More Than Mere Survival: Placer Gold and Unemployment in 1930s British Columbia

by

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ABSTRACT

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A definite and permanent placer mining culture in British Columbia provided a popular alternative to unemployment during the Great Depression. The low cost of the game and an increase in gold value made small scale placer mining more attractive than it had been for decades. It was facilitated by government, which responded to pressures from grass roots for assistance and provided financial and training incentives in reaction.

Gold panning was a unique means of survival for many unemployed during the Depression, often meaning autonomy from wage paid labour, and a subsistence income. It was also unique, because it could be a positive Depression era experience.

The individual placer miner is constructed here as a small resource entrepreneur. This approach extends the frameworks of S.D. Clark and Wallace Clement, and accounts for the existence of a permanent placer mining culture in that period and throughout much of B.C.'s social and labour history.

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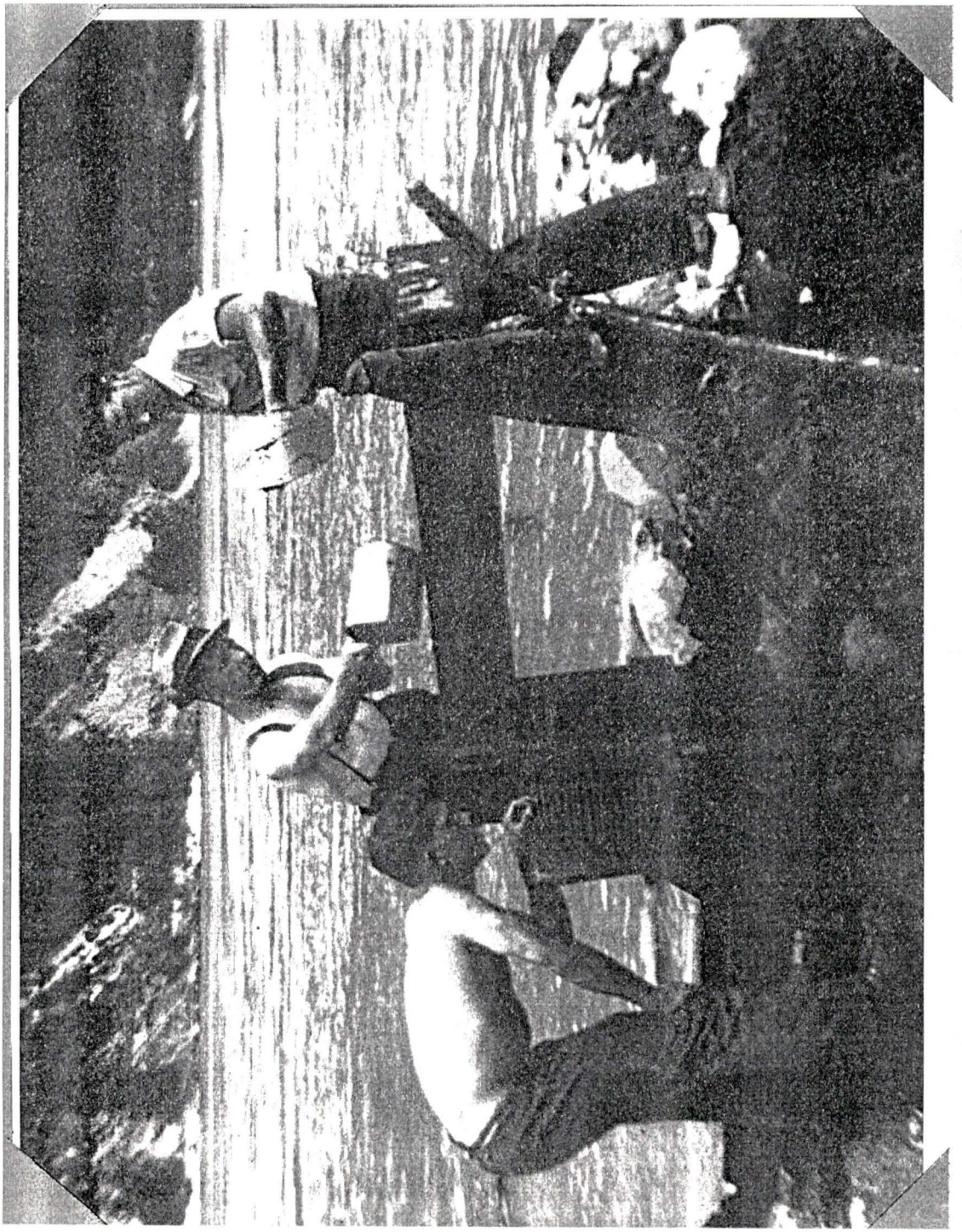
June 15, 1995
Victoria, British Columbia

For the children of today: may they always have
the independence of spirit
to survive in difficult times.

Figure 1: Placer Mining Trainees, Emory Creek, 1935



INTRODUCTION: PROSPECTS FOR INVESTIGATION

> But gold mining has never hesitated. As an industry, it has had a unique experience.... When, in due course, depression follows inflation and prices ebb, the gold miner, through necessity, finds himself physically and mentally prepared to meet the situation.[1]

During the Depression, hundreds of unemployed young men in British Columbia took advantage of a unique opportunity to escape the caprices of the wage labour force during a decade of chronic unemployment. This opportunity offered them independence, country surroundings, a low cost of living, and the possibility that they might acquire a fortune. It was encouraged by incentives legislated by the state in response to grass roots and business interests. Small communities throughout the province offered their support and understanding to these men, as long as they were willing to work hard. The opportunity required little investment other than good physical health, a willingness to work, and a certain spirit of adventure. The financial return was variable, depending on how the individual formed his own reality of labour. That reality could be a secondary, part time activity, or instead, the primary focus of the individual's labouring effort. Placer mining by hand was unique in that it stands in contrast to our generally accepted interpretation of the Depression as a decade of trauma and disillusionment. This discussion of placer mining is an account of a positive Depression era experience.

The opportunity was placer mining for gold. The

traditional tools of the previous century -- sluicebox, shovel, dipper and pan -- worked just as well in the 1930s. The increase in the price of gold was a powerful incentive to seasoned miners to go back and rework old prospects and for green miners to pursue new ones. The work was hard, and a certain persistence was necessary if one wanted to make a tolerable life for oneself -- a life of more than mere survival on the dole.

This thesis will suggest a sense of what the placer mining experience was like for the unemployed young man during the Depression. In addition to documentary sources and extant secondary popular histories, More Than Mere Survival draws from oral interviews and written responses from Depression-era miners, writers of personal memoirs, and present day Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources personnel. The interviews and correspondence were carried out between 1992-1995.

This exploration of the independent placer miner's experience will provide a look into that sector of mining culture as it existed for young men during the Depression. In this work, the independent placer miner will be defined by the writer as a member of a limited petit bourgeoisie: the small resource entrepreneur. The attributes of this class will be defined in detail below, but in brief, these attributes include the small scale seasonal extraction of a staple resource, carried out by an individual, with the economic risk

but also the possibility of gain wholly assumed by the individual. Further, these extraction activities were carried out in non-urban areas, and this setting was an integral element of an ethos of independence that was important to the success of the small resource entrepreneur.

The activities of the small resource entrepreneur in the first half of the twentieth century have not received any significant attention from historians to date. There is, perhaps, a difficult decision to be made as to what comprises an identifiable sample for study. Some notable works have emerged in regard to labour and resource history in the province during the 1980s and early 1990s that have relied on the more institutional of resource activities and their players as subjects of extended research and analysis. The majority of these deal with the mining and timber industries, and, as such, support in one way or another the fact that the corporate interest has fulfilled the primary role in provincial development. The traditional view of British Columbia as "The Company Province" need not be overturned; but the interpretation must be expanded to identify the long term importance of the small resource entrepreneur in the development of the province.

The secondary literature on the mining industry of British Columbia has been, for the most part, the history of company interests and organized labour. Miners have been treated most often by historians as the characters of

colourful exploits, and the representatives of the vanguard of labour militancy. The classic example of this is Paul Phillip's No Power Greater (1967), in which miners are seen as union members, exploited workers, aggressive strikers and progressive political activists.[2] Rolf Knight is partially correct in his assessment of Phillips and of other labour historians, stating that the lives of the miners themselves, the work that they did and their family lives are little understood through the secondary literature. Knight surveyed the literature in regard to the inhabitants of work camps and company towns. But like the labour historians that he criticized at the time, he confined his discussion to organized groups of labour in the context of work camps and company towns.[3]

The history of coal miners in British Columbia has become more accessible to the general public and students alike through the work of popular historian Lynne Bowen. In particular, Boss Whistle (1982), is based on a foundation of extensive oral interviews conducted with miners under the auspices of the Coal Tyee Society. Her intent was to portray the daily lives and long term fight for organization of coal miners in the Nanaimo coal district.

The use of the oral history of the coal miner by Bowen and the Coal Tyee Society is an important contribution to historiographical method, one which has often been touted within the field of women's and feminist history as intrinsic

to the craft. Oral history has not always been used to its full extent in traditional pursuit of male history, although a number of important contributions have emerged in recent years.[4] In the recovery of the experience of the placer miners and other resource workers, it is imperative that we "listen to the voices" of men as witnesses. Both gendered identities deserve equal voice in the oral record.

In this work, the masculine voice will dominate, because the experience was predominantly that of men. While not denying that women had a share in the social milieu of the placer miner, this work is concerned mostly with the history of young unemployed males. This is, without apology, an historical account of white male labour in the context of unemployment and placer mining culture during the interwar years.[5]

The history of the timber industry in British Columbia has been extensive, but as with the case of mines resources, largely concerned with organized labour and company interests.

The logging industry of Cowichan Lake has recently been portrayed by Richard Rajala with great effect. This is a study of a company settlement area and organized labour, not of the gyppo logging operations (usually termed small logging shows in the interior of the province), that were significant intraregionally until World War II. Rajala expands on his view of technological and managerial change in the west coast logging industry with an in-depth study of the Cowichan Lake

region. His discussion, however, embraces a cumulative model of progressive organization and its attendant conflicts and leaves little space for the independent entrepreneur or for small show logging enterprises. In the context of a discussion of resource workers, the importance of persistent skills (hand falling and bucking) is acknowledged, but again, not the main focus of Rajala's work. [6]

Mary McRoberts has also dealt with a portion of the logging industry of B.C. in a case study of the Williams Lake logging industry and the rise of a corporate structure in the interior logging industry in the post-WWII era. While this forms a useful counterpoint to the later work of Rajala, McRoberts is concerned with an adaptation of Chandlerism: her study does not go beyond the mills of Williams Lake to explore the contribution of the small cat shows and independent contractors whose efforts fed lumber and pulp mills in the Central Interior during the 1940s and 1950s.[7]

Earlier writing on the lumber industry in British Columbia, such as that of Patricia Marchak, Ken Bernsohn, and Donald MacKay are important industrial histories or chronological works, but do not delve into the role of the small resource entrepreneur.[8]

The secondary literature produced by popular historians, enthusiasts, and journalists on the history of gold rushes and subsequent ghost towns is substantial. With few exceptions, these works deal with the period from 1858 to 1920, spinning

out the tales of boom and bust passed down from the original "argonauts" of the Cariboo Gold Rush. A heavy dose of nostalgia pervades all of these writings, which are produced for the enthusiastic reader and not as historical analysis of autonomous labour. A sample of the existing body of these works is appended as Appendix 2. These publications are of varying levels of expertise and factual accuracy.[9] They have, nonetheless, served an important role in perpetuating the cultural traditions of the gold miner in British Columbia, because they are accessible to general readers and hopeful placer miners.[10]

Apart from the "gold rush and ghost town" books are a few volumes that convey the individual experience in placer mining during the Depression with accuracy and effect. The personal memoirs of Ralph Hall, Walter Guppy, Sydney Hutchison, and Fred Peet are among these accounts. Each of these authors has contributed to the public knowledge of what it was like for an independent placer miner to have "survived" the Depression. Ralph Hall and Fred Peet are, in fact, career mining men of considerable expertise and insight. Unfortunately, the absence of source documentation detracts from the usefulness of these works for researchers and students. As important as it is for individual accounts to be known, these efforts add little to our understanding of independent labour and the place that small resource entrepreneurs should be accorded within the multifaceted identity of British Columbia. Works

such as Gold Seekers (Hall) and Depression Stories (Sydney Hutchison) form an important component of the corpus of Depression studies, but can not be perceived as complete in themselves.[11]

Little more credence can be given to an institutional analysis of government reports and statistics of the Depression era, as these records do not provide a full account of the activities of individual placer miners.[12] Two examples are worthy of note here. Statistics do not generally differentiate between independent placer miners and wage-paid labour in larger placer operations. The records of the Government Agents in British Columbia were not as complete for the 1930s as in previous decades, owing to the fact that the office became increasingly bureaucratized and less the local influence that it traditionally had been. Although the multiple roles of the Government Agent were still closely intertwined with the activities of the placer miner, and through administrative necessity, with the unemployed, the records of these public servants became smaller in volume during the Depression.

If the present historiography of the interwar period excludes the small resource entrepreneurs, such as placer miners, and, for the most part, the history of labour outside of the organized labour force, how is that gap to be filled? A more complete analysis will engage the use of oral history and a combination of government records, annual financial

data, and licensing information. Certain comparisons may be drawn from the activities of gold miners in other countries, such as Australia, the Pacific Northwest, and the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. Standard reference works on British Columbia, such as those by Margaret Ormsby, Martin Robin, and Robin Fisher are certainly not to be ignored.

