily Times*, 12 March 1885, 2.

were Chinese or Japanese males.²⁶ Considering that most of the Chinese in B.C. retained their cultural and religious identities, how did they become acceptable ‘strangers’—even if only in their capacity to serve in white homes? There are several reasons why domestics were perceived as being at least marginally different from their non-servant counterparts. The most obvious explanation is that the white employers’ acceptance was based on need; they had to hire Chinese servants or go without. They were hired by default! In 1885, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald quoted J.A. Homer, Member of Parliament for New Westminster, as saying that “the employment of the Chinese on the Island ... was at present a matter of necessity ... it was impossible to get a servant except a Chinaman.”²⁷ Similarly, a letter to the editor of the *Daily Times* explained:

people are wonderfully inconsistent on the Chinese question. They keep on howling ‘The Chinese Must Go,’ and as a rule those who howl the loudest are those who employ the most Chinese help. Suppose ... John packs his carpetbag ... tomorrow, how are you going to get along without him? Who will be your house cook for you! You will certainly have to import servant girls from the east, and ten chances to one they will get married and leave you before they have been six months in the Province ... The simple fact is that John can’t be dispensed with until there is someone to take his place.²⁸

Another article in the *Daily Times* quoted Judge Henry Crease’s comments to the Royal Commission:

The Chinese are ... quite a pattern to the whites ... If the Chinese are excluded ... the misery—domestic misery to 80 out of every 100 families here—would ... be inconceivable The wail of the housewife would sweep through the land.²⁹

²⁶ Eric W. Sager, “The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871-1931,” *Social Science History* (December 2007), 25-26.

²⁷ “Chinese Immigration,” *Daily Colonist*, 15 May 1883, 2.

²⁸ “One Solution of the Chinese Question,” *Daily Times*, 23 March 1885, 3.

²⁹ “The Chinese Question,” *Daily Times*, 14 March 1885, 2.

Judge Crease emphasised that “persons of capital” would not come to reside in British Columbia if they could not retain efficient domestics.

Male Chinese domestics were also “favourably received ... because they were seen to have partially assimilated into the white culture,”³⁰ as suggested by Crease’s comments about Chinese characteristics being “quite a pattern to the whites.”³¹ Some wore western clothes, spent money in the larger community and even gave their employers Christmas presents. Florence Baillie-Grohman recalled how her servant, Gee, made efforts to assimilate. When he became the proud owner of a silver watch, she made him a “watch-pocket” to keep his watch safe. When he saw this stylish item, “his delight knew no bounds.” He then entreated her make him a second one for everyday wear, and even requested another for a friend who was also a domestic servant. Mrs Baillie-Grohman was also impressed by her servant’s desire to become literate in English. She commented that after only six weeks of lessons with her, “Gee could already write and read fairly well.”³²

The ‘availability’ and ‘assimilation’ theories offer partial explanations for the dominant white population’s acceptance of male Chinese servants. However, sexual stereotyping was the key to white rationalization. When required, the stereotype of sexually depraved Chinese men could be altered to suit their role as domestic servants. In the Royal Commission Report of 1885, Justice Gray referred to Chinese labourers as

³⁰ Sedgwick, “The Context of Economic Change,” 42.

³¹ “The Chinese Question,” *Daily Times*, 14 March 1885, 2.

³² Florence Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” in *Fifteen Years Sport and Life*, W.A. Baillie-Grohman (London: Horace Cox, 1900), 337.

“a small, inferior and comparatively speaking, feminine race.”³³ The assignment of feminine and submissive characteristics also helped white employers to justify the condescending (and sometimes cruel) treatment of their Chinese domestics.

Shortly after the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants, they were recruited as houseboys, gardeners, launderers and cooks in many of B.C.’s white middle-class or upper-class homes. Many white residents regarded their Chinese servants as invaluable domestic “assets.” However, as with the First Nations’ servants, praiseworthy reports were often tainted with racist and sexist rhetoric – whether subtle or overt. For example, Sarah Crease wrote to her husband in 1866 on the domestic virtues of her newly acquired Chinese servant.

Dearest Hubby, We have all been longing to let you know what a charming Chinaman we have got. I don’t know when we have had things so comfortable as since he came. He is clean, orderly and industrious, bakes and cooks to our hearts’ content—and (what we most feared about) washes the clothes quite as well as Sarah at her best ... We have all been in an incessant state of rejoicing to have ... such a real treasure ... God, I’m sure sends such Chinamen.³⁴

Two decades later, Jennie Phillips-Wolley explained to a friend in England: “Life here for a woman depends, my dear, a good deal on the Chinese ... if you are lucky, and treat your Celestial well, he seems to be a treasure beyond price.”³⁵ The use of a word such as “treasure” is not surprising. Elsewhere in North America, employers often referred to gems, jewels, and pearls, and “good” female “maid/objects.”³⁶

³³ Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration (Ottawa: Commission, 1885), lxix; James W. St. G. Walker, “Race,” *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 62.

³⁴ BCA, MSS 55, Vol. 13/3, Susan R. Crease, “At Pentrelew,” in *Crease Family Papers*, 15-19.

³⁵ Jennie Phillips-Wolley, “Correspondence Outward” in Clive Phillips-Wolley, *A Sportsman’s Eden* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1888), 181-182.

³⁶ Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *The Servant Problem: Domestic Workers in North America* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1985), 3.

Although Frances MacNab and Florence Baillie-Grohman did not use these terms when describing Chinese domestics, they also extolled their virtues. MacNab even related the comments of other female householders who preferred to hire the Chinese rather than the few white servants that were available; Chinese domestics were “less troublesome.” Although she was reluctant to admit it, Frances MacNab agreed. She concluded: “the only way to be waited on efficiently, or to live in peace and comfort, was by getting rid of white servants and employing only Chinamen.” They were industrious, patient and clever, and had a fidelity to their employers “practiced by few Europeans.” In her opinion, “Celestial” servants could even be trusted with “their master’s children ... more readily than any other coloured man.”³⁷ Comparisons to white female servants also appeared in Florence Baillie-Grohman’s writings. She explained that “it is difficult to give an entirely satisfactory answer to the question so often asked:” What kind of servants do Chinamen make?” However, on average she said she would rather have a Chinese servant than “an untrained white girl who ... expects to be treated as an equal.” Moreover, she added, in comparison “with the average plain cook and inefficient housemaid, the contrast” would be all in favour of the Chinese servant who “does twice the work ... he is always sober, and fairly honest. “ When faced with unfamiliar household tasks during her first month in Victoria, she relied totally on her eighteen-year-old “houseboy.” He was “clean and good looking for a Chinaman.”³⁸

Whether or not they were referred to as “treasures” or “good looking,” male Chinese domestics were regularly compared to white females and feminine

³⁷ MacNab, *British Columbia For Settlers*, 76.