This last statement, however, begs the question of the extant secondary historiography of British Columbia: why is placer gold treated as an antiquarian leftover of the Innisian tradition of staple theory?[13] Placer gold was important to the political formation of the province, according to Margaret Ormsby, and, in the estimation of Jean Barman, to the assurance that British Columbia would become a partner in Canadian Confederation.[14] The existence of a definite and permanent placer mining culture and a unique entrepreneurial class that has been sustained by that culture has not yet been recognized in historical writing. The reason for this historiographical void is that the overwhelming tendency in the discussion of Canadian labour history has been with organized labour and responses to it. Masses, movements, and visible institutions appear to be the preferred topics of labour history analysis.

Support for the concept of a placer mining culture stems from a pragmatic application of a standard anthropological definition of culture as:

> the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artifacts which members of a society use in coping with one another and which are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.[15]

As will be seen in this thesis, the combination of manual mining techniques combined with a sharing of information and knowledge over generations have ensured the establishment and continuation of placer mining culture, a culture that continues into the present day. Placer miners have traditionally passed on the secrets and skills as well as the pitfalls of their craft, while maintaining that gold seeking is an exciting activity that holds the promise of rich rewards. The interest in goldseeking has been especially strong during periods of disillusionment with the wage paid labour market -- the most of extreme of which was the Great Depression of 1929-1939.

Research into the placer mining experience of the 1930s has required the integration of several methods of investigation. The groundwork was accomplished using the wide assortment of "gold rush and ghost town" writings available. These gave one a sense of cultural tradition, of the mining community, and of the excitement and pathos of the mining game.[16]

The use of the Annual Reports of the Department of Mines, and various summary materials dealing with Depression-era relief schemes and incentives such as the Placer Mining Training School, provided factual evidence. Secondary sources

such as Margaret Ormsby's classic treatment of the political history of the province have been useful, as have the scholarship of those such as James Struthers, dealing with unemployment and the various attempts at intervention by the state.

Newspaper accounts, letters, and government correspondence were far more effective in that regard. From the Premier's Papers (BCARS) came letters such as those of Mrs. Mathisen (see Ch. 1), in which she denounced the relief camps and cried out for the moral salvation of her sons through honest employment. From the files of P.B. Freeland, Chief Mining Engineer, came the frustration of dealing with retraining programs that met the needs of the unemployed, but not of his personal vision for a more professional and scientific exploitation of British Columbia's mining resources. This view was shared by T.D. Pattullo, Premier from 1933 to 1941, but any long term plans for the training of professional mining labour were shattered by the exigencies of war.

The personification of the individual placer miner was missing from the account compiled from documentary and secondary sources. A request for information from former placer miners of the Depression era proved to be a particularly rich source. The output from this process has been some fifty responses in the form of letters, photographic materials, and oral interviews. Several people closely

concerned with placer mining history and gold rush culture in British Columbia have been exceptionally helpful in lending original documents, indexes, and professional advice. These include the present Gold Commissioner, Denis Lieutard, and former Historic Sites director, Bob Broadland.

Thus, this research has looked beyond the traditional and at times sensationalist "gold rush and ghost town" genre, to integrate grass roots, state, and business interests in the placer mining game.

Those who responded to the inquiry for information about placer mining in the 1930s all had one thought in common. They all believed that this experience was unique, and that it should be captured in an academic treatment that would begin to define some of the characteristics of the culture, its entrepreneurial attributes, and the possibilities that existed for the unemployed male during the Depression if he availed himself of the opportunity to head for the hills as a placer miner.

> No group of men in all Canada is so little appreciated and so thoroughly deserving as our prospectors. It is generally conceded that the odds are all against their chance for success, and they perhaps more than anyone realize that fact, but they never hesitate. A head wind means just a little added effort.[17]
>
> Balmer Neilly, in Transactions of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (1932).

Historians have ignored the role of the independent placer miner in British Columbia's labour history. Placer mining reminds us that many men and women provided labour, but were not part of the wage labour force. During the Depression of the 1930s, wage-paid jobs were suddenly hard to find, and many workers were forced to seek alternatives. Hundreds chose to head for the hills in search of gold.

Neilly's words [above] are admittedly a romanticization of the role of the Canadian prospector. Romantic or not, however, popular accounts that emphasize an image of indomitable men who trudged over mountains, strode through streams and pried into crevasses in search of gold have been the only form of presentation.

Academic treatments of gold mining have not yet considered the labouring experience of the independent placer miner, and as a result there has not yet emerged a useful framework for doing so. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to constructing such a framework of interpretation: how can we best understand the role of the placer miner?

Placer mining, contrary to the view posited by S.D. Clark, is not an episodic phenomenon. A definite and permanent cultural tradition was created during the first gold strikes in the western portion of North America. That culture has a long, if considerably romanticized, history in British Columbia.

Clark discusses the characteristics of the British Columbia and Yukon gold mining society of the nineteenth century. In his view:

> The character of the mining society emphasized the present at the expense of the past and future. The community inherited no rich cultural life and built up no tradition to be passed on to new generations.[18]

This statement is flawed in light of our spreading investigations into the diversity of culture and of its possible categories of analysis. While the traditional, arts-oriented view of culture may not have received adequate support within the societies that Clark discusses, the social and material elements of mining society provided more than enough enrichment to ensure that placer mining society would endure. This was made possible primarily through the persistent use of elementary mining tools such as the gold pan and sluicebox, but a growing spirit of communitarianism among placer miners also contradicts Clark.

This communitarian ethos was exhibited to greater or lesser extent depending on the state of mining activity -- it did not disappear entirely between gold rushes.

Community was perpetuated by the nature of the resource and the pragmatic responses of some to its availability, a pragmatism that co-existed with the romanticism popularly attached to gold seeking. The usual players in the game kept it alive for the occasional players such as the Depression era unemployed.

Thus, while Clark aptly describes the mining society of nineteenth century British Columbia and the Yukon as highly mobile, with little inclination toward the establishment of community, his description is of a phenomenon of short duration that ended with the demise of each rush for adventure and spoils.[19]

Nothing could be further from the truth. In British Columbia, these societies were dispersed and geographically isolated in many cases, but they did persist over generations. These regional societies passed through periods of stagnation between major gold rushes during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but the social traditions and manual skills of the prospector never disappeared. The men and women who populated these societies were characterized by a curiosity of mind, an indomitable spirit and the desire for instant wealth.

Over time, their attitudes became integrated into a gold mining culture which was reinforced by the writing of personal memoirs, the interpretations of popular historians, and the sensationalist tradition of the press. In the

twentieth century, the cultural identity of the prospector was further preserved through the unlikely source of annual reports and advertisements of provincial mines departments. Prospecting for gold became an almost mythical and enviable art whose allure could not be denied.

What position must we accord the placer mining experience? Certainly, it occupies an historic position in several respects. The first of those is its role in the political formation of the province: the second, the establishment of a definite and permanent mining culture that persisted beyond British Columbia's colonial era. Thirdly, placer miners must be credited with a role in the economic development of the province. Before proceeding further, it will be useful to sketch the material history of placer mining, and the emergence of a permanent placer mining culture.

What is placer mining, and how can placer mining culture be seen as unique and enduring within the context of British Columbia's history?

Placer mining is the search for, and extraction of, free gold from the alluvial gravels of rivers and streams. It implies the excavation or digging of the gravel, the transportation of the gravel to the equipment which disintegrates and washes it, and the removal of waste tailings. This is followed by the recovery of the heavy minerals from the catchment equipment.[20]

The basic requirement of any placer operation, large or small, is a plentiful supply of water. Unlike the "Forty-Niners" in drought-prone California, British Columbia's miners have had abundant water resources with which to work. In most cases, the occurence of placer gold is coincident to these water supplies, since it is the action of streams eroding the exposed ends of channels or veins of gold that creates placer or "free" gold deposits.

The process begins with the prospector, traditionally known as the father of mining, who makes the initial search for areas likely to yield gold values. The second step of the placer mining process may also be the final one for the small scale miner -- the extraction of the gold through one or a combination of manual or partly mechanized means. A third step of the placer process may take the extraction process out of the hands of the individual, when that prospect or claim is worked by a company scale operation with the use of wage labour. It is the first and second step operations that are of interest to us within the context of the Depression and the possibility of an escape from the wage labour force.

Small scale placer methods rely on the shovel and pan, dipper and sluicebox. These hand methods are useful for operations on deposits of fairly high grade shallow gravels. The work is slow and laborious, and requires a great deal of perseverance. The low cost of tools such as the rocker,

shovel and pan defined this as "the poor man's favorite method of working."

Rocking, sluicing, and the use of a long tom all substantially increase the amount of gravel that can be worked in a day.[21] Gravels are rockered until large materials and gravel are reduced to black sand retained behind riffles in the bottom of the rocker box. The black sand must be removed at intervals to prevent washing it back out of the rocker box when the riffles can no longer retain the gold bearing sand. The sand is removed and panned down further, then eventually rendered out. During the Depression, mercury was still used to recover the gold values. For the independent miner, this usually meant placing the dirty gold in a chamois cloth with a small amount of mercury, then squeezing out the mercury through the pores of the cloth until all that remained inside of the cloth was a "button" of gold. Further purification of the gold was done in a small crucible over an open fire, that removed the last of the mercury and other impurities from the gold.[22]

After the initial surface values had been recovered, or in prospects where below ground excavation was necessary, other methods were used. The old-timers of the Cariboo rush used deep-drifting operations, in which Cornish water wheels were used to handle the water necessary to move and wash gravels, and the slum, or mucky conglomerate of sand,

gravel, and gold that was washed out of the ore dug out of the ground.

There was always an assumption, as is the case with all progressive technology, that more modern equipment would mean higher output -- but between 1858 and 1933, none was found to be truly successful. The basic excavation and washing of gravel was handled though a range of means that extended from hand washing in the simple gold pan, to large scale washing of entire mountainsides under hydraulic pressure. Steam shovels, drag-line scrapers, hydraulic elevators, and pump hydraulic were but a few of the innovations tried. And in the end, the final "clean up" was usually done with the use of the gold pan, and a precious amount of mercury to separate the gold from the black sand.[23]

Historically, placer mining was the parent of mineral mining in British Columbia.[24] Placer activity began with the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s. The economic activity and population increase that placer mining generated accomplished what mercantile hegemony and political diplomacy did not -- the creation of a politically united province.[25] The gold rushes provided the initial impetus for sustained non-native economic development. This fact was supported in the annual reports of the provincial Mines Department, and still reiterated by John Walker, Deputy Minister of Mines, in 1958. Placer

mining was the reason that the political entity of British Columbia came into being in a timely manner. Without the coincidence of the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rushes, the non-native settlements situated on Vancouver Island and the mainland might well have remained somnolent and isolated for decades.

Placer gold activity was also the means by which the social and economic foundations created by the Hudson's Bay Company persisted, after its colonization charter was terminated in 1854. The reasons for the economic success of that colonization effort have been discussed by Richard Mackie, who argues that the Vancouver Island colony was a success, albeit limited, under the terms of the Charter.

Mackie does not, however, go on to emphasize the importance of the gold rush to the perpetuation of the colony, nor does he elaborate on the establishment of a new social order within the colony. Rather, he contends that gold miners would have to revert to social and economic patterns previously established under the Wakefieldian system of colonization. This was a society of elites with every intention of upholding the old order of the British landowning gentry, and no interest in creating a new and independent labouring class. Once the finite gold resource, exploited to the extent of extant technology, was exhausted, gold miners would have to follow others into established patterns of natural resource activity.[26] These patterns

would include the passage from independent miner to the relative anonymity of the wage labour force. Mackie does, however, give full credit to the gold rush and its participants for rescuing the Vancouver Island colony from its "corrupt and moribund state."[27]

> Culture is a pyramid to which each of us brings a stone.
>
> Wallace Stegner(1987)[28]

Placing Wallace Stegner's metaphor within the context of the Britannic heritage of British Columbia, the province is not without its own stone cairns to culture. These are perhaps more numerous and diverse in their composition than the monolith that Stegner had in mind for his beloved but beleaguered American West. Some of these cultural cairns associated with working lives, such as that placed for organized labour, or another to the recognition of the "Company Province," have been recognized and written about at length.[29] Others have received far less custodial care and attention.

The moss-covered cairn that represents the placer miner is laid of cultural stones that show traits unique to the independent resource entrepreneur, an environment of chosen isolation and self-determined financial need. The base of the placer miner's cairn is self-reliance. The smaller stones that complete the body and the height of the cairn are the varied experiences of miners during gold rushes and

cyclic depressions. The capstone is persistence in the wake of technological advance and state intervention.

Unlike Stegner's metaphorical pyramid to Western culture, British Columbia still has a number of real cairns that express the placer miner's cultural and labouring experience. Throughout the province are carefully hand piled stones, known as tailing piles; some were left by meticulous Chinese miners, some by adventuring white miners. Some tailing piles were left in the 1860s -- others, as recently as yesterday. These are the visible and orderly cairns that express something more than the formation and persistence of a distinct mining culture. They express the thoroughness of endeavour and detail but none of the haste and disorder imposed by mechanized mining. They show us that, over time, some men and women remained small entrepreneurs, and as such, were not employed directly by capitalist firms.

Independence was integral to the initial formation of placer mining culture. The persistence of placer mining over periods of near-stagnation of the activity can be credited to a placer mining culture based largely on this attribute.