³⁸ F. Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 333.

characteristics were ascribed to them. In fact, when referring to the jobs performed by her male servants, Mrs. Baillie-Grohman commented on their abilities as “parlourmaids,” “housemaids” and “sewing women.” In her book, *Gender Blending: Confronting the Limits of Duality*, Holly Devor contended that males, such as the Chinese servants, who crossed the gender line by taking on what the dominant society considers “unnatural” gender roles will often be ridiculed or scorned – especially if they are successful in the performance of that role.³⁹

This idea may account for some of the negative or condescending rhetoric aimed at Chinese domestics. Certainly, these views were present elsewhere. In his study of Chinese servants, Terry Abraham asserted that the Chinese were not naturally suited to become domestic servants; they simply stepped into a convenient gap in the labour market and made the best of it.⁴⁰ Margaret Strobel agreed with this view. She suggested that these men “may have felt less contradiction between masculinity and domestic service than we might expect.”⁴¹ These were not the domestic skills typically practiced by females in China, and this was, after all, waged labour.

Nevertheless, the white population liked to imagine that Chinese men had an innate propensity for the job. Nancy Stepan contended that the European idea of “biological determinism” helped to rationalize the view of effeminate Asian men. She asserted that some nineteenth-century scientists actually claimed that Caucasian

³⁹ Holly Devor, *Gender Blending: Confronting the limits of Duality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 50.

⁴⁰ Terry Abraham. “Class, Gender and Race: Chinese Servants in the North American West.” Paper presented at the Joint Regional Conference Hawai’i/Pacific and Pacific Northwest Association for Asian American Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 26 March 1996 (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Library Special Collections), 2.

⁴¹ Margaret Strobel, “Women’s History, Gender History, and European Colonialism,” in *Colonialism and the Modern World: Selected Studies*, Gregory Blue, Martin Bunton and Ralph Croizier, eds. (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 59.

women had “low Brain weights and deficient brain structures,” as compared to Caucasian men. These ‘factors’ explained women’s intellectual inferiority. Scientists extrapolated that gender was analogous to race. Caucasian women and the ‘lower races’ were then alleged to share a delicate, narrow and childlike skull. The skulls of Caucasian males tended to be robust and more rounded – clear indications of a “superior race.” Stepan added that “Women and ‘lower races’ were called innately impulsive, emotional, and imitative rather than original, and were incapable of the abstract reasoning found in white men.”⁴²

White employers frequently spoke to, and about, their Chinese domestics as if they were childlike and unintelligent. Again, because of the perceived effeminate-childlike qualities of Asian men there was moral justification for their discipline and control by white employers. For example, two women, quoted in a history of the Victoria area, discussed the discipline of an untrained Chinese servant.⁴³ They sanctioned the beating of this servant by another male domestic (the “head man”) because the former had, without permission, picked some flowers for his employer. Florence Baillie-Grohman also recorded an incident of physical punishment when a widow with whom she was staying became aggravated about the inefficiencies of her fourteen-year-old Chinese servant. Mrs. Baillie-Grohman heard “a scuffle ... and remonstrances being exchanged between the widow and the boy ... Sing was shoved into the room, the widow prompting him from behind ... then ducking his head, [he] turned tail and escaped ... from the widow’s clutches.” The widow explained that she had been trying

⁴² Nancy Leys Stepan, “Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science,” *Isis* Vol. 77 (June 1986), 263.

⁴³ Betty Brightwell, ed., “Sing, One Marvellous Chinese Servant,” in *Seafarers, Saints and Sinners: Tales of Esquimalt and Victoria People* (Victoria: The Esquimalt Silver Threads Writer’s Group, 1994), 30.

to teach him some manners, but he had “no savey.” Although Baillie-Grohman insisted that she valued the services and (at times) the companionship of her own Chinese servant, Gee, she conceded that she “spoilt him rather ... he was getting somewhat cheeky before he left, and on several occasions I had to give him one or two severe reprimands on his head.”⁴⁴ Her actions would not have been unusual for the time, considering the preconceived notion of Chinese servants being naturally submissive. As the *Daily Colonist* reported in 1889:

[T]he reason why so many people like Chinese servants is the same as leads some Eastern people to prefer negro servants, ... namely the fact that such servants recognize their true place in the household. They do their work without conveying the idea that they are degrading themselves.⁴⁵

White employers typically ‘talked down’ to the Chinese. True to the colonial stereotype, they spoke slowly and distinctly when giving instructions or orders to the labouring or ‘serving class’ and regularly depicted the Chinese as speaking only ‘broken’ or ‘pidgin’ English. Whatever the communication problem, employers were not expected to speak Chinese, but the Chinese were expected to struggle along in a foreign language.⁴⁶ White British Columbians regularly imitated what they saw as childish efforts to speak English. For example, the *Daily Colonist* printed an alleged conversation between a protesting Chinese man and Premier Walkem to ridicule their poor command of English and their rather childlike view of the environment, religion and laws in British Columbia. The conversation reads:

“You Mistel Walkem?”
 “Yes. What you wantee?”

⁴⁴ F. Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 334.

⁴⁵ “Domestic Servants, *Daily Colonist*, 30 April 1899, 4.

⁴⁶ Abraham, “Class, Gender and Race,” 6.

“You sabee tax?”
 “Carpet tacks?”
 “No; Chineeman tax. Cut him head off tax, no pay.”
 “Yes, Me sabee.”
 “Well, you sabee smoke?”
 “Yes.”
 “No likee, eh?”
 “No – no belly good.”
 “Well, spose plentee hiyou more smoke – no belly good, too, eh?”
 “Belly bad.”
 “Well, you cumtux Ah Hoy? Him wolk (work) lunatic asylum. You stealem him tax. Ten dollars. Joss – you sabee Joss?”
 “Yes; me sabee – allee same God.”
 “Well, Joss he heep sillox (angry). Ah Hoy he play (pray). Allee Chineeman play. Joss he light him pipe and flow smoke out him mouth. You no likee? Belly well. Spose you stealem any more tax. Joss he light him two pipes and smoke all King George man dead. Allee same bacon.”⁴⁷

Here, the paper is making fun of serious complaints about the imposed ten-dollar tax.

Writings about the “serving class” were often meant as amusing (and sometimes exotic) entertainments for family and friends in eastern Canada and in Britain. White employers were particularly inclined to ridicule the ‘improper’ speech of their Chinese domestics. In 1903, Frances Herring, recorded what she saw as an “amusing” conversation between her aunt and a new Chinese servant – Ah Shune. The aunt said:

At the end of his month, he came to me and said, “You pay me?” He knew he was very incompetent, and remarked to me tentatively, “Me no come to-moller.”

“What for you no come?” I asked him.

“I think you no likee me!”

“Oh yes; me heap likee you,” I returned; “You come to-moller.” So he came, and has been here ever since except for five months, when he went away to China...he had said when he left, “Me come back tree months; me likee you, you no too muchee talkee.” Indeed, I suppose you have noticed how

⁴⁷ “Joss Smoking His Pipe,” *Daily Colonist*, 13 September 1878, 2.

little I say to him. I find I can get along with the Chinese so much better by having very little to say to them.⁴⁸

This is only one of many recorded conversations between a “mistress” and a Chinese domestic. On one level, the employers may simply have been trying to make themselves understood. However, there is sufficient indication that white employers regularly mocked their servants’ efforts to speak English. This is somewhat analogous to the repeating of “baby talk” to a child – with a large dose of racism thrown in.

Of course, there were exceptions to this condescending and sometimes cruel attitude. In her diaries, Alice Barrett Parke, an Okanagan rancher’s wife, wrote, “nearly everyone talks a kind of broken English to Chinamen, so I don’t wonder they never learn to speak really well. I cannot do it.” Parke asserted that her servant, Goo-ee, preferred that she speak to him in proper English. “I don’t think that he finds it easy to understand me, but we make brave attempts.” A few months later, Mrs. Parke began to teach Goo-ee to read and write English – with great success. She commented that considering how difficult it must have been to learn Chinese, “it is no wonder that he finds English easy.”⁴⁹

White British Columbians also perceived the intelligence and social skills of the Chinese as being “under-developed” and this contributed to the repetition of the effeminate/childlike stereotype in the so called “humorous” anecdotes.” For example, Florence Baillie-Grohman complained that she had tried to teach Gee how to open a door properly and greet her visitors. However, no matter how carefully she trained him,

⁴⁸ Frances E. Herring, *Among the People of British Columbia: Red, White, Yellow and Brown* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903). 23.

⁴⁹ Jo Fraser Jones, *Hobnobbing with a Countess and Other Okanagan Adventures: The Diaries of Alice Barrett Parke, 1891-1900* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001), 192, 193, 196.

when uncertain as to whether his mistress was at home or not, “he would throw the door wide open, and stand in the hall and shout for me to know if I were at home, and if I would see Mrs. So-and-so.” Another time, Baillie-Grohman tried to teach “Charlie” to bake bread. In the middle of the process, she had asked him to stop and clean the soot from the stovepipe. Thereafter, he repeated the steps exactly – always cleaning the pipe whether necessary or not.⁵⁰ White employers such as Mrs. Baillie-Grohman saw these “amusing” incidents as being stereotypical and perceived Chinese domestics as “imitative rather than original.”⁵¹

Of course, there was a positive side to the perceived imitative characteristics of Chinese servants. Charlie, Mrs. Baillie-Grohman’s “small six dollar boy,” may have been hard to train, but “once shown how to do anything, the boy ... never forgot how to do it.”⁵² Frances MacNab also saw imitation in a positive light. She insisted that her Chinese servants had astonishing memories. “Once shown John Chinaman how you wish anything to be done, and it will always be so in future.”⁵³

Along with the effeminate and childlike stereotype of Chinese domestics, Caucasian writers emphasised constructed characteristics such as timidity or even cowardice. Mrs. Baillie-Grohman recalled being awakened one night by a series of crashes. She rose from her bed, lit a candle and called out to her servant, whereupon a light which had previously shone under his door was extinguished. The next morning she inquired as to why he did not investigate the crashes or, at least, answer her call. Gee responded that if an intruder could “kill big English woman, he velly easy kill poor

⁵⁰ F. Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 351, 350-351.

⁵¹ Stepan, “Race and Gender,” 263.

⁵² F. Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 349.

⁵³ MacNab, *British Columbia for Settlers*, 72.

little Chinaman too ... I so glad to hear you no killed this morning" ... Baillie-Grohman remarked that "it was not comforting to know that one's only protector in the house would quietly retire to sleep, although convinced that one was being murdered."⁵⁴ The crashing noises had not been caused by intruders, but by a cat that had climbed into a china cabinet.

Violet Sillitoe described a similar situation when intruders threatened her while she was alone in the house except for her two dogs and her Chinese servant. She heard noises on the veranda, and called out to her servant during the night without response. Her servant would not leave his room, but later told her "that he had heard steps on the veranda and in the morning there were footprints, showing that two men had been around."⁵⁵ At least her dogs had been loyal and protective; the cowering image of her servant was in keeping with his effeminate stereotype. The passivity of the Chinese servant was the focus of the account that was meant to be more humorous than ominous.

Nevertheless, some employers recorded examples of their Chinese servants being unable to cope with stress. Susan Crease reported an incident involving their cook Chu and a gardener-groom at the family home, Pentrelew, in the early 1880s. One day, the gardener rushed to her saying the kitchen was on fire: "Chu burn him!" There was indeed a fire and the mistress of the house took charge shutting the doors, evacuating a guest and sending for the police. The last policeman had "just gone to Beacon Hill to arrest a Chinaman who was trying to drown himself in the sea" and it

⁵⁴ F. Baillie-Grohman, "The Yellow and White Agony," 340-341.

⁵⁵ Violet E. Sillitoe, *Pioneer Days in British Columbia: Reminiscences from 1879 to 1894* (private publication, [circa 1920]), 15.

turned out to be Chu! “A cart brought poor Chu to the house for identification – he was lying on the bottom of it, so greatly swelled that I hardly knew him at first – I said ‘Chu, what for you make fire?’ ‘Oh me not know’ he answered, ‘me think bad heart.’” Although Chu was injured, he was taken straight to gaol--”there being no better place for men circumstanced as he was.”⁵⁶ Crease described a curious “insanity” that overtook Chu when he was forced to change from prison clothing to his own clothes for his court hearing. Possibly, it was the act of dressing for court that disturbed him. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Chinese domestics were characterized as being incapable of dealing with stressful situations. The women were reported as courageous when compared to their male servants even though they had admitted to being nervous or frightened.

Along with their perceived submissive and childlike characteristics, the clothing worn by Chinese men further feminized them in the eyes of the white population. The Victorians saw visibly-different, colonized men as having a “feminine and lower-class predilection for decorating their bodies;” in his ‘cogitation’ on clothing the popular historian Thomas Carlyle declared, “The first spiritual want of a barbarous man is Decoration, as we still see amongst the barbarous classes in civilized nations.”⁵⁷ White British Columbians certainly made note of the exotic/feminine dress of the Chinese. In a letter to a friend, Jennie Phillips-Wolley included an exotic description of “a pig-tailed Chinaman in a profusion of beautifully white linen”⁵⁸ Jessie McQueen also wrote that a typically “stylish ... Chinaman” wore a white “blouse” which hung outside of his

⁵⁶ S. Crease, “At Pentrelew,” 15-19.

⁵⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender & Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 224.

⁵⁸ J. Phillips-Wolley, “Correspondence Outward,” 29.

“brocaded silk trousers.” The blouse was “fastened to one side with brass buttons and loops of cord”⁵⁹ The *Daily Colonist* vividly described “the gaudy costumes of the New Year ... Bright green coat, purple panties – colors that would make a Siwash green with envy – long skirts of maroon silk.”⁶⁰ The description was not meant to be flattering. The writer used sexual stereotypes to “otherize” both male Chinese cooks/servants and First Nations females. In her memoirs, Eunice M.L. Harrison, the wife of Judge Eli Harrison, recalled that her “cooks and houseboys wore noiseless Chinese satin slippers, in addition to blue trousers, a long white starched apron and a starched white Oriental coat, with its high collar.” Their queues were generally “braided around their heads.”⁶¹ While Mrs. Harrison may not have meant to mock her Chinese servants, an image of femininity was prominent.