One aspect of this independence has been developed by historian Tina Loo. The legal frameworks that initially emerged in British Columbia's mining society were adaptations from the California gold rush. From the

beginning, B.C.'s gold miners were known for their involvement in self-government and in determining local rules and regulations governing behaviour and mining activity. This gave the men a measure of independence and experience not only on their placer claims, but in workings of government as well. Even though Governor James Douglas and Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie took swift steps to make sure that administrative localism did not rear its intrusive head in the midst of their colonial empire, this independence could not be denied. Early intrusion of these regulatory devices did not impede the miner's sense of themselves and their enterprise as distinct and crucial to the development of the colony. As Loo reminds us, "Despite their impermanent character, gold rush communities were localistic, regardless -- paradoxically -- of their location."[30]

Another contribution to the understanding of the mining society in the context of its geographic isolation and cyclical decline is geographer R. Cole Harris, "Industry and the Good Life Around Idaho Peak." In the Innis tradition, Harris sees the staple as predominant in determining settlement patterns and the elements of new societies. These societies were based upon common work, a measure of self interest, and the fact that friendship cut across cultural backgrounds. The work techniques of staple trades such as gold mining created commonalities of spirit,

leaving past attributes of culture behind. The main thrust of Harris' discussion -- that these work techniques provided the basis for inclusion in new societies -- is persuasive. But the following requires some adjustment in the case of the placer miner and [his] position in B.C. history:

> Settlements, most of them ephemeral, have suddenly appeared in the wilderness, their locations dependent on transportation technology and resource availability, their economies tied to distant markets, their populations migratory and largely male, and their rhythms of work and leisure bound to technologies of resource procurement.[31]

Early gold mining along the Fraser was not tied to transportation routes -- these were improved in response to gold mining activity, enhancing those that had existed in pre-contact and contact times and introducing others as gold mining activity dictated. The economy of what Ormsby has described as "The Gold Colony" was not entirely tied to distant markets, as much as gold created an economy based upon the needs of the gold miners and fulfilled in part within the colony. Populations were large, migratory, and predominantly male, but the work of Sylvia Van Kirk has made a beginning toward our understanding of the role of women in various contexts of support within gold mining settlements such as Barkerville.[32]

What were the prerequisites for entry into an entrepreneurial class of placer miners during the 1930s? There had to be a willingness to abandon traditional

reliance on a predictable family wage. During the Depression, however, that could hardly be viewed as a risky venture because many did not have the option of a wage-paid situation. One had to be willing, as well, to assume an entrepreneurial attitude and the associated risk. Was risk in the wake of disillusionment worth worrying about? The role of attitude was clearly of the essence.

The income realized through independent placer mining could vary substantially. Only the individual, however, was qualified to assess (within reasonable boundaries of survival) his own success or failure. In an era without a social welfare net, this primacy of individual assessment may have been the key to survival for many who were ill-served by an economy traditionally reliant on both the security and the oppression of the wage labour force.

What factors of analysis lead to the conclusion that the placer mining experience was that of a limited entrepreneurial class?

In orthodox Marxist terms, the working class is involved in an objective relationship to the means of production; they produce a specific product. The working class labour for wages. The working class have no control over their conditions of labour -- they operate within a structured workplace, as cogs in a larger machine. They produce a surplus for others, and the fruits of their labour are not their property. The wages earned often will not

enable the working class to purchase the product of their own labour. Finally, the working class do not own the workplace, the tools that they use everyday to complete their task, or their own time spent on the job. Taken together, these attributes comprise the inequality of the working class, an inequality that first emerged during the Industrial Revolution.[33]

These elements presume a relationship to those who do not belong to the working class, whether that other is manager, owner,or entrepreneur. They also point out a relationship to surroundings and physical things, whether those things are the buildings in which wage labour is carried out, the technology that the labourer uses to perform his function, or the paycheque received at intervals for time spent in the workplace.[34]

Nothing about the working class is set in stone. It is a constantly splintered and shifting reality. The only constant in the working class milieu is that it is always clearly understood who is the worker -- and who is not.

The independent placer miner was not so affluent nor so secure as to escape the level of subsistence for the higher and more rarified level of prosperity -- unless extraordinary luck was his lot. The placer miner did not "fit" within the working class at all: thus, this discussion of an escape from the wage labour force during a time of widespread unemployment has found an appropriate

representative.

The activities of the placer miner were within an entrepreneurial class, with attributes that clearly contrasted with those of the working class. He was involved in an objective relationship to the means of production, and the use of his labour power was not determined by another. He worked for profit that benefitted himself, his dependents, or in some circumstances a partner. He had complete control over the conditions of his labour. A greater surplus of production could put him in a condition greater than subsistence. He owned the tools of production, both material and intellectual, and his own time on the job. The physical environment of production was under his control, subject to state regulation of land tenancy and resource use.

The labouring experience of placer miners bears some similarity to that of farmers, when the attributes above are used as the measure of labouring autonomy and enterprise. Farmers must also be considered entrepreneurs and in the Canadian West, risk takers of immense proportion. The amount of surplus produced defined the success or failure of the farm making enterprise. So, in an entrepreneurial sense, the prospector and the farmer share in their proclivity toward a hardheaded optimism coupled with a pragmatic outlook toward their own economic survival.

The problem with linking the prospecting and farming

experiences together is that there are significant differences in their respective cultures prior to World War II. Placer miners were predominantly single men seeking wealth in the goldfields, hoping to return home to one of a variety of established family structures. Agrarian culture was a culture of the family: in the farm making process, the reinforcement of the farm labour force, and the building of a cooperative spirit and social networks between farming communities. The culture of the placer miner was formed from reliance on material methods of production, not the ethnic, religious, or lingual elements often important to the formation of farming communities.

The most important element of the enterprise to both prospectors and farmers was the land. Each had certain responsibilities to fulfill in order to lease (prospectors) or own (farmers) the land that they worked for profit. The difference was the ultimate use of the land. Farmers strove to improve their land to ensure its viability over time, while prospectors worked diligently to degrade the land in their pursuit of a limited mineral resource before moving on.

The cultural attribute most shared by the two labouring groups was (and is) their political radicalism, displayed by the farmers in the first half of the twentieth century by their participation in the formation of the Progressive Party, and in more recent years by the tendency of western

miners to join the Reform Party under Preston Manning.

Thus, while certain entrepreneurial characteristics were held in common by the placer miner and the farmer, it becomes necessary to remember Bryan D. Palmer's admonition that the working class is not necessarily working class culture. We must conclude that the entrepreneurial class structure was similar, but that the similarities between farming culture and placer mining culture were comprised mainly of continuity in manual skills that were not easily eroded by progressive technology. In both cultures, modern technique could co-exist with established manual methods of work, and the two could be complementary because of the seasonal nature of each enterprise.

The entrepreneurial attributes discussed above are what made the role of the placer miner attractive. The ease of getting into placer mining meant that the line between working class labour and entrepreneur was relatively easy to cross. The variety of experiences among placer miners created at least the impression of a pluralistic and classless society.

The central concern of the Depression years was the struggle against unemployment. No other issue occupied as much editorial space, as much philanthropic energy, or as much personal pain. The state repression of those years was the complement of universal state inaction on the issue of unemployment. When the state could have achieved an

effective program of relief and forthright unemployment policy by listening to suggestions from grass roots, it chose instead to manage unemployment and contain the threat of the unemployed.

The encouragement and movement of men into placer mining by the state was another instance of containment and management, but this original intent on the part of the state was thwarted by the popular belief in the power of gold to get men out of the cities and working on their own behalf. Placer mining was a popular means of making, in more than one miner's words, "at least a dollar a day."[35]

Working class men were able to move virtually at will from unemployment or underemployment in the wage labour force to placer mining, because the cost of getting into placer mining was so low that this was not in itself a barrier. A gold pan and shovel, a packsack and some food supplies were enough to get one started. Information and direction was available free of charge from government mining officials or organizations such as the Chamber of Mines. Leaving the enterprise incurred no capital loss; if there were any items of equipment or other related possessions to dispose of, there was always another player ready to acquire them. Over the years of the Depression, men floated in and out of placer mining as they needed to: either back out to unrelated wage labour positions, or to lode mining jobs that set them up financially for another

season as an independent entrepreneur.

The role of the state in the placer mining enterprise was not oppressive but it was considerable. Changes in legislation during the Depression worked to ease entry into the game. The changes included Provisional Free Miner's Certificates, assistance in grubstaking, community lectures on prospecting, and the Placer Mining Training School. A paternalistic assistance by regional mining engineers and Gold Commissioners continued throughout the Depression as it had for decades. Their guidance role was greatly accentuated during this decade in accordance with the popular response to placer mining as a viable exercise in periodic entrepreneurship.

Not all men were willing to subordinate themselves to the anonymity of the work force. Not all women were willing to follow their male partners to the gold fields, but in the present century many did accompany their men as domestic support or even active partners on mining claims. In the case of the placer miner, the means of success was that he was not tied to technologies of resource procurement -- simple devices were in most cases as effective as those requiring more mechanization and capital investment. Again, the elementary tools and low expense ensured the continued independence of endeavour.

Why was this independence of endeavour possible? In "Transformations in Mining: A Critique of H.A. Innis,"

Wallace Clement has discussed the petty commodity producers of Canada, and their contributions to an economy based on resource extraction.[36] By the end of the nineteenth century, Clement argues, this identity had disappeared, the victim of progressive industrialization and organized labour in resource industries such as logging and mining. Clement completely ignores the individual and his integral role in the Canadian resource economy. Far from being extinguished by the wave of progressivism in technology and organization of the wage labour force, the petty commodity producer was still alive and well down until the outbreak of World War II. This was especially true of the hinterland regions of British Columbia, where transportation and communication lines were not fully developed until the 1960s in many parts of the province. The argument for the persistence of the petty commodity producer is one that could be productively explored for the postwar period as well, but is beyond the scope of this paper.[37]

The label of "petty commodity producer" is revised somewhat by Clement to the concept of "independent commodity production" in his study of the formation of organizations within Canada's fisheries. But although he contends that the discussion of class has become altogether narrow and overly simplified, and that his corrective is to bring class analysis to a point in which such analysis clarifies our understanding, once again Clement falls short of the mark.

His expanded view of class analysis is not sufficient to the discussion of those independent commodity producers, such as placer miners, who were not constrained by the caprices of market demand. Independent commodity production:

> ....links producers with capital through the mechanism of the open market. There is a unity between the direct producers and the means of realizing their labour. Production is a unity of formal ownership, economic ownership, and possession of a non-exploitative labour relationship....if they have free market access and are free of contractual obligations to capital.[38]

In the case of the placer miners, they were not directly aligned with the open market and the challenges of competition, but with the government which acted as a market opportunity in which no restrictions were placed upon output. The provincial government also encouraged consistently increased output and discouraged hoarding by its decision to purchase small amounts of gold from the independent miner. In this way, the independent placer miner was guaranteed a market for his gold, at a set price. No one - whether shopkeeper or government -- turned down the opportunity to purchase gold.

Another of Clement's attributes of the independent commodity producer does not fit at all well -- the issue of ownership. Formal and economic ownership do not find an easy application to an enterprise that is relatively fluid and whose means of production may not be construed by many as substantial investment.

In the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx made the following statement in regard to what comprises a distinction of class:

> In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection between these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.[39]

The problem with this venerable statement is that within the entrepreneurial class of placer miners there was no "hostile opposition" of endeavour in the traditional sense of competition for market share. There was, instead, a hostile reaction to the failure of industrial capitalism to absorb an acceptable number of wage labour entrants during the Depression. This was a convincing raison d'entre for players to enter the placer mining game.

The placer miners of the Depression exemplify an outcome in opposition to that of proletarianization. They left the wage labour force (a failed, or seriously flawed market during the Depression) because an alternative means of realizing their own labour power and their own labour needs became accessible. This realization became clear through a set of circumstances no more under their control than those which placed them within the waged labour force to begin with. The system of industrial capitalism

essentially backfired -- creating an opportunity for independents to take advantage of a limited economic situation in which placer miners form their own political and ideological dimensions of work.

The relative obscurity of the placer miner's experience can then be considered as a departure in part from the Marxist tradition, a tradition that stresses relational classes. The placer mining experience is class based, as the activity of a petit bougeoisie; but it is highly coloured by social characteristics that emerge from a traditional reliance on methods of production of a valued staple, not the accretions of cultural and ethnic baggage, and a belief in the continued use of those methods. It is to these social characteristics that we must look for the answer to the persistence of placer mining society in British Columbia, but it is to the notion of class that we look for an answer as to why the activity was responsible for an exodus of people from the compromised waged labour force of the Depression years.

With the stage set for a more particularized definition, then, I have chosen to redefine this class of resource worker within the context of interwar British Columbia as the small resource entrepreneur. This class distinction is important for two fundamental reasons. The contribution of those individuals "first on the ground" in resource exploration and extraction continued to be

significant. In the case of the mining industry, this fact was paid homage to in industry publications, political rhetoric, and annual reports of the mines ministry.[40] The men who prospected for placer gold, for instance, were often the instrument by which further mining prospects of various ore bodies were discovered. The small resource entrepreneur was also significant for perpetuating an individual means of production activity, whether through prospecting, trapping, fishing, pole cutting, or small-show logging. Autonomous activity as a small resource entrepreneur was highly important to many men and women during periods of economic depression. During the Great Depression of 1929-1939, the ability of hundreds to go out on their own as placer miners meant a life of more than mere survival.[41]

The model of the penny capitalist developed by John Benson has some resonance in the construction of the model of the small resource entrepreneur. Benson first developed the model with reference to British coalminers and a range of "submerged" secondary forms of enterprise -- other ways of augmenting the working class family income. His use of "working class" is somewhat contentious, being "all those employed in low-status manual occupations -- whether as wage earners, or as subsistence and self-employed workers -- who did not employ others to work for them."[42] The definition of the penny capitalist in Canada differs little from the original: a working person who went into business on a small

scale in the hope of profit (but with the possibility of loss) and made him or herself responsible for every facet of the enterprise.[43]

The most persuasive examples of the penny capitalist are those that emerged in retaliation against the insult of poverty. Three attributes of the penny capitalist are peculiar to the independent placer miner. Penny capitalism, avers Benson, created some self confidence in the individual. It also helped to mitigate the effects of poverty: when shut out of the workplace during times of depression or labour conflict, the individual could undertake certain business activities on his own recognizance. Finally, penny capitalism generated a limited amount of economic mobility.