However effective the feminization of Chinese domestics was in the minds of white employers, the image of barbarous and sexually depraved Asians occasionally surfaced. One involved their ‘exotic’ eating and smoking habits. Jennie Phillips-Wolley indicated that while her Chinese servant always arrived in the morning looking “fresh and clean as a new print dress,” he likely passed his evenings in the “consumption of opium ... or in eating nameless horrors.”⁶² A writer in *Man to Man* magazine claimed that there was an overwhelming smell of opium in the Chinese Quarter and the butcher shops typically displayed “repulsive-looking delicacies.” The Chinese had “a fondness for decayed edibles ... nameless dainties which have the look of dried bodies of insects

⁵⁹ Jessie McQueen to Jane McQueen, Lower Nicola, 20 September 1888. quoted in Barman, *Sojourning Sisters*, 93-94.

⁶⁰ “Festivities Are Ended,” *Daily Colonist*, 1 February 1903, 2.

⁶¹ Eunice M.L. Harrison, *The Judge’s Wife: Memoirs of a British Columbia Pioneer*, Ronald B. Hatch, ed. (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2002), 75.

⁶² J. Phillips-Wolley, “Correspondence Outward,” 182.

and serpents.” In fact, there were even “fat puppies for the table.” The *British Columbian* accused “Asiatics” of creating opium dens in order to seduce and ruin “young men and women ... by hundreds, if not thousands.”⁶³

An example of perceived depravity appeared in a *Daily Colonist* warning that although a Chinese servant was a ‘good machine’ who would respond to his employer’s call and would perform multiple household tasks, the employer should not be “content to have about him continually mere machines ... What guarantee for virtue or preservation from vice!...Nothing is more remarkable than the foolhardiness with which some families put themselves at the mercy of Chinese servants.”⁶⁴ The writer of a satirical letter to the editor of the *Daily Times* ominously described a “most charming picture of cosmopolitan life in Victoria, in which the humorous Chinaman enjoys the highest social privileges of the family circle.” The servant “looks over his mistresses’ shoulder while she writes ... was he toying with her glossy curls at the same time, or does the ‘cosmopolitan’ husband object to sharing his joys with dear ‘Chung’?” Indeed, “the sweet-scented Celestial” may also be “carrying leprosy into the family where he is treated with such distinguished consideration.”⁶⁵ More evidence of a perceived threat to white womanhood surfaced at a meeting, in Ottawa, of the Select Committee on Chinese Labour and Immigration. A British Columbia M.P, Arthur Bunster, began his testimony by asserting that only “a few would be aristocrats who like to put on frills ... are fond of having Chinese servants.” He claimed that their popularity rested on the fact that they performed tasks that “a white man is not supposed to do. For instance ... they will think

⁶³ “One Phase of the Evil,” *British Columbian*, 25 April 1883, 1.

⁶⁴ “Now Is The Time,” *Daily Colonist*, 25 September 1878, 2.

⁶⁵ “Ah Sin was his Name,” *Daily Times*, 19 March 1885, 3.

nothing of going and scrubbing the woman of the house in a bath tub—as I have been told.” Bunster later admitted that he had been describing a skit he had seen on a San Francisco stage, but his earlier remarks had their intended sensationalistic effect.⁶⁶ Constance Backhouse explains that opium was at the heart of such imagery. Newspapers fuelled white anxieties about Chinese opium peddlers using the drug to enslave and defile innocent white women.⁶⁷ These ideas persisted into the 1920s.⁶⁸

In a letter to the *Daily Colonist* editor, the president of the Anti-Chinese Union (A.C.U.), John M. Duval, also addressed the outcry against employing Chinese men and boys as household servants. However, instead of merely offering up Sinophobic stereotypes or relying on government intervention, Duval proposed a practical (local) solution. He encouraged Victoria’s citizens to donate or loan money to the A.C.U. central committee members who would “do their utmost to supply the necessary help to replace the Chinese.” The committee would only import English girls who could “furnish sufficient testimonials of good character.”⁶⁹ Duval intimated that such a trait rarely existed in male Chinese domestics.

⁶⁶ James Morton, *In The Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd., 1974), 69, 75.

⁶⁷ Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, 143.

⁶⁸ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1993) 112. Anxieties also appeared in a series of articles written by a conservative feminist, Emily Murphy. She hinted at the vile sexual acts and the miscegenation that occurred in Chinese opium dens. Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, 144. There were fears that opium could even transform a supposedly asexual, male Chinese servant into a sexual predator. Scott Kerwin, “The Janet Smith Bill Of 1924 and The Language of Race and Nation in British Columbia,” in *BC Studies*, no. 121, (Spring 1999), 83. Anti-Chinese sentiment surrounded the mysterious death of Janet Smith. It was at first alleged that she had been murdered (and, possibly, sexually violated) by a male Chinese co-worker. The press and Vancouver’s Scottish Societies advocated a law that would prohibit white females and Asian males from serving in the same households

⁶⁹ “White Female Servants,” *Daily Colonist*, 18 November 1885, 4.

Although Florence Baillie-Grohman usually presented *her* Chinese domestics as being hard working and “fairly honest,” she also wrote about a sensational incident in which a trusted Chinese servant took up a kitchen knife and murdered another Chinese man while the former was making lunch for his employer. “To the mistress’s horror the missing Chinaman was found, with his throat cut, crammed into an old tub or dust-box in a small outhouse close to the kitchen.” In another case, her friend’s servant was arrested for setting the kitchen on fire--his excuse being that a Chinese society had forced him to do so. Naturally, such recollections did add an exotic flavour to Mrs. Baillie-Grohman’s work. However, she was careful to add that these instances “cannot condemn the whole class of Chinamen ... as a class dangerous to the community.”⁷⁰

The aforementioned newspaper articles and Florence Baillie-Grohman’s recollections indicate that Chinese servants were not always exempt from the immoral or dangerous stereotypes inflicted upon their non-servant counterparts. Whenever the political or economic need dictated (especially when there was an influx of Chinese into the area), an anxious white population invoked these stereotypes. In 1871, there was a concern in the American Pacific north-west that white employers over indulged their Chinese domestics. An editor for the *Daily Pacific Tribune* complained: “Chinese house servants, here and elsewhere, have more comfortable places and receive better pay than Chinese labourers on railroads. And they know it.” Householders were urged to reduce the wages of any “heathen Chinese” servant.”⁷¹ This attitude may have accompanied the servant-retaining class who migrated from the United States to B.C.

⁷⁰ F. Baillie-Grohman, “The Yellow and White Agony,” 353, 353.

⁷¹ “Chinese Servants,” *Daily Pacific Tribune*, 20 June 1871, 3.

The fear of a Chinese influx actually became an election plank in 1878. The winning candidate, George A. Walkem, introduced a Chinese Tax Act, which required all Chinese over the age of twelve to pay \$10 quarterly and restricted their access to labouring jobs. These actions precipitated a general strike by Victoria's Chinese workers on September 17, 1878.⁷² Newspaper articles did indicate that the absence of Chinese domestics caused great hardship in both white homes and businesses. However, the *Daily Colonist* challenged white society that it was "fairly on its trial" to supply the "cooks, housemaids, chambermaids, laundresses, wood sawyers, boot and shoemakers, and tailors" required to replace "all the Chinese employed till yesterday in the city that have quit work."⁷³ While admitting the inconvenience of the strike, the *Colonist* urged Victoria employers to use the opportunity to hire white help. After happily reporting that the deserted jobs were rapidly being filled by white workers, within a few days the *Colonist* was appealing to employers to hire white men and women, who were said to have arrived by steamship and were expecting to find situations. They had "been forestalled by the Chinese servants who returned to their places the day before." The editor insisted, "where a white servant can furnish as good service as a Chinese servant, it is the duty of a civilized household to hire a white servant."⁷⁴ An advertisement entitled "Cooks" underscored the editor's problem:

Owing to the recent strike amongst the Chinese, a number of white female cooks have arrived in this city seeking employment. As yet they do not seem to have met with that encouragement to which they are entitled, notwithstanding the fact that they are willing to work for the same wages hitherto paid Chinese cooks and will perform the same nature of labor. In

⁷² James Morton, *The Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd., 1974), 61-62.

⁷³ "On Trial," *Daily Colonist*, 18 September 1878, 2.

⁷⁴ "Now Is The Time," *Daily Colonist*, 25 September 1878, 2.

several instances, the non-success of the new arrivals has proved disheartening to them.⁷⁵

Whether or not there were white females available to do the work, it is clear that Chinese cooks and servants were taken back into their original jobs.

While early Chinese domestics may have been hired 'by default,' they had become indispensable. This is not surprising, as in many cases, they were the only servant in the household. The Chinese servant's responsibilities included everything that the mistress or the rest of the family could not, or would not, do. Violet Sillitoe explained her servant's duties: "our domestic staff consisted of one Chinaman, who had to look after the horses, milk the cow, attend to the vegetable garden, besides cooking, baking and washing for the family."⁷⁶ Jessie McQueen's letters to her mother included a description of a Chinese servant who did "all the cooking and dish-washing" in a household where there was "dinner three times a day—meat & vegetables every time."⁷⁷ In the postscript of his 1888 book, *A Sportsman's Eden*, Clive Phillipps-Wolley asserted that Victorians were fortunate to have found such a versatile substitute for a parlour maid and cook. Chinese domestics are "docile, clean, ready to work, and able to do anything that a woman can, the universal employment of them ... at a high rate of wages, proves the esteem in which they are held."⁷⁸

By the 1880s, Chinese servants were so valued that "promotional literature designed to attract white immigrants mentioned the availability of Chinese cooks and

⁷⁵ "Cooks," *Daily Colonist*, 25 September 1878, 3.

⁷⁶ Sillitoe, *Pioneer Days in British Columbia: Reminiscences*, 15.

⁷⁷ Jessie McQueen to Jane McQueen, Lower Nicola, 20 September 1888, Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia quoted in Barman, *Sojourning Sisters*, 93.

⁷⁸ Clive Phillipps-Wolley, *A Sportsman's Eden* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888), 254-255.

domestic servants.”⁷⁹ Whether in book or pamphlet form, the literature was directed at middle-class or wealthy Britons who, upon arrival, would require servants. The author of one such book, *The Settlers of Vancouver Island*, espoused the good character and the impressive domestic abilities of the Chinese:

Much of the talk against the Oriental, known as the “Yellow Peril” ... is a got up scare story, and has no evidence in fact They are also the chief, and to a certain extent the only house servants to be found, who are willing to work in domestic service on the Pacific Coast of Canada at the present time. In this, they are superior to the ordinary maidservant ... the honesty and integrity of the Orientals are seen and acknowledged by all who have employed them.⁸⁰

The author may have been an admirer of the Chinese people, but, considering his intended audience, he was probably trying to reassure prospective immigrants about the quality of domestic service in British Columbia.

Ironically, the government and private employers also came to use the fact of the Chinese presence to attract white female *domestics* to British Columbia. Some promotional literature declared that many potential employers already had Chinese servants. It was intimated that these individuals would take care of most of the cooking and the more unpleasant chores. An 1883 government pamphlet meant to attract immigrant domestics, stated that “Female servants ... are scarce, and wages are high ... Chinamen are much employed as cooks; but the women do not take servants’ places.” The information in this pamphlet indicated that an immigrant domestic would not have to cook; nor would Chinese females threaten her job. A similar pamphlet, published in 1886, emphasized that Chinese servants were not only “employed as

⁷⁹ Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, 41.

⁸⁰ Rev. W.G.H. Ellison, *The Settlers of Vancouver Island: A Story for Emigrants* (London: [circa 1914]), 81-83.

cooks,” they also cut the firewood, lit the fires and cleaned the boots.⁸¹ The Chinese domestics’ reputation for hard work was actually used to attract local, white women and girls to situations as servants. Potential employees were sometimes informed that there was already a Chinese servant in the home. An advertisement that ran in the *Daily Colonist*, from April 30th to May 6th 1899, read:

Wanted Immediately – A woman to look after children; must understand sewing: Chinaman Kept, Apply Mrs. Mulligan, Oak Bay Avenue.⁸²

The reader could assume that the “Chinaman” would be responsible for the more tedious and/or labour intensive jobs.

The value of Chinese labour is clearly outlined in the 1902 Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration. There were a few complaints that Chinese servants were inherently dishonest and their work was “unsatisfactory.” There were even suggestions that because of the Chinese presence white girls had developed a “caste prejudice” against such work and looked upon domestic service as “menial employment.” However, the commissioners ultimately concluded that Chinese domestics “give general satisfaction, and many of them are exceptionally good servants ... the larger number are found to be honest, obedient, diligent and sober.”⁸³

Unfortunately, the commissioners’ conclusion had little influence on the discrimination against Chinese domestics. Yet, the Chinese had some occupational agency. At the very least, they had options as to their place of employment; they took into account the wages paid, the temperament of their employer and the working

⁸¹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Province of British Columbia: Information for Settlers* (1886), 15, 24.

⁸² Wanted advertisements, *Daily Colonist*, 30 April 1899, 3.

⁸³ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration: Session 1902* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1902), 171, 167.

conditions. Eunice Harrison commented that while living in her Victoria home, Oakwood, her “house boys ... were all Chinese and in almost endless succession, some staying two years or so, others but two minutes.”⁸⁴ Jennie Phillipps-Wolley provided some insight into this aspect of the servant-employer relationship in the 1880’s. Shortly after arriving in B.C., she ascertained that the Chinese domestics were “sharp enough to have noticed how necessary” they were to the white population. They would take on varied domestic duties, and although the number of incoming Chinese had decreased, white servants had not filled the vacancies. Mrs. Phillipps-Wolley complained to an English friend that she had to pay her first Chinese servant “thirty to forty dollars a month as cook, housemaid and buttons” (seamstress.) Such servants also had a “painful” habit of leaving without notice, often not even bothering to collect their back pay. “It is a terrible thing to feel that if you lose your temper with him ... when morning comes you may find your household ‘brownie’ gone ... and what is more, if this happens often, you will find very considerable difficulty in replacing him.”⁸⁵ Frances MacNab also commented about Chinese servants “taking French leave.” She explained, “the difficult point with the Chinaman is that no one foresees the hour when his services may terminate.” An employer could only hope to fill his place with “one of his countrymen.”⁸⁶ However, as Mrs. Phillipps-Wolley pointed out, the replacement of a Chinese servant often depended on the employer’s ‘character;’ “your reputation as a mistress in Chinatown is one of your most valuable possessions.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ronald B. Hatch, ed., *The Judge’s Wife: Memoirs of a British Columbia Pioneer*, ((Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2002), 206.