Each of these attributes can be usefully taken to the discussion of the small resource entrepreneur during the interwar years. The attributes of such entrepreneurs include:

1] Small scale extraction of a staple resource,
2] Control over own labour power and rate of production,
3] Seasonally determined work,
4] Progress from income equivalent to wages to accumulation dependent on chance,
5] A range of economic risk in the activity, commensurate with the entrepreneur's labouring abilities and knowledge,
6] No assumed obsolescence of methods of extraction, and
7] A non-urban environment as an integral element of ethos of independence.

In short, the small resource entrepreneur would work in

a non-urban resource hinterland on his own behalf, for the financial well being of himself and his dependents, while expecting a large measure of risk but accepting that risk in exchange for considerable personal freedom. The limitations imposed on the placer miner's activities would be geological chance and human physical capability.

Placer mining culture fostered the influx of new miners into the game. This was largely a material and political culture that did not rely upon previous ethnic, religious or lingual baggage for its persistence. The attributes that had ensured the persistence of this culture were independence, a proclivity towards risk taking, and the development of common bonds based upon traditional methods of production. Its permanence is best understood by understanding the nature of the gold resource itself and how gold seeking as an independent activity has been fostered by both pragmatic and romantic approaches to its exploitation.

The placer miners of the Depression era in British Columbia can be considered to be those who belonged to or had access to this definite and permanent culture. Rather than providing labour for wages, people who were mostly of working class origin could move into a limited entrepreneurial opportunity in which they would create their own reality of labour and income.

Thus, these were the players in the placer mining game during the Depression, players who were willing to take a

chance on gold and a limited economic opportunity. The cheapest implements of the art of placer mining -- the sluicebox and shovel, dipper and pan -- were still used to exploit placer gravels when British Columbia slid into the Great Depression.

During the cash poor era of the Depression, a return to the elementary tools and skills of the game would suffice to get hundreds of men and women into the hinterlands in search of not just a quick dollar, but a continuing source of income. This source of income did not rely on participation in the wage-paid labour force for that assurance of survival. Disillusionment and failure could be compensated for by the measure of independence that was the placer miner's lot, an independence not easily found in other contexts of labour.

Identifying the independent placer miner as unique within the labour experience of British Columbia is one of the main tasks of this work. Chapter 1 explores grass roots involvement in placer mining, and community response to the unemployed single male who entered that milieu as a green miner. Chapter 2 probes at the government responses to grass roots requests for assistance with placer mining as an alternative to unemployment. Chapter 3 is a study of the Placer Mining Training School, a program which began as a measure of unemployment relief but clearly did not remain so. Finally, the significance of placer mining as an

alternative to unemployment during the Depression will be assessed in light of the involvement and response of grass roots, state, and capital interests.

Notes

1.Balmer Neilly, "Canadian Gold Mining Reviewed," Transactions of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (1932), p. 315.

2.Paul Phillips, No Power Greater: a century of labour in B.C. (Vancouver:Boag Foundation and B.C. Federation of Labour, 1967).

3.Rolf Knight, Work Camps and Company Towns in Canada and the U.S.: an annotated bibliography, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1975), p. 5 and passim.

4.The best recent example of this exploration of male memories and labour is Eric Sager, Ships and Memories: Merchant Seafarers in Canada's Age of Steam (Vancouver: UBC Press,1993). This work has particular relevance here because of Sager's emphasis on the importance -- and the pitfalls -- of memory in the writing of history, whether it be academic or popular in its exposition.

5. This thesis recognizes the power of nostalgia to imbue the individual account with a positive tone. Some of the respondents recalled their time as Depression era placer miners with congeniality. Others -- Eddie James, for example -- were caustic about the level of government assistance and the idea that placer mining could provide a subsistence income. This work attempts to balance that spectrum of opinion, while adhering to the thesis that this was a positive Depression experience for most.

6.Richard Rajala, The Legacy and the Challenge: A Century of the Forest Industry at Cowichan Lake (Lake Cowichan, B.C.: Lake Cowichan Heritage Advisory Committee, 1993).

7.Mary McRoberts, "Corporate Structures and Local Economies: The Case of the Williams Lake District Lumber Industry," in Canadian Papers in Rural History Vol. IV (Gananoque, Ontario: Landale Press, 1990).

8.Patricia Marchak, Green Gold: The Forest Industry in British Columbia (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983); Donald MacKay, Empire of Wood: The MacMillan Bloedel Story (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1982); and Ken Bernsohn, Cutting Up the North: The History of the Forest Industry in the Northern Interior (North Vancouver: Hancock House, n.d.).

9.The more reliable, or least more literary, interpretations of the Fraser River/Cariboo gold rush are Bruce Hutchison, The Fraser (1950), Robin Skelton, They Call It The Cariboo (1980) and a lesser known work by Cariboo historian Branwen Patenaude, Because of Gold (1978). Works such as Gordon R. Elliott, Barkerville, Quesnel and The Cariboo Gold Rush(1958) provide a chronological retelling of the gold rush "story," but are without historical analysis; those such as Bruce Ramsey (Ghost Towns of British Columbia, 1963) and Rosemary Neering's works are strictly for tourists and armchair yarn readers, and are of little value to the student.

10.See Appendix 2, Annotated Bibliography, Gold Rush and Ghost Town Genre Works. This listing should give the reader an idea of the range of the works available, but it is by no means complete. Those interested in a particular location or region are referred to Hale and Barman's bibliography of local histories.

11.Ralph Hall, Goldseekers (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1978); Sidney Hutcheson, Depression Stories (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1972); and Walter Guppy, Wetcoast Ventures (Victoria, B.C.: Cappis Press, 1988).

12.The records for independent placer miners tend to be subsumed within the records of placer gold output as a whole within the province, even though in most cases individuals were required to submit an annual report of work to the Resident Mining Engineer in their district. It has been necessary for the writer to combine information in regard to revenue from permits; the reports from mining engineers and government agents; and reports from the newspapers about mining activity with Annual Reports of the Department of Mines, Department of Labour, and Canada Census data, as there discrete statistics for placer miners operating on their own behalf do not exist for all years.

13.H.A. Innis, Settlement and the Mining Frontier, (1936).

14.Margaret Ormsby, British Columbia: A History (Vancouver: MacMillan, 1958), ch. 6 passim.; and Jean Barman, The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: UTP,

1991), p.98.

15.Fred Plog and Daniel G. Bates, Cultural Anthropology (New York: Knopf, 1980), p. 15.

16.The use of the terms "game," "players," and "rules" throughout reflect the language of the period under discussion. The government, the mining associations, and the press all used these terms to describe the placer mining activity. While the use of "game" can imply an activity involving either luck or skill, in this context the element of luck was perceived historically during the gold rushes, and the emergence of an element of skill during the 1930s when the government decided that more men needed to be trained in an elementary knowledge of the game -- in order to benefit the provincial mining industry as a whole. The use of these terms throughout the thesis is not a colloquial indulgence by the author.

17.Balmer Neilly,"Canadian Gold Mining Reviewed," Transactions of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (1932) p. 303-304. Neilly was assistant to the president of McIntyre Porcupine Mines Ltd.

18.S.D. Clark, "Mining Society in British Columbia and the Yukon," in Peter Ward and R.A.J. MacDonald, eds., British Columbia: Historical Readings (Vancouver: Douglas and MacIntyre, 1981), p. 223 and passim.

19.Ibid., pp. 216 and 223.

20.British Columbia--Department of Mines, Bulletin No. 1, Placer Mining In British Columbia (1933). This thesis is concerned with the placer mining efforts of individuals working on their own behalf or in small groups -- not large scale gold mining (placer or lode) carried out with the benefit of investment capital.

21.See Appendix 3, Glossary of Placer Mining Terms, and Appendix 4, Placer Mining Equipment. Basic mining terms are used throughout this paper.

22.L. Cooper, interviewer, "Jack Stevens," (Sydney, B.C.: audiotape, December 1995).

23.See Appendix 3, Glossary of Placer Mining Terms. The gold recovered would be in one of several forms: "buttons" of less than an ounce; "puddings" of various weights (usually the periodic clean up of a company operation, not that of an individual); and "bricks." This last mentioned was the usual shipping form for large scale operations.

24.Charles H. Pitt,"Some Observations on the Placer Industry of British Columbia," Miner (June 1939), p. 36.

25.See Appendix 1, Chronology of Placer Mining Events.

26.Richard Somerset Mackie, "The Colonization of Vancouver Island, 1849-1858," BC Studies (Winter 1992), passim.

27.Ibid., p.3.

28.Wallace Stegner, The American West as Living Space (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp.5, 80.

29.Martin Robin, The Rush For Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972).

30.Tina Loo, "A Delicate Game": The Meaning of Law on Grouse Creek," BC Studies No. 96 (Winter 1992-1993), pp. 41-65.

31.R. Cole Harris, "Industry and the Good Life Around Idaho Peak," Canadian Historical Review, LXVI, 3, 1985.

32.Margaret Ormsby, British Columbia: A History (Vancouver: MacMillan, 1958), Ch. 6.; and Sylvia Van Kirk, "A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, 1862-1875," in Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds., British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), pp.21-37.

33.Alan Dawley,Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.5.

34.Bryan D. Palmer, Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), pp. 22-23 and Ch. 5.

35.L. Cooper, interviewer, "Bill Sharlow," (audiotape:Victoria, B.C. January 1995).

36.Wallace Clement, "Transformations in Mining: A Critique of H.A. Innis," in Class, Power, and Property: Essays in Canadian Society. Toronto: Methuen, 1983.

37.The efforts of the independent prospector and placer miner did not end with the outbreak of World War II. While the activities of the placer miner went through hiatus during wartime, they did re-emerge after the war, supported this time by a program of government grubstaking that has continued into the present era.

The activities of placer miner, small show logger, and

trapper still continue, and in the 1990s, more placer mining claims have been filed than in any other decade since the Depression. Further work on placer mining could consider the cyclical nature of the activity, as historically it would appear that every sixty years or so sees another economic depression -- and another wave of miners heading for the hills.

38.Wallace Clement, The Challenge of Class Analysis (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988), pp. 107-108.

39.Karl Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York, International Publishers, 1963, original 1852), p. 124.

40.The editorials Miner magazine were the most consistent in their praise of the "old time" prospector, although the role of changing technology was given more print space. The radio speech of T.A. Crerar (CBC, 25 April 1938) lauded the role of the prospector in Canada's history and his continuing importance to new mining starts and the image of perseverance in the face of adversity; he went so far as to declare gold mining the possible economic saviour of the distraught Canadian economy. The presidential address by J.J. O'Neill, Royal Society of Canada, emphatically reiterated Crerar's thoughts on how gold mining could rescue the Canadian economy (Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada Vol. XXXIV (May 1940)pp. 3-14. Reinforcing the plethora of polital rhetoric more from geological expertise than blind faith, the Dept. of Mines Annual Reports in regard to prospector training consistently reminded the public of the intrinsic value of the independent prospectors and gold miners. The reports also informed the reader of the incentives to placer mining instituted by the state. This expression of departmental paternalism also found visual expression in the illustrations that accompanied annual reports and the film that was made in 1935 about the first session of the Placer Mining Training School.

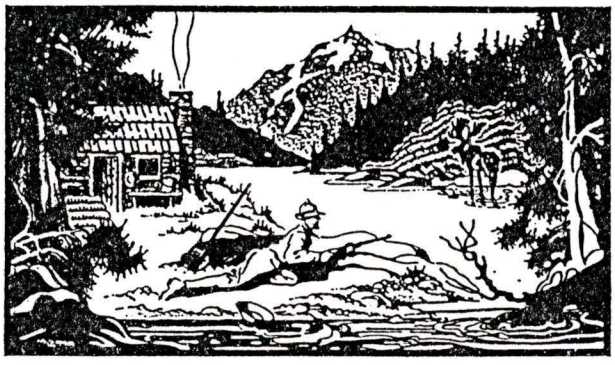
41.Evidence of this can be seen in the accounts of Ralph Hall (Goldseekers); Earl Baity (Three Against the Wilderness), and other titles of the same genre. Further substantiation comes from the Annual Report of the Dept. of Labour: the expenditure for relief was usually lower in areas with active mining activities, such as the Cariboo (Annual Reports, 1931-1939 inclusive).

42.John Benson, Entrepreneurism in Canada: A History of "Penny Capitalists" (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1990), pp. 4-5.

43.Ibid., p.8.

Figure 2: Dept. of Mines Annual Report imprint

The Mining Industry of British Columbia



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Sketch map of the Province showing the various Mining Divisions.

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CHAPTER ONE: GOLD AMONG THE GREY

> The Cariboo Trail that once saw hundreds of men straggling afoot in their journey north to the goldfields, now sees their place taken by a string of motor cars, antiquated many of them, but all occupied by men possessed of the spirit and of the same desire as that which previously...animated so many others.
>
> The possibility of finding gold no doubt appeals strongly to those who have been merely existing, and offers a way of escape for them from a situation that for many has become intolerable.
>
> Whether these men in their fight with nature can improve upon the conditions experienced by them in Vancouver remains to be seen.
>
> Williams Lake Tribune, 19 May 1932.

Early in the Depression, it became apparent to many that the activity of the placer gold miner was more than a thriving proposition. It was a far better alternative than shipping off to a relief camp, shuffling in a bread line, or remaining at home, an unwelcome burden to financially strapped parents. In this chapter grass roots pressures for support of independent placer miners will be explored, through examples of the ambitions and experiences of men who chose to placer mine independently throughout the province. The case of the Likely District in the Cariboo region will be briefly examined as an example of community response to an influx of unemployed men who became placer miners. The reasons why this alternative to wage labour became attractive to unemployed men will be given voice through the words of Depression-era miners interviewed by the writer between 1992 and 1995.

After 1931, the problem of unemployed single men in British Columbia was exacerbated by the establishment and

operation of relief camps. These isolated camps robbed the men of their mobility, much of their contact with society at large (including women), and the opportunity to voice publicly their protest to the state. Many unemployed men had no choice but to go to the camps because this was the only way they could receive public assistance. The camps were built to accommodate some eighteen thousand unemployed men, in an effort to separate them from the general public in isolated areas where public works programs were intended to take place.[1]

The government saw the unemployment relief camps as a means of removing a potentially radical element from public eye. Quarantining unemployed men in a kind of protective custody brought an opposite effect, however; the relief camps and the hobo jungles around railway division points such as Kamloops became concentrated breeding grounds for unrest. More than that, the camps did not contribute to self-esteem by providing useful employment during the Conservative administration of Premier William Fraser Tolmie, or the "Work and Wages" that the campaign rhetoric of Liberal Premier Thomas Dufferin Pattullo promised. Instead, the legacy of these camps was the entrenchment of the sharply demoralizing effect of unemployment, publicly symbolized by the experiences of the Royal Twenty Centers. The men built roads and other facilities in return for board and remuneration that eventually fell to a dismal twenty cents a day.[2]

The state's attempt to decrease potential radicalism among the unemployed by confining them to relief camps was a failure of immense proportions.[3] The social imbalance created by an overabundance of transient men within the province seemed to be an unsolvable problem. Communities did not welcome indigent men into their midst, especially if they were "foreigners" from out of province. Attempts on the part of state, church, and philanthropic organizations to heighten individual self esteem among the downtrodden unemployed did not make the fact of unemployment and the concomitant decline of labour skills disappear.

Many people in the Depression were deeply concerned about the problems of the single male unemployed and concomitant loss of male identity. Mrs. Mathisen was but one of many who wrote to the Premier about these disturbing social issues. In this excerpt from her letter, the problems of the unemployed single man during the Depression are given pathos and force.

> May 9, 1935
>
> T.D. Pattullo, Premier
>
> Dear Sir:
>
> ....He will be 19 years old on his birthday and has not had a job - just hanging around wasting his life - no use to himself or anyone.He is anxious for work to learn a trade but you know as well as me what chances there has been for that. Lately he had a chance to become an apprentice but because he was over 18 owing to the Minimum Wage Act he could not take it. I have another boy taking his Matric in High School this year and what is there for him.
>
> My husband and me have done our best. Our

> Savings are used up and we have no chance of saving for our old age. You know it is hard for us to see our boys born in Vancouver left as they are nothing but Relief Camps facing them. You say you give relief to boys and let them stay at home. Well I know boys around our district who have had to go to those slave camps for they are nothing else. We are progressing rapidly 20 cents above Slavery.
>
> Now please excuse my bitterness but when I see my boys who have always been good & getting Excellent for their Conduct on their School Report Cards maybe get made into a Criminal - it well just makes one see Red. I hope you will let me know what to do.
>
> Thanking you
> In Anticipation
> I Remain,
> Mrs. P. Mathisen[4]

Church organizations were also concerned about the deadening social effect of relief camps and disintegrating male identity. The Anglican Diocese, under the direction of Bishop Schofield, initiated surveys of the relief camps in order to investigate the religious and moral well being of the men. The findings of the diocese which were duly recorded and sent to Premier Pattullo listed "crushing initiative," "wasting manhood," and "ruining self-respect" among the negative aspects of the camps.[5] Pattullo's response was evidently insufficient; the remedy he offered was "work on the basis of reasonable wages," while still continuing the use of relief camps.[6]

In July 1935, the Vancouver Sun published a summary of the survey findings. The account included the response from Minister of Labour Gordon to allegations made within the survey. The Minister found it "interesting" that society felt

that female companionship should be a mandatory element of the relief camp atmosphere.[7] Gordon stated further that the decision to avoid such police actions as fingerprinting the camp inmates to avoid movement from one camp to the next was proof of the government's considerate treatment of the men. Finally, in response to the criticism that the camps did not allow the men to lead normal lives, Gordon retorted, "Just how many today are able to lead normal lives in these abnormal times? Has the patient taxpayer, who has uncomplainingly shouldered the greatly increased burden been able to lead a normal life?"[8] The findings of the survey were published on the same day that the strikers returned on the train from Regina in that hot summer of 1935. There was nothing that could be done to cool either the anger of the reliefers, or the ardor of the church reformers. Gordon's words were not acceptable excuses for an inexcusable state of affairs.

The proposals that streamed in to Premier Tolmie's office during the early days of the Depression reflected a large measure of independent initiative -- seed clubs, volunteer road building in the Peace River country, and clothing relief administered by communities, for instance.[9] At the same time that letters and proposals were flowing into the hands of the Executive Council, however, people were taking things into their own hands, in response to one of the great sunshine stories of the Depression years. Placer gold mining was enjoying a new popularity, creating a ray of hope for many of

Figure 3: Newspaper Headline Montage.

Army of Placer Miners
Make Wages Washing Gold

Thousands Search For Yellow Metal In Cariboo And Kootenay.

Engineer Says $2 a Day Average—Some More, Some Less.

(Special to The Province.)

VICTORIA, July 30.—How British Columbia's new army of placer miners are faring on the remote creeks of the province during this summer is outlined in a series of reports issued by Hon. W. A. McKenzie, minister of mines. These reports, prepared by his resident mining engineers, show that the whole region west of the Rockies has experienced a gold rush comparable in proportions only to the historic rushes of the sixties and seventies, though, unfortunately, not as rich in results for the individual miner. But while many have experienced the common sad luck of prospectors, others have made good wages and some promising properties have been discovered.

FIND SMALL NUGGETS.

From the Cariboo, A. M. Richmond reports a large influx of prospectors. On the lower Fraser about 180 men are working in groups of two, three or four, the average returns per day per man being between twenty-five and fifty cents. Occasionally rich returns were recovered by careful mining of paydirt from under the larger boulders, and nuggets valued at as much as $10, in one or two instances, have been discovered. Most of the small operations are using the rocker for washing. The syndicate operations, of which there are several, generally are using centrifugal or suction pumps and short sluice-boxes for gold recovery. Sand and gravel suction samples for gravels up to about two inches in diameter are being used

MINING TOPIC OF CLUB TALK

Kiwanians to Hear J. D. Galloway Speak on Properties in British Columbia

GRUB-STAKING REVIVAL URGED

Galloway Tells Prospecting Students How Old Custom Profited Both Parties

Care Advised in N
Stocks as All Wild
Cannot Be Eradic

Resumption of the old-
stem of grub-staking
le to those who do th
d those staked was urg
y evening before more

TO TEACH STUDENTS IN PLACER AREAS

Cariboo and Yale Reserves Set Apart By Mines Department.

GOLD TO THE RESCUE

The Calgary Albertan

For three years the need for organization of unemployed has existed.

For three years we have heard protests against "putting a premium on idleness," used as an excuse against installation of a dole system.

For three years this country has put a certain premium upon idleness by ladling out relief to single men and families and by insisting upon no work in return, or the sort of work which shames the employer and employed alike by its sheer futility.

It is impossible at this moment to forecast how long present conditions will last, and therefore how long relief
[illegible] on a large scale
are certain of only
even the morons have
point—that until the
gains normality Can-
ada will have to shoul-
urden.
ways of meeting that
direct relief which
than any other form
its dead loss; the other
public works. Direct
(and very great) dis-
ertaking public works
ifficult, since (despite
uction conditions) it
ssible at this moment
rprises that are not
mediately productive.
rtue in the suggestion
ck in productive en-
a demand warrants it.

TO TRAIN IDLE FOR GOLD HUNT

Rush to Placer Claims Expected to Follow Government Grub-stake Plan

CARIBOO GOLD IN SPOTLIGHT

One Bright Spot in Province, Says Member For District

Cariboo was the one bright spot on the map of British Columbia, Rod. MacKenzie, member for that district, told the Legislature yesterday, but the trouble was that the people of New York knew more of its gold possibilities than did the people of Vancouver.

He gave the members some account of the gold developments that has been going on, congratulated the Cariboo Gold Quartz Co. on the success it had attained in times of stress, and warned green prospectors that this was not a good time of year to go into the country. He said there were no relief

BIG COMPANIES STAKE CARIBOO

Government Increases Staff at Barkerville to Cope With Recordings

So active has recording of claims in the Barker
the Min
necessary to
Gold Commis
was stated y
yesterday.

1000 Young Men Schooled in Placer And Lode Gold Operations Since '35

British Columbia's unemployed.

> Whereas quartz mining is a rich man's industry, placer mining can be undertaken by any man willing to work and equipped with tools and an elementary knowledge of the game.[10]

A popular belief in gold and its role in economic recovery held more than its share of newspaper headlines during the 1930s (Figure 3).[11] Gold seemed to be the only mineral with a future during the Depression, so most mining activities were in pursuit of the precious metal. Not all gold mining was carried out by company ventures such as the Cariboo Gold Quartz mine that was responsible for the founding of the town of Wells. The idea that an individual could make some kind of a living by panning for gold re-created the nineteenth century spirit of adventure, of gold nuggets, "argonauts," and instant wealth.

There was, however, recognition of the fact that this was indeed a new age of mining. In the twentieth century, far more information was available to the neophyte miner, and preparation was one key to possible success in the gold fields. At the same time, the possibilities that existed for placer mining to serve as one form of unemployment relief were not to be denied. This excerpt from the Victoria Daily Times neatly summarized popular thought about the connection between placer gold and unemployment relief:

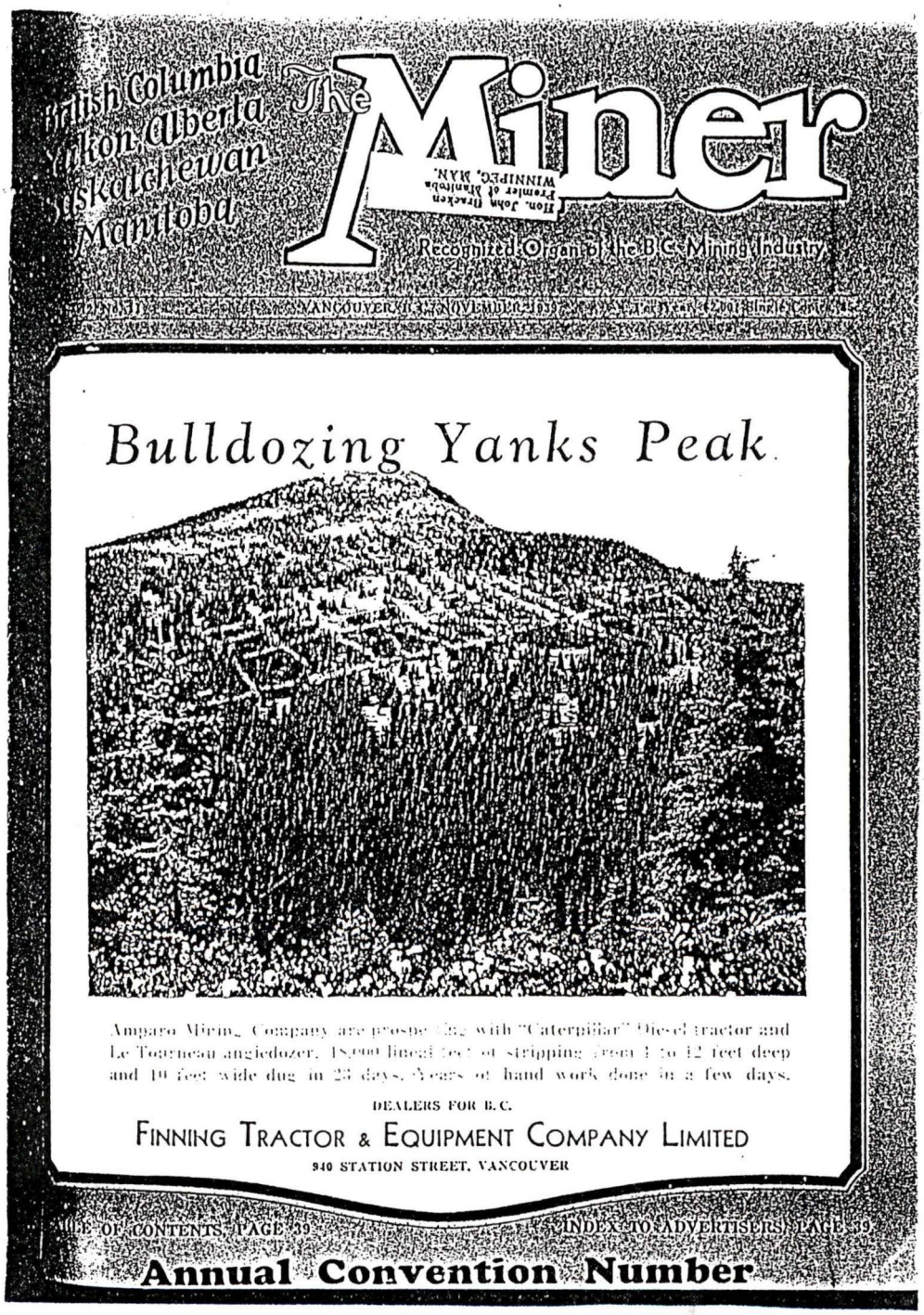
> It would be ridiculous to send ill equipped, ignorant and untrained men into the wilds of British Columbia, to lose themselves among the

> creeks and mountains. Yet, if equipment, provisions, and guidance were provided, there is reason to suppose that many unemployed would be enabled to become producers again almost overnight....The virtue of the scheme lies in the fact that, while it would probably involve Canadian governments in more expense than does distribution of direct relief, it might provide a part solution to our unemployment problem by making a section of our unemployed independent of relief assistance.[12]

Institutionally, by the 1930s placer gold mining was seen as a mechanized process, that relied on heavy machinery to open up mining prospects and access roads. Certainly this was amply illustrated on the covers of Miner magazine during the 1930s when every month modelled yet another brute of modern earthmoving machinery (Figure 4).[13]

Not all mining efforts, however, were so modern or capital intensive. Both lode gold mining and independent prospecting enjoyed a substantial renaissance in the 1930s. There were two excellent reasons for this. In the first place, placer gold mining was an attractive alternative to urban unemployment after the onset of the Depression: the start-up costs were cheap, geological information was readily available from the provincial government, and the country atmosphere was conducive to a hardy independence.[14] In the second, potential profit was greater because the gold price was set at $35 an ounce after Franklin D. Roosevelt abandoned the gold standard in 1933.[15] During the Great Depression, gold provided the solitary, gleaming exception in an otherwise moribund mining industry; it stood out amongst the general

Figure 4. Miner magazine, November 1939.



gloom of unemployment and bankruptcy.

Table 1. Placer Gold -- Value of Production, British Columbia, 1900-1939 ($).

1900-1909	9,367,384	
1910-1919	5,049,500	(-4,317,884)
1920-1929	2,718,111	(-2,331,389)
1930-1939	8,969,737	(+6,251,626)

Source: British Columbia -- Department of Mines Annual Report (1944).

So many British Columbians were enthused by the idea of prospecting for gold, in fact, that the annual supply of 8000 copies of "Placer Mining in British Columbia" produced by the Department of Mines was exhausted in the first months of 1933. In previous years, there were always a number of surplus issues on the shelf. In John Galloway's annual report for that year, the provincial mineralogist stated, "The reports of the Resident Mining Engineers. . . clearly indicate that many latent opportunities for the individual and the capitalist still exist in placer mining."[16]

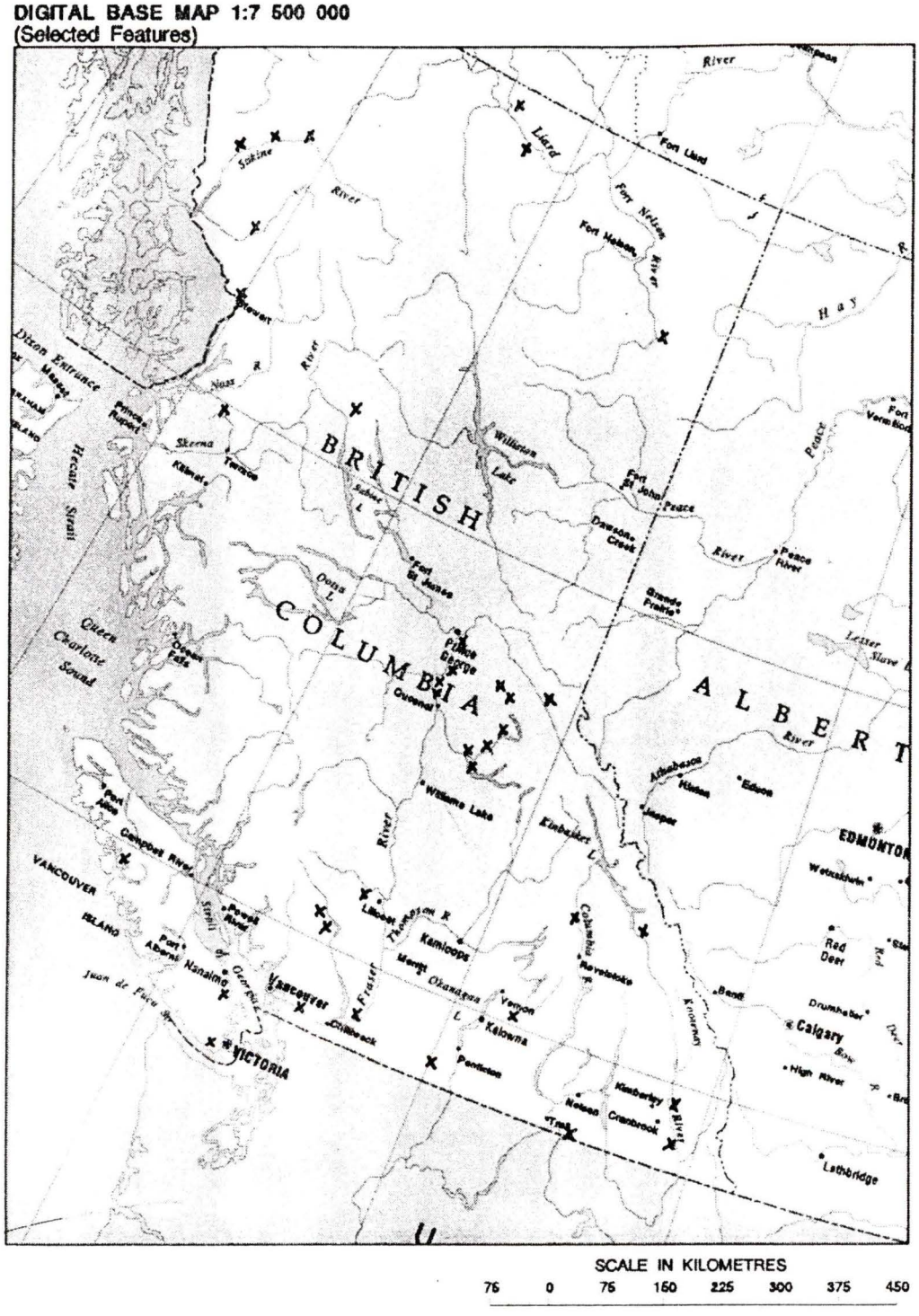
The spatial distribution of placer miners at work around the province in 1932 is shown in Map 1.[17] Most of the placer prospects were reworkings of historic placer areas, such as the Barkerville and Yank's Peak areas of the Cariboo, Spruce Creek in the Atlin district, and the Pend d'Oreille River in the Trail district. But new prospects opened up as well. Fred Wells saw a town named after him, after the establishment of Cariboo Gold Quartz Mines, just a few miles from

Barkerville. On Vancouver Island, explorations at Zeballos began in 1932; the first gold brick was poured with the help of miner/engineer Fred Peet and great ceremony at the Privateer Mines in 1938.[18] The Bridge River area fairly exploded in independent and company placer operations, dominated by the activities of the Pioneer and Bralorne Mines.[19]

By 1938, the Vancouver Province reported that the outlay of capital and modernization of technique in lode placer mining was significant. Further, it was stated that "Hundreds still operate on their own and in small groups."[20] Few districts in B.C. were without at least a few placer mining hopefuls.

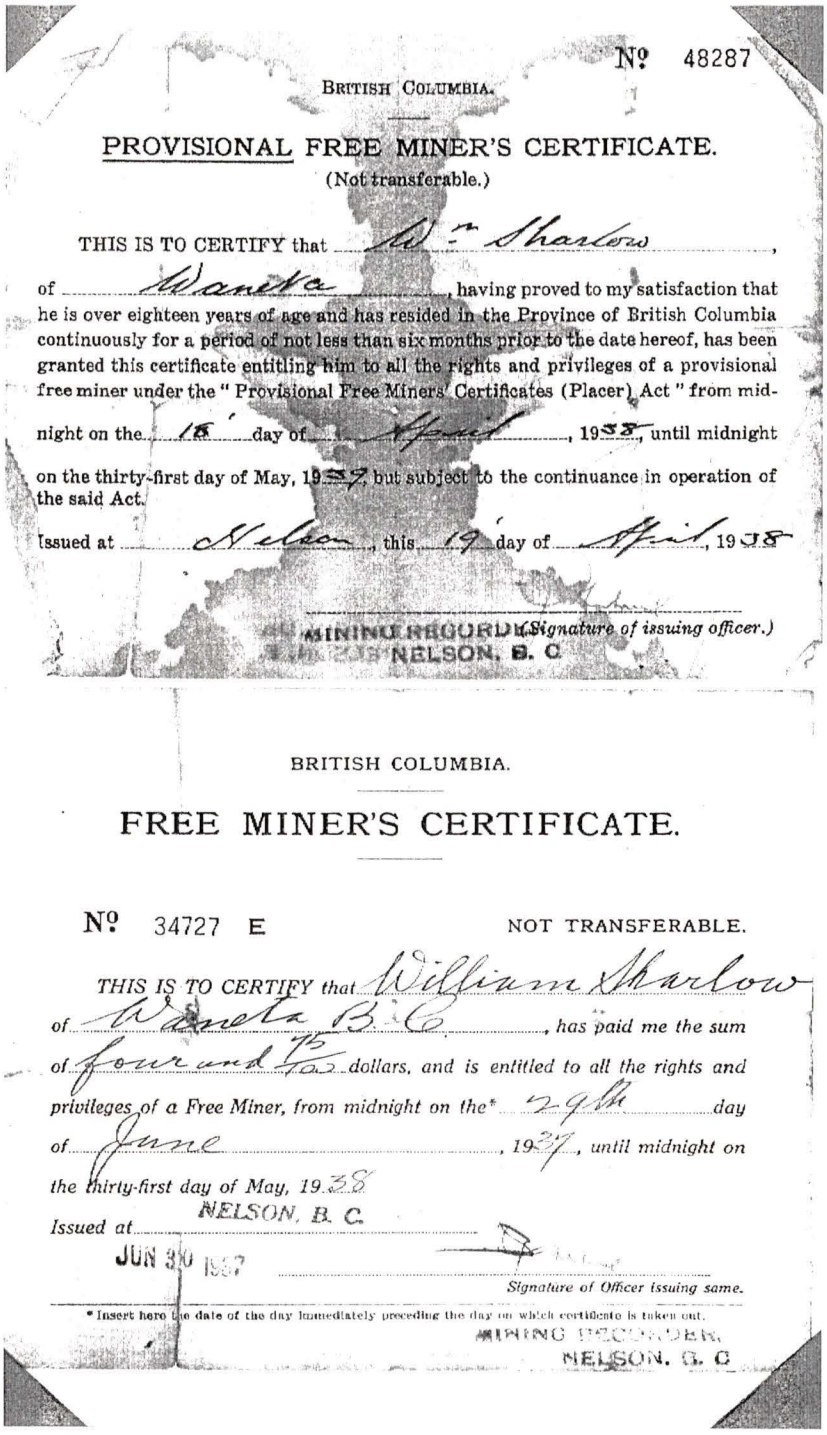
The number of independent placer miners can be estimated by the issue of Free Miner's Certificates. These permits were not free of cost, but indicated that the bearer was free to explore wherever he or she felt there was a likelihood of finding gold or mineral. In 1932, an amendment to the Placer Act created another category of permit, with similar rights attached to it. Provisional Free Miner's Certificates (Figure 5) were issued without cost as a relief measure that would allow more people into the game. Essentially, the provisional permit allowed a person basic locating and prospecting rights for the first year, after which the individual would have to pay the standard fees for such services as filing and recording the claim with the Mining Recorder.

Map 1. Areas of Independent Placer Mining Activity, 1932 to 1938.



X = area of independent placer activity, 3 or more workings.
Source: Minister of Mines Annual Report: 1932-1938.

Figure 5: Free Miner's Certificates.



No 48287

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

PROVISIONAL FREE MINER'S CERTIFICATE.

(Not transferable.)

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that Wm Sharlow,

of Wanita, having proved to my satisfaction that he is over eighteen years of age and has resided in the Province of British Columbia continuously for a period of not less than six months prior to the date hereof, has been granted this certificate entitling him to all the rights and privileges of a provisional free miner under the "Provisional Free Miners' Certificates (Placer) Act" from midnight on the 15 day of April, 1937, until midnight on the thirty-first day of May, 1937, but subject to the continuance in operation of the said Act.

Issued at Nelson, this 19 day of April, 1937

(Signature of issuing officer.)

MINING RECORDER
NELSON, B. C

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

FREE MINER'S CERTIFICATE.

No 34727 E NOT TRANSFERABLE.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that William Sharlow

of Wanita B. C., has paid me the sum of four and 75/100 dollars, and is entitled to all the rights and privileges of a Free Miner, from midnight on the* 29th day of June, 1937, until midnight on the thirty-first day of May, 1938

Issued at NELSON, B. C.

JUN 30 1937

Signature of Officer issuing same.

* Insert here the date of the day immediately preceding the day on which certificate is taken out.

MINING RECORDER,
NELSON, B. C

In 1932 alone, 10,000 Provisional Free Miner's Certificates were issued. Of those men interviewed by the writer, only one man held a "regular" permit, and most identified with the "pink permit," or Provisional Free Miner's Certificate. And rather than obtaining only one such permit, it appears that several in succession were obtained without cost to the bearer, contrary to the conditions of the Placer Act[21] Government statistics are given for the regular issue permits, but not clearly delineated for those issued as provisional (or relief) permits. For those permits that were revenue-generating (at $5 per year), the following gives us an idea of how many people were potentially in the field during the years 1928-1942.

Table 2: Individual Free Miner's Certificates Issued, 1928-1942.

1928:	9,612
1929:	12,248
1930:	8,927
1931:	8,950
1932:	8,411
1933:	13,674
1934:	14,554
1935:	10,780
1936:	9,113
1937:	8,721
1938:	10,191
1939:	8,277
1940:	5,929
1941:	4,876
1942:	4,090

nb: revenue-generating permits only. In 1934, fully 30% of departmental revenue came from the issue of these permits. Provisional (non-revenue producing) certificates were not accounted for statistically until 1944.
Source: British Columbia -- Department of Mines, Annual Report (1928-1942, 1944).

As a point of comparision, the wage labour force in British Columbia mines (all resources) in 1934 was 12,985; labour employed in placer operations was 1,122. With 14,554 Free Miner's Permits issued in that year, the possible number of independent placer miners in the field was greater than the number of mining wage labour employed.[22]

The experiences of the snipers and miners varied as widely as the terrain that they exploited. It will be expedient, therefore, to look first at several individuals' experiences in various mining districts of the province. This will be followed by a regional example of how unemployed men were accepted as new miners into a district known for its historic gold discoveries during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The accounts that follow are drawn from oral interviews and letters from men (and one woman) who placer mined during the Depression. Their memories were collated by the writer, 1994 to 1995. All of the accounts have similar threads: that the experience was essentially a good one, that placer mining provided an acceptable alternate income, and that public officials such as the Government Agent were generally helpful to them in their endeavours. The miners also share the feeling that hinterland communities had accepted them for their ability to produce and contribute to the regional economy.

In the district surrounding Trail and Waneta in the south Kootenays, placer miners had it somewhat easier in that the climate was milder than in the central interior and the north. The mining season extended throughout the winter in some cases, since little freeze up occurred. The Pend d'Oreille River and its tributary creeks were the placer mining grounds for men like Bill Sharlow, who worked several claims there between 1937 and 1939. His experience is an illustration of those who varied their time spent in mining between wage-paid employment and independent placer mining.[23]

Bill Sharlow came to British Columbia from Alberta. He worked for his father, a freight operator, until he took it upon himself to lessen the financial load in a household with too many children and too little income. He travelled to British Columbia on the rails, stopping at small town grocers for food supplies. One such grocer noted Sharlow's bedroll and conversation about being bound for B.C. The storeowner commented that Sharlow must be going for the gold mining -- since that was the best chance for a young man to get a living.

Initially, Sharlow went to work as a mucker in the Reeves-MacDonald mine at Nelson (lead-zinc), but after a short period of time he quit when he found that the mine was notorious for poor ventilation and was known as an unhealthy workplace. He then took up a claim on the Pend d'Oreille River, setting up in an abandoned cabin which he fixed up over

time. The Pend'Oreille ran only a short distance into British Columbia, and had swift streamflows which for the placer miner meant less overburden to remove from the gravel he worked for its gold content.

There were other young men along the river with placer gold claims, according to Sharlow; the attitude was one of persistent hard work, but there was a spirit of conviviality and concern for each other among them. The regulations governing placer claims meant that a miner could not be away from his claim for more than three days during the mining season, so a work week was carried out by most placer miners that conformed to that of the wage labour force. It was always possible, avers Sharlow, for a man to make a dollar a day and be able to save money from that. Taking slack time would be invisible to most, but when it came time to get provisions, sloth could be seen by all in the miner's ability to pay at the general store. For that reason, as well as the fact that some, like Bill Sharlow, sent money home when possible, a constant effort on the placer claim was the norm.

During the Depression, Dorothy Marryat found employment as a teacher first on the Stewart River, then on the CNR line between McBride and Prince George. One of her schools was at Loos, where she met a young man who had been thrown out of work when the local lumbermill burned down. It was 1934, and there were not any other wage labour jobs to be had in the district. Hugh Marryat filed a claim six miles out from Loos,

on the Fraser, and on weekends Dorothy would walk out to the claim to visit and lend a hand. The community accepted those who placer mined in this area, even though they were in the minority compared to active mining areas such as Likely and Wells. Eventually the couple moved on, but the placer mining experience was an important one for the Marryats, financially ensuring that they would have a life together.[24]

Hal Rumming was from the Lantzville area on Vancouver Island. He grew up in a rural environment, clearing land with his father and learning about the use of explosives in the process. Without adequate employment in 1938 and having an interest in mining, he attended the Placer Mining Training School at Emory Creek. The next mining season, he and three others took the provisions given by the government and set out for a summer's field work at Quesnel Forks in the Cariboo.[25]

Unlike other prospecting parties comprised of Placer Mining Training graduates, Rumming and his group were independent of direct organization of supplies and transportation. They travelled from Vancouver's Carrall Street dock on the Union steamship Lady Pamela to Squamish, then on the Pacific Great Eastern Railway to Williams Lake, their backpacks and supplies with them. At Williams Lake they fully expected to complete their journey by foot, a trek of over 80 miles with full packs. The RCMP in Williams Lake, however, arranged with the local freight truck to take them in the Likely road to within a few miles of the Quesnel Forks bridge.

Once there, the prospecting party carried out inspections of claims for the provincial government, and placer mined a portion of the tableland above the Forks. They found that their isolation was almost complete, as once prospectors were on their claims in this area, they were rarely seen except when provisions were needed.

One exception to this was a group of Americans who had been coming into the area for four years, spending three to four months placering in the Quesnel Forks area. Somehow, they also managed to get their aging Model A Ford in over the old coach road from Williams Lake, refusing to haul their provisions in on foot. This group surreptitiously came in every year to the same area, even building a snug cabin in which to stay, but never filed a legal claim. The close supervision that is now the case was then non-existent in more isolated mining areas like Quesnel Forks.

Hal Rumming and his chums made great plans for the placer mining that they would do after the war was over. The group made a decision to meet in Vancouver after the war, agreeing that properly done, the life and earnings of a placer miner constituted a decent and profitable way to live. Many of the men, however, went on to full careers with the military (Rumming served 31 years), and their dreams were never more than just that.[26]

Not all who chose to placer mine as an alternative way of making a living were the young men who had been shut out of a

wage labour experience. John Shearman and his wife were in their sixties when Shearman wrote a bitter, pleading letter to T.D. Pattullo in June, 1937. In the letter, he described himself as "an old time miner, with one resource left, placer mining."[27] Mr. and Mrs. Shearman lost their "land, mines and timber" in the Powell River vicinity in the second year of the Depression. They retreated to a placer claim on the Fraser River near Agassiz and attempted to eke out an existence for themselves, but, without sufficient food and medical care, were on the point of desperation when Shearman wrote the letter to Pattullo:

> The mining season is about over, I have no chance for medical aid as my money is about gone. I know of several places to mine that I have prospected, but I have not the funds to do so, sufficient grubstake, etc., but I have the outfit and I understand prospecting. I have asked for, but have always been refused sufficient grubstake for this purpose.[28]

Shearman's request to the Premier was simple. Like so many during the Depression, he asked for assistance in the form of a grubstake, and clarification of his filed claim. Apparently his bitterness was derived from part from the fact that Pattullo had ineffectually arbitrated a claim dispute for Shearman (during the time that Pattullo was Minister of Mines), and the result had been the loss of Shearman's Powell River claims. Nonetheless, he was willing to continue to grub out a placer miner's existence even at the age of sixty-six, carrying out a day's work the same as that of a much younger

man.

Shearman's letter was forwarded to George Pearson, Minister of Mines. No record of any resolution of either the grubstaking or claim filing matters appears to exist.

The accepted account of cities and municipalities during the Depression has been that they were under incredible fiscal stress, a condition that led to receivership and bankruptcy for some. In hinterland communities that depended on resource extraction for their economic base, however, a different condition existed. And in the case of communities that traditionally relied on placer gold as a major part of their economy, the Depression was actually a positive time: rather than turn people away like Vancouver did, these communities welcomed an increase in worker population.

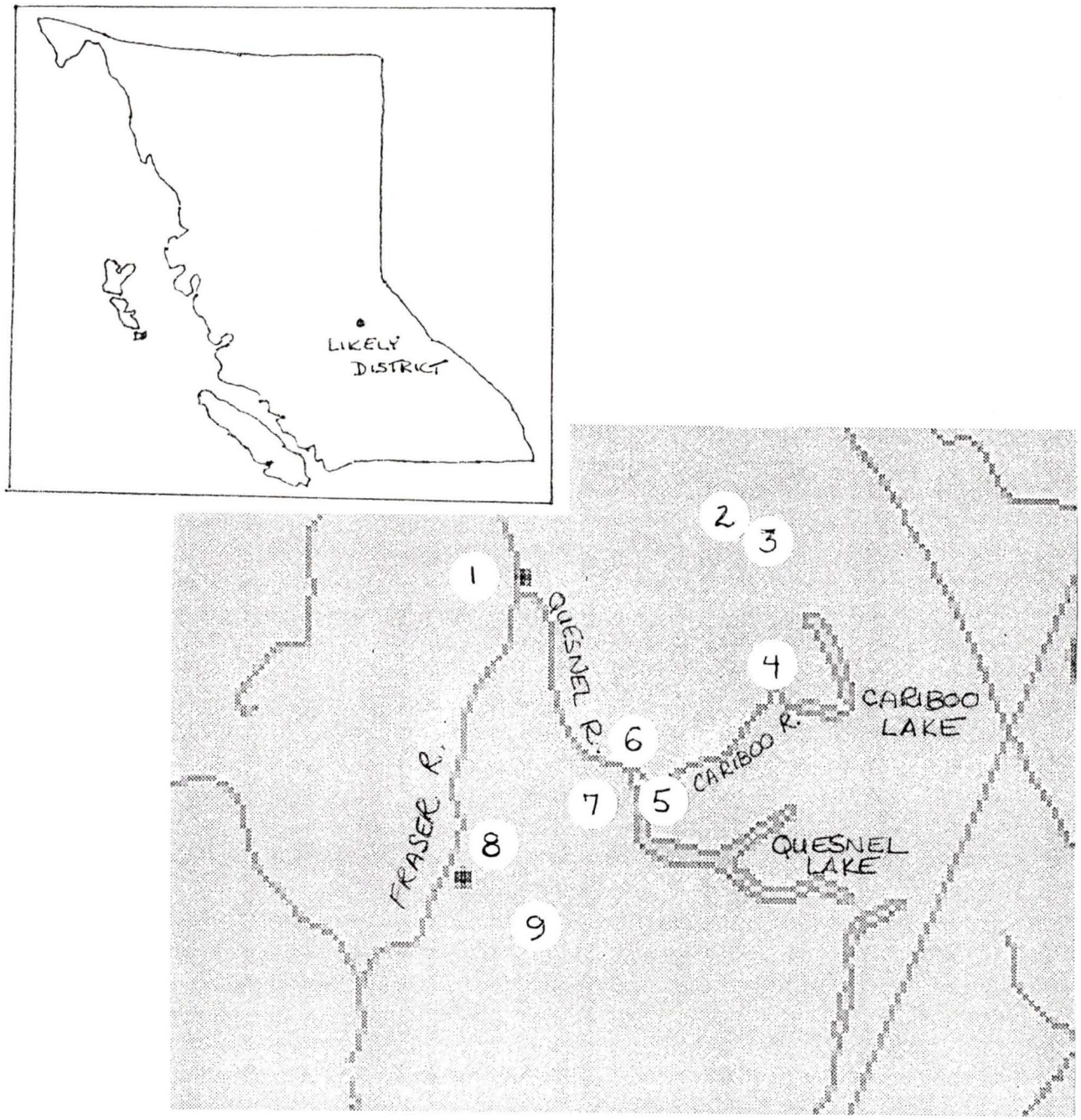
Such was the case in the Likely District in the Cariboo, some seventy miles northeast of Williams Lake and forty miles to the south of Barkerville (see Map 2). The Likely district is considered to include the unincorporated settlements of Hydraulic, Keithley Creek, Quesnel Forks, and Likely. The closest supply centre is Williams Lake. The population at the beginning of the 1930s was some 300 people, the majority of whom were single men. The school enrollment was between 10-14 students throughout the decade, and the average number of families was 12.[29] The settlements in this district date back to the Cariboo gold rush era, when Quesnel Forks was the main supply centre for the Cariboo. The district is

physically rugged forest land within the Quesnel Highlands of the Interior Plateau, abutting on the western slope of the Columbia Range.[30]

The onset of the Depression held little in the way of surprises for the residents of the Likely district. As one long time resident later remembered:

> There wasn't much cash around and there were a lot of people looking for work, but I don't remember that we were ever what you might call "down and out." You could always get by with a sluice box and a couple of traps, and our needs weren't all that great....I know things were bad in the cities, but at least around here we never went short of food. Then the price of gold went up, and that helped.[31]

Map 2. Likely and District.



1. Quesnel
2. Wells
3. Barkerville
4. Keithley Creek
5. Likely
6. Quesnel Forks
7. Hydraulic
8. Williams Lake
9. 150 Mile House

The only relief schemes that directly applied to the district were provisional free miner's certificates, and government grubstaking. The provisions of these schemes are discussed more fully in Chapter 3. Other relief schemes such as land settlement and farm placement plans were not applicable because of the mountainous, wooded nature of the district.[32] There were only two farms in the Hydraulic area, while twenty six miles away at Beaver Lake and Big Lake Ranch the rolling valley terrain was better suited to feed crops and cattle ranching.[33] The predominant economic activity for the Likely district was placer gold, and it remained so until changes in logging technology and truck transport made it feasible to exploit the huge timber resources available in the Quesnel Highlands and Matthew River Valley.[34]

Miners and those providing essential services were the integral elements of an established community before the Depression. There had been a gold strike at Cedar Creek in 1922 that brought with it government services such as assayer, constable, forest ranger and game warden.[35] The first school in Likely was established in 1922, in the former pool hall.[36] From the time of its establishment during the Cariboo gold rush, the society of Likely had been one in which social relationships were hastily formed as required. The common economic interests and work methods of the miners were influential in rapidly creating a new social order in new surroundings. This order was composed of individuals who were

enterprising and determined to manage their economy on their own, apart from the outside world and the wiles of government. It also created a society more resilient and forgiving of demographic upheaval, a factor significant in making the isolated mining society of the district appealing to residents, entrepreneurs, and unemployed alike during the Depression.

In the case of Likely and district, it appears that what may have helped to form and hold the community together at a time when most social structures were disintegrating was this ability to accept change and new members easily. Unfettered by preconceived standards of society, this community in isolation bore up well under repeated turnovers in population during the Depression years. Substantial social upheaval did not occur until the late 1960s, when the interests of miners, loggers, church members, and young people of the protest generation collided.[37]

Placer mining was the economic activity most often mentioned in the Williams Lake Tribune during the Depression. Regular features described what mines were being worked, how many men were new to the district or employed with the mines, and advance expectations of what the annual "clean-up" would be worth.[38] There were at least a dozen company mining operations active throughout the 1930s. The number of independent placer miners was at least equivalent to the number of wage labour in the area; in the Likely district in

1937, each group numbered some 300 men. Most men attempted gold recovery as part of their means of subsistence during the decade, whether as a seasonal alternative to other resource activities such as trapping or logging, or as a part time activity when not at work for a company mining interest.[39]

It was common practice for storekeepers to advance supplies to prospectors against their eventual gold recoveries. At Keithley Creek, Tom Kinvig was in this way a great help to incoming green miners. At Quesnel Forks, Lim Sing was another such benefactor. Kinvig recalls it as "helping them get off relief."[40] While this assistance cannot be attributed solely to altruism on the part of the storekeeper, grubstaking was a form of community-based social assistance. This small boost given to these men financially was undoubtedly even more so emotionally. To be a prospector was to be self sufficient and far less visible in one's impoverishment.

Not all of the young men who worked in the Likely district during the 1930s came from the outside.[41] Some, like Tom Kinvig, were already residents when the country slid into the Depression. In contrast to those who came in hopes of finding "good ground," Kinvig and providers of basic services served as a support base for many young men needed more than hunger and dreams of wealth as an incentive to work their placer claims.[42] By the fall of 1933, when the outside had hit bottom, Kinvig had built the Keithley Creek Hotel and

was a newly married man. When young men like George Baker came in with their relief grubstake, he helped them get off relief by grubstaking them for a year's time. Some of the men were, in Kinvig's words, "as honest as the day is long." Others turned out to be poor credit risks and never repaid their stake, even though they "struck" on their placer claims.

According to Kinvig, those miners who were successful usually made around $1000.00 each for a season's backbreaking work. This estimate includes those who had more sophisticated machinery, however, such as a dredge. The less sophisticated operator made at least a dollar a day, and on the Fraser River bars, Earl Baity recalls an income of between two to four dollars a day.[43] The mining season in the Cariboo began after the river receded in late May or early June, and continued until late October.[44]

One reason for the attractiveness of this district to green miners was, of course, the mineral resource. Another was the considerable human resource of an established community historically connected with gold mining. There were a number of old miners still working in the district, who had come into the area because of the 1922 Cedar Creek gold strike. These are remembered by Kinvig and one of the school teachers, Margaret Wilson Murray, as hard working, honest men. A second "rush" caused by the Depression saw men walking into the bush and staking each side of the road wherever they saw

an undeveloped spot.

Not all men came into the district alone. Some of them brought wives and children with them. Some of the women, like the wife of Walter Hasbrouk, stayed at home camp and cooked for their families, in the mining community. Others, like Mrs. Westenheiser, accompanied their husbands into the bush for a season's trapping when mining season was over. Annie Sandburg swung the pickaxe right beside her husband on their placer claims. Yet others, like Marjorie Youngren, left their husbands behind in the bush, when the dreams of wealth got a little too stretched and they could not take the isolation any longer.[45]

As the Williams Lake Tribune announced in 1933, "The Keithley Creek Hotel and General Store are doing a fine business, and times are looking good for Likely and Keithley Districts."[46] Not all miners out in the Cariboo Lake area of the district built their own cabins, choosing instead to stay at Kinvig's Keithley Creek Hotel or Mabel Borland's Cariboo Lake Lodge. Kinvig's establishment had nine sleeping rooms, which he described as a "flopping place" for prospectors. The 60 by 30 foot two storey building was heated by a single large woodstove, and was roofed with rubberoid shingles to guard against the sparks that started many cabin fires in the Cariboo. The wood for the structure had to come mainly from Squamish, with little of it cut at Tom Greer's small bush mill in Likely.

Borland's establishment was a little more elaborate, and the proprietress carried on a convivial competition with Kinvig. When she erected a sign saying, "Established -- 1869," he immediately ran one up that stated, "Established Yesterday -- No Stale Bread." Neither, however, had much to fear that they would lack for business.

During the depths of the Depression, everyone was out staking quartz claims after the success of the company operated Midas and Cariboo Yankee Belle mines, and if their credit was good, these miners wanted a place to stay (preferably with a good cook).[47] Not all business relationships were as jovial, as there were some instances of claim staking fraud that did make their way to the superior courts in Victoria.[48]

There were single men and nuclear families who came to the district to find a living, away from Depression-stricken urban British Columbia. There were established families that became involved in business in the district, that supplied and supported this floating part of the population. There were also some people who were the exception, being public employees who eventually fell prey to a bankrupt government. Colin and Jean Muir were among this group. In the early 1930s, Colin Muir was the Public Works road foreman for the Cariboo district -- no small task -- with a salary of $2,160.00 per year plus expenses.[49] In 1933, he was laid off, and he and Jean returned to Likely to work a placer claim by hand until

1939. The community welcomed them as old friends and enjoyed the social graces that the couple perpetuated, such as weekly get-togethers and sing alongs around the Muir piano.

> They were nice people for all their drinking -- what else was there for them to do?[50]

The impact that the placer mining frontier had on those new members such as the Depression era miners was evident in communities like Likely. Social gatherings are one way of gauging this impact and the acceptance of the miners into this community.

A month after a young schoolteacher named Margaret Wilson arrived in Likely, she and a few other women of the village were invited to Quesnel Forks in February to help celebrate the completion of the new bridge across the South Fork of the Quesnel River. Only three women lived at the Forks at that time; Mrs. Shaw and her eleven year old daughter Megan, and old Mrs. Kim, the last Chinese Canadian woman to live at the Forks. The miners were delighted to have feminine company. An unused building was cleared out, and a dance was held to the musical renderings of a band comprised of a mouth organ, a stove pipe beaten as a drum, and of course -- a fiddle. The alcoholic refreshments did not make it in from Williams Lake in time, but storekeeper Lim Sing had a supply that passed from one person to the next. Mrs. Shaw put on coffee in her home, which had been the old Quesnel Forks jail. During the course of the evening, a woman introduced Margaret to her

future husband, placer miner Gordon Murray. And while she did not consume alcohol herself, she was tolerant of those who did in an environment of hardship and hard work.[51]

The willingness of long-time residents, new arrivals such as Margaret Wilson, and miners new to the district to come together for social functions illustrates how truly fluid the boundaries of an isolated community could be. This stands in direct contrast to the treatment received by unemployed men in the cities, men who were without social acceptance because their ability to earn the acceptable "family wage" was compromised by the economy.[52]

There were a fair number of Chinese Canadians at the Forks during the Depression.[53] Most of the buildings that remained at the Forks were part of the Chinese section of that site. As in other placer mining areas, typically the Chinese went over mine workings after white miners had left the area, not convinced that they were played out.[54] Some, like Lim Sing, were storekeepers who also served some meals to men on the way to their placer claims.[55] Lim Sing was also responsible for grubstaking many prospectors through hard times during the 1930s and 1940s, just as Tom Kinvig did at Keithley Creek.[56] There appear to have been no cultural barriers to this system of assistance. Work related technology and a willingness to work were more important to the formation of common bonds than elements of cultural or ethnic identity.

The communities within the Likely district were

established before the Depression, the legacy of past gold strikes during the nineteenth century and of the 1920s. They are not easily compared to many of the documented rural towns in British Columbia prior to 1930, and there was little change in the nature of the community during the 1930s. The population was diverse ethnically, although the largest group proportionately was of British-Canadian origin. This ethnic diversity, that included those of European, Scandinavian and Chinese heritage as well as British-Canadian, was seen as an asset in a district where the bonds of community were formed by a common economic interest in gold and other resources. The people who came to the district were individuals who came in search of gold and they instituted new strategies for living as they found it necessary to do so. Over time, social functions and usual rites of passage began to define a new social order, but the primary theme of this gold mining society was individuality.

The Likely district held a limited number of services -- a few small grocery stores, hotels, and one beer parlour. Most of these businesses were one-family operations. During the Depression there were no resident government officials, as there had been during the 1922 Cedar Creek gold strike; if Colin Muir's layoff can be taken as an example, there were no funds available to support these services outside of Williams Lake. One government telephone was in service at Likely, so it was possible to order supplies and have those delivered by

teamster, and later, by freight truck. The number of vehicles in the area was limited to a few privately owned cars and one freight truck. Urban-dwelling British Columbians may not have found much in common with this isolated population who built their homes from the forests surrounding them, hunted and fished to fill the larder, and worked long arduous hours in pursuit of a few flakes of gold. The lifestyle that some had left behind in their relative successes was still serviceable to those who lived "in the bush" around Likely, and during the Depression, there were some benefits in this adherence to a simpler, albeit more difficult way of life.

What allowed the Likely district to survive during the Depression? How was it able to maintain and even progress in the establishment of social structures in a way that other settlements could not? What was endemic to the failure of the budget-drained cities and agriculturally drained Prairies was in the case of an isolated single resource community a boon. In the municipal areas of British Columbia, permanent residents were encroached upon by a transient horde of unemployed that could not add to the economic base of the municipality. In the Likely district, however, the region's ratepayers wished to see an influx of population, one that would help to increase resource extraction. They welcomed unemployed newcomers -- as long as they were willing to work. On the Prairies, workers specialized in the production of a staple whose worth had become unpredictable through the

intricacies of market, and impossible for many to cultivate in a decade of drought. In the Likely district, the main economic enterprise was ground sluicing and placer mining for gold -- a commodity that promised perhaps even more psychological value for the miner than it did purchasing power. In the municipal areas, the bonds of community were threatened by the floating population of unemployed; but in the Likely district, these bonds seem to have stretched and accommodated the increase in population with some measure of success.

The effects of the Depression in the Likely district were, therefore, not as disruptive as they were in other parts of Canada. This was because the district offered a limited economic opportunity to those willing to adapt to local strategies of resource management. The Depression of 1929-1939 meant an intensified continuation of the isolated life already common to the Likely district residents. This lifestyle was based on the continued use of persistent skills such as placer mining by hand. The unemployed who chose to enter the district and others like it may have found a life unlike what they had known on the "outside," but the chances of survival were good if they worked hard to find the gold among the grey.

The experiences of the unemployed who crossed the boundary between wage labour and self employment as a placer miner were varied. There were, however, several themes in

common. They had to be willing to leave an urban environment for a harder, more physical life, creating one's own reality of labour and, coincidentally, their own social reality. This labouring and social reality was based on adherence to a material culture of persistent skills, skills that once more proved to be at least adequate if not highly successful in providing a means of subsistence. The placer mining experience shows us that not all individuals saw the Depression as a hopeless time -- for most, in Bill Sharlow's words, "it was a good life -- you could always make your dollar a day."[57] The placer mining experience also shows us a different face of community; in cases such as Likely, Loos, and Waneta, established communities stretched the bonds of community to accept the placer miners.

The means by which the communities and the individuals who became placer miners -- transient or resident -- was in part the result of legislation and incentives that were instituted in response to grass roots interest in the game of placer mining. Chapter 2 will look at those issues of incentive and legislation, and how they developed over the years 1931 to 1933 to assist potential and traditional players in the placer mining game in Depression era British Columbia.

NOTES

1.Margaret Ormsby, British Columbia: A History (Vancouver: MacMillan, 1958), pp. 454-456.

2.Ibid., and Lesley Cooper, interviewer, "Charlie Wood," (audiotape: Nanaimo, B.C., 6 December 1994). Wood's experiences during the Depression included time spent in these camps, and he bitterly corroborates the view that they represented a "deadening" experience for young men.

3.The standard treatments include James Struthers, No Fault of their Own: Unemployment and The Canadian Welfare State: 1914-1941 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), and to a lesser extent, Jane Barman, The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: UTP, 1991). The narrative account of Sydney Hutcheson (Depression Stories; Vancouver: New Star Press, 1972) certainly places the reader in the shoes of the unemployed male of the era, as far as it is possible to do so.

4.Mrs. P. Mathisen to T.D. Pattullo, 9 May 1935, GR 1222, Premier's Papers.

5.Dr. Charles Schofield to T.D. Pattullo, 11 May 1935. GR1222--Box 136 File 4 Premier--Unemployment (BCARS).

6.T.D. Pattullo to Dr. Charles Schofield 14 May 1935. GR 1222--Box 136 File 4 Premier--Unemployment (BCARS).

7."Camps Denounced in Church Probe," Vancouver Sun, 3 July 1935, p.1.

8.Ibid., p.5.

9.Minutes...Subcommittee on Unemployment Relief. B.C. Executive Council, 1932-1933. (B.C.Legislative Library).

10."Gold to the Rescue," Victoria Daily Times, 2 March 1933.

11.Admittedly, the newspaper accounts were partisan views and not an accurate reflection of popular opinion in all cases. In this case, however, popular belief was the basis of these reports, substantiated by the long history of placer mining in British Columbia, continued correspondence to the government in regard to permits and mining information, and, during the Depression, the submissions