⁸⁵ Phillipps-Wolley, *A Sportsman’s Eden*, 182-183.

⁸⁶ MacNab, *British Columbia for Settlers*, 82.

⁸⁷ Phillipps-Wolley, *A Sportsman’s Eden*, 181.

Florence Baillie-Grohman and Eleanor Fellows similarly observed the periodic movement of servants between white employers. Baillie-Grohman claimed that whenever Chinese domestics congregated, they gossiped about their employers' temperaments and personal affairs. She reported that:

The qualities of every mistress are well known, and some in consequence find it difficult to induce any Chinaman to enter their service. Certainly, everyone's income is speculated upon, and if one lives in a house, which fetches a certain rent, one will only be able to procure a Chinaman at corresponding wages.

A Chinese domestic was apt to use his employer's financial position to his own advantage. The first Chinese servant employed by Mrs. Baillie-Grohman even exercised some agency when it came to his work environment; he made it clear that he preferred not to vary from his own housekeeping routine. She explained, "he was much put out if I deviated a hair's breadth from that which had become customary." Baillie-Grohman also complained that all of Victoria's Chinese domestics expected to have Sunday afternoons off. They left as soon as the noon meal was finished, often refused to prepare the evening meal and did "not appear again until Monday morning."⁸⁸ Eleanor Fellows mentioned an incident where an overtaxed Chinese servant ceased cooking half way through an elite Victoria woman's "grand banquet." When the flustered hostess looked into her kitchen, she found it in complete disarray. "Of John there was no trace, nor did he ever reappear. Something – no one knew what – must have offended him."⁸⁹

Whether or not there was a conscious and/or a unified effort to maintain the negative sexual stereotypes of the Chinese, the use of these images was sustained

⁸⁸ Baillie-Grohman, "The Yellow and White Agony," 349, 335, 351.

⁸⁹ Eleanor C. Smyth (nee Fellows), *An Octogenarian's Reminiscences; the Story of a Great Reform* (Letchworth, Eng.: Letchworth Printers, 1916).

throughout early British Columbia history. White British Columbians saw sexuality as being at the core of the Chinese identity. Chinese immigrants were generally categorized as sexually deviant, morally corrupt and, for the most part beyond redemption. These images justified the prejudicial and discriminatory practices of the white population. In addition, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that negative sexual stereotyping escalated in times of political, psychological or economic crisis, the Chinese often being the 'scapegoats'.

There are several explanations as to why male Chinese domestics were usually exempt from the sexual deviant stereotype. Of course the 'availability' and (to some extent) the 'assimilation' theories offer partial explanation. However, the ascription of feminine characteristics, even de-sexualization, was the key to white rationalization. When required by the white population, sexual discourse could change the generally depraved Chinese male into a submissive and effeminate serving-unit. In fact, the de-sexualization of Chinese domestics frequently caused them to be preferred over white female servants. One newspaper explained that women liked the Chinese "for a servant as their husbands cannot love him as they might a girl."⁹⁰ There was a comfortable assumption that Chinese servants could carry on with their domestic chores, without the risk that they might 'carry on' with the male 'head of the household'. Conversely, there was also an assumption that a de-sexualized male servant would not be a 'romantic' threat to his mistress, or to other female servants or family members. Although he spent most of his waking hours in their company, the ascription of feminine traits would have rendered him fairly harmless in the eyes of his employers. Surely, he would not offend

⁹⁰ Roy, *White Man's Province*, 36.

these white females with his unwanted 'attentions.' Essentially, a male Chinese servant could change his employers' sheets, wash their underwear and perform all manner of intimate duties for them, mainly because he was not seen as a 'man' – at least, not in the white European sense. How convenient for the middle-class and upper class, white population!

Although the Chinese 'alternative' did not quite measure up to the Imperial ideal, there is no doubt that the feminization of male Chinese servants helped to overcome the fear of employing a 'stranger' and ensured a 'safe' supply of domestic servants in British Columbia. This phenomenon continued until the so-called Chinese 'machines' and other servants could be replaced by household machinery in some middle and upper class homes. However, from the time when the first Chinese domestics were employed in the colonies, the supply rarely met the demand. There was an ongoing 'servant problem' that benefited the Chinese men and boys who did take up service. Given the demand for their 'service,' there was some room for movement and negotiation.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The 'servant problem' is one of the most frequently mentioned subjects in the reminiscences, letters and dairies of British Columbia's white female residents. There were typical complaints about poor service and raves about household 'treasures,' much as there were in eastern Canada. However, white employers were faced with a 'problem' that was unique to British Columbia. In the early years, "setting up house" usually meant going without a white female servant and hiring occasional First Nations help. By the 1860s, white servants were sometimes available, but they were often 'married off' after a short term of employment. The most consistent and, by many accounts, the most efficient and hardworking servants were the Chinese men and boys. They served in white homes from the 1860s until at least the late 1920s.

Along with the practical reasons for the employment of First Nations, Chinese and white domestics, their presence in middle-class and upper class homes served ideological purposes. In part, servants were 'kept' because they enhanced their white employers' social status; they also reinforced the race- and class-based social hierarchy. "A lady did not do her own work, or at least not all of it."¹ The preferred English domestics were especially instrumental in maintaining British standards. British immigrants expected that the "specific values and cultural features of Victorian

¹ Marilyn Barber, "The Women of Ontario Welcomed Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," in *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History, Volume 2*, Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 103.

England”² would accompany these female servants into British Columbia households. Whether or not English domestics could be obtained, it was incumbent upon the ‘mistresses’ of elite B.C. households to manage and supervise their servants so as to perpetuate the Imperial idea of cleanliness and morality. However, British Columbia’s peculiar ‘servant problem’ ensured that the Imperial vision of employer-servant relations and domestic order could not be exactly reconstructed.

From the early colonial days, efforts to maintain the social distance between servants and employees were thwarted. The average servant-retaining household had only one employee. Eric Sager states that by 1901 in Canada, “59 percent of live-in servants worked as the only servant in the household.”³ The percentage would have been higher in servant-deprived B.C. Where white servants were more numerous there could be anonymity, but the domestic workload in a one-servant household ensured that the ‘mistress’ often had to work alongside her servant. Of course, efforts were made to keep up the depersonalization of domestic servants. In writing about household affairs, many white employers did not bother to name their servants and gave some nicknames. However, there is at least an uncomfortable intimacy in the writings.

The general lack of white female companionship also allowed for a breach in the social or class hierarchy that determined employer-servant relations. When living in isolated areas of British Columbia, some white employers actually developed friendships with their First Nations and Chinese domestics. In addition, many white domestics came to have integral roles in the social life of their employers’ families. They

² Rita S. Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 27.

³ Eric W. Sager, “The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871-1931,” *Social Science History*, (December 2007), 23.

were invited to community and family outings and celebrations. While First Nations, white and Chinese servants did experience class, race and gender-based discrimination, they generally had more personal agency and social mobility than their counterparts in Britain. In a generally under-stocked market, they could at least change employers or bargain for better working conditions.

First Nations servants were few in number and were usually employed on a part-time basis. Theirs was a seasonal lifestyle, so when the need arose they took up their own cultural and economic endeavours. They often left their white employers wondering when, or if, they would see their servants again.

By the late 1870s, the number of Chinese domestics far exceeded the First Nations who were in service. The Royal Commission for 1902 found that there were 530 Chinese cooks and servants in Victoria, 262 in Vancouver, 65 in New Westminster and 42 in Nanaimo. In addition, Chinese were employed as cooks on farms in most other areas of the province. Witnesses told the Commission that despite their numbers, there were barely enough Chinese servants to fill the needs of white British Columbians. The Chinese derived some agency from the fact that they were the only group willing to take on the work that white labour disliked. When a situation did not suit Chinese domestics, they sometimes negotiated for better conditions or higher wages. The Commission reported that their “wages range from \$10 to \$30 per month in private families, and from \$25 to \$45, and some cases even higher, in hotels.”⁴ Moreover, much as with First Nations domestics, they were known to disappear without notice. In many cases, they

⁴ *Report of Royal Commission, 1902, 187.*

would appear shortly thereafter as an employee in another white household or they would get work in laundries, cigar factories or canneries.

The lot of white female servants partly hinged on the fact that there was so few of them in British Columbia. Local women and girls were simply “not inclined to go into service.”⁵ Rather than being tied to a job that usually involved domestic drudgery, isolation and inferior social status, they preferred clerical, retail or factory work—“even at lower net wages than domestic work.”⁶ In the 1902 Royal Commission, A.R. Milne speculated that white females avoided ‘service’ “because of the long hours and inconsiderations on the part of their employers.” Another commissioner blamed an ever-strengthening “case prejudice against domestic service.”⁷ A writer for *Westward Ho! Magazine* extolled the virtues of “the busy young woman of today, be she stenographer, shop girl or trained nurse, [she] has, as a rule, a most contented, happy look which is a great attraction in a girl’s face.”⁸ Whether or not such a young woman acquired the “contented, happy look,” at least she would have a separate work and home life, giving her a chance to participate in social activities. Another reason for the dearth of “servant girls” in B.C. was that relatively high wages earned by the main ‘bread winner’ let families keep their daughters at home until they married.⁹

It is not surprising (considering the unfilled demand) that the white women and girls who did take up domestic service had more bargaining power than their British counterparts. For example, the all important “character reference,” the corner stone of

⁵ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration: Session 1902* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1902), 167, 169.

⁶ Barber, “The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestic,” 105.

⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission, 1902*, 170,171.

⁸ “A Woman’s Ideas,” *Westward Ho! Magazine*, 7 September 1907, 40.

⁹ *Royal Commission 1902*, 170.

the British system, was rarely mentioned in the writings of B.C.'s employers. The "Female Help Wanted" advertisements in the newspapers seldom requested references. In Britain, and (to a lesser extent) in eastern Canada, servants "relied upon character references from former employers in order to obtain new positions."¹⁰ Employers were not legally required to provide these letters, and some used this power to discourage their domestics from leaving. The loss of a "character," or a bad "character," could be devastating to a British servant.¹¹ However, B.C. employers usually hired white servants based on less formal recommendations from friends, relatives and (occasionally) immigration societies. If they were fortunate, householders sometimes hired the daughters of local families on a temporary basis. These girls expected to be treated with some respect and many left uncomfortable positions. Much like the servant-employer relations with Chinese and First Nations domestics, the "mistress of the house" could receive an unofficial and (if negative) unwanted "character" from her white domestics.¹²

As already mentioned, white employers (especially white "mistresses") found it difficult to fulfill their part of the Imperial ideal.¹³ The "servant problem" was not simply the fault of the servant. From the 1860s through the early 1900s in B.C., there had been increasing pressure on middle-class women. As they ascended the social ladder, they were encouraged to spread their good character and civilizing influence by participating

¹⁰ Magda Fahrni, "'Ruffled' Mistresses and 'Discontented' Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1890-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997), 10.

¹¹ Theresa M. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernization of Household Service in England and France, 1870-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 73.

¹² Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," in *Women At Work In Ontario, 1850-1930*, Janice Acton, et al., eds. (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 83.

¹³ Fahrni, "'Ruffled Mistresses and Discontented' Maids," 6.

in church work, charitable organizations and artistic endeavours. Afternoon teas, dinners and receptions were expected of the socially conscious.¹⁴ The British writers of Cassell's manual urged the 'mistress' of the home to "extend her influence beyond the four walls of her home and bless and benefit the outside." These actions would help to promote the Imperial ideal. Cassell's also spoke to husbands of an added benefit wherein an "outside interest" would give their wives the "strength and nerve" with which to renew their efforts in the home.¹⁵ An article in *Westward Ho! Magazine* spoke to the "wives of prominent men" in British Columbia who had

many important social duties to perform—not always pleasures by any means, but duties owed to the position in which their husbands have placed them and to society in general. The well-known doctor or lawyer does not clean out his office in the morning, he pays somebody else to do it and so, the well-educated, accomplished woman in society should not be expected to scrub her kitchen floor.

The magazine also urged these women not to renounce the "ties of housekeeping and the nursery ... A good home makes a good citizen and good citizens build up a fine nation."¹⁶

Ironically, by the turn of the twentieth-century, the Imperial ideal included even higher standards of domestic maintenance than it had done earlier. After all, did not the socially elevated middle-class women have more leisure time? Unfortunately, technological advances had not yet breached the realm of household drudgery. Elaborate furnishings and Victorian-style knick-knacks required a great deal of care.

¹⁴ Terry Abraham. "Class, Gender and Race: Chinese Servants in the North American West," paper presented at the Joint Regional Conference Hawai'i/Pacific and Pacific Northwest Association for Asian American Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 26 March 1996 (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Library Special Collections), 2.

¹⁵ *Cassell's Book of the Household: A Work of Reference on Domestic Economy*, Vol. 1, (London: Cassell and Company, Limited, [circa 1885]1889), 94 and 100.

¹⁶ "Verita," *Westward Ho! Magazine*, April 1908, Vol. II No. 4, 56.

Plumbing and heating systems were still somewhat primitive, and human energy was the main power source when it came to general cleaning and laundry duties.¹⁷ The T. Eaton's catalogue for 1901-02 displayed three mechanical (hand cranked) washing machines displayed (averaging \$4.00 each) and wringers cost from \$3.50 for the less efficient model to \$15 for the Queen mangle, with "three maple rollers, casters, folding table and the best English steel springs." In the same catalogue, a three piece, carved oak bedroom suite was listed at \$10.25. For reasons of economy, many middle-class homemakers would have opted for the wide assortment of wood washtubs and washboards that ranged in price from fifteen cents to eighty cents. In addition, while electricity was available in urban centers such as Victoria and Vancouver by the early 1900s, it had not yet alleviated household chores. The only electrical devices in the 1902 T. Eaton Catalogue were lighting fixtures, small electric motors and a six-inch electric fan.¹⁸ It is not surprising that unless she had enough domestic help, a socially 'obligated' middle-class woman would have found herself working a 'double day.'

Westward Ho! Magazine suggested a rather desperate alternative to the 'double day.' Women who had "other destinies to fulfill" and no domestic help were encouraged to consider moving themselves and their families into a hotel, apartment or boarding house. "People who have the means ... are perfectly justified in living where they will get the most comfort."¹⁹ Shortly after arriving in Victoria, Florence Baillie-Grohman sought out comfortable accommodation. Realizing that servants would not be available,

¹⁷ Helen Lenskyj, "A 'Servant Problem' or a 'Servant-Mistress Problem?' Domestic Service in Canada, 1890-1930," *Atlantis Vol. 7 No. 1 Fall 1981*, 4.

¹⁸ T. Eaton Co. Limited, "Household Furnishings," in *The 1901-1902 Editions Of The Catalogues for Spring & Summer, Fall & Winter* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1970), 186, 210, 186 197-198.

¹⁹ "Verita," *Westward Ho! Magazine*, 56.

she moved into furnished rooms in a Widow's cottage and shared the services of the resident Chinese domestic. In the 1902 *Royal Commission Report*, A.H. Grant, the Seattle Labour Commissioner, stated that the lack of domestic help in his city caused many American families "to close up their houses and go boarding."²⁰

By the early 1900s, industrialization and technology had begun to ease the domestic burden. Labour-saving devices such as new cleaning products, processed foods and even vacuum cleaners were slowly being integrated into middle-class and upper class households. Factory products arrived on Canada's railway system²¹ from manufacturing centres of Ontario and Quebec and some homes had piped hot water, instead of relying on servant to carry water from wells to kitchen stove reservoirs. More efficient wood-and-coal stoves had been developed and manufactured clothing was becoming more available. Simpler styles of clothing (the shirtwaist for women) made the washing, drying and ironing process less time consuming.²² Candles had been replaced by gas lighting, and now gas lighting was being replaced by electricity.²³ Indeed, an advertisement in the *Daily Colonist* announced that electricity had revolutionized housework.

Electricity has solved the "help" problem in many homes and emancipated the housewife from the drudgery of real hard work in the carrying out of her household duties.

²⁰ *Royal Commission 1902*, 172.

²¹ Corrective Collective, *Never Done: Three Centuries of Women's Work in Canada*, (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 123.

²² N.E.S. Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada 1893-1993* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), 39.

²³ E.S. Turner, *What the Butler Saw: Two hundred years of the servant problem* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1962), 249.

Electricity has banished the tyranny of the washtub, the dustpan and broom, the solid fuel range with its attendant dust and dirt and the old sad iron Electricity is plentiful, untiring, reliable and adaptable.²⁴

There is an indication here that electricity was everything that domestic servants were not. However, the main use for electricity prior to the mid 1920s was for electric light fixtures.

The labour-saving technology of the 1920s certainly eased the practical need for domestic servants. Many middle-class housewives could then manage their own domestic chores (if reluctantly) and the upper class were not as reliant on 'live-in' servants. As industrialization progressed and "production was removed from the home,"²⁵ the status of domestic service declined even further. The isolation of the work place and the often temporary or desperate nature of such employment left domestics in a vulnerable position; collective action was a rare (and usually futile) occurrence.²⁶ These factors would surely have had negative psychological and economic affects on the 'serving class,' but servants too were undergoing changes. By the early twentieth century in Britain and Canada, many female domestics had taken up jobs in factories and other traditionally male occupations. There was a new sense of independence, a partial shift away from the class and gender-based social hierarchy. The scope of female employment had increased.²⁷ Some former domestics opted for familiar work in hotels and boarding houses where they could make better wages and have some freedom. Others became part time, 'live-out' servants or 'cleaning ladies.' Moreover, many white females looked for something better; if they had to serve, it would be in the

²⁴ "Drudgery of House Work Is Conquered," *Daily Colonist*, 30 October 1925, 22.

²⁵ Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 73.

²⁶ Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada," 110-111.

²⁷ Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 167.

public sphere – as teachers, clerks and office or factory workers. At least they could leave their jobs behind at the end of the day, and they would have the privacy and dignity that they were denied as a servant. According to Cassell's manual, for those who did remain 'in service,' even the mistress-servant relationship in Britain was "not what it used to be." Most domestic servants no longer accepted the patriarchal idea that "the mistress was a sort of guardian" Relations needed to be readjusted from "guardian and ward" to that of "buyer and seller."²⁸ Of course, this ideal had already infiltrated domestic service in British Columbia because of the distinctive gender and ethnic demographics.

Long before the advent of domestic technology in B.C., racial discrimination, Chinese competition, and an understanding of "buyer-seller" had ensured a steady decline in the number of First Nations men women and children who became servants. Although the missionaries had tried to educate them (especially the girls) in the ways of 'civilized' domesticity, they were rarely seen to have achieved the level of self-regulation and hygiene required in a white household. Whether or not they met the requirements, most Aboriginal people chose not to subordinate themselves and their culture to this form of waged labour. Their traditional fishing and hunting lifestyles were far more appealing, and they had ever-increasing options for paid work in the factories, canneries, sawmills and hop fields. By stringing together a variety of seasonal jobs, a family could make a good living and still participate in their own cultural activities.²⁹

²⁸ Cassell's *Book of the Household: a Work of Reference on Domestic Economy*, Vol. 1 (London: Cassell & Company, 1889), 151.

²⁹ Paige Raibmon, "Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka'wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World's Fair," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 2 (Summer 2000), 168.

Discriminatory legislation was one of the obvious causes of the dwindling numbers of Chinese servants. Certainly, after the exclusionary Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 they could not be replaced. However, as with the white females and the First Nations who had been 'in service,' even the supposedly deferential Chinese domestics were ready for a change. Long before the ultimate exclusionary legislation, they had begun to disappear from white households. They also looked for work that would provide them with higher wages and/or better working conditions. Although they often had to endure "employment segregation" and negative "wage differentials,"³⁰ many former domestics went to work as hotel and restaurant cooks and cleaners, and as woodcutters, fishermen and cigar makers.³¹ Others joined the ranks of the Chinese entrepreneurs and tradesmen who were important in the running of B.C.'s urban infrastructures. In 1885, only three per cent of the Chinese were "in business for themselves." The 1901 figures showed an increase to over twenty-five per cent.³²

By 1914, it was clear that the British Columbians who still wanted servants (whether white, First Nations or Chinese) did not have a large pool to draw from. Then again, when had there been a large pool to draw from? Since the early settlement years, the white middle-class and upper class British Columbians had struggled to keep up the Imperial ideal of a respectable and orderly household. The lack of 'appropriate' white female servants and the often-reluctant use of First Nations and Chinese domestics disrupted the boundaries that the white population expected to reconstruct in

³⁰ James W. St. G. Walker, *"Race," Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical case Studies*, (Ottawa: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 64.

³¹ Charles P. Sedgwick, "The Context of Economic Change and Continuity in an Urban Overseas Chinese Community," (M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1973), 34.

³² Walker, *"Race," Rights and the Law*, 64.

their new settings. The problem was not simply that there was an ongoing imbalance with the supply and demand of domestic servants. Class, race and gender issues that were unique to British Columbia complicated the servant situation. When they could be obtained, white, female servants did not always conform to their part of the Imperial ideal and Aboriginal and Chinese domestics could 'serve' without subverting their own cultures. Ultimately, the 'servant problem' remained a fact of life for many upper class families in British Columbia until the development of electrical appliances such as washing machines, electric irons and vacuum cleaners early in the twentieth century relieved some of the drudgery of household chores.

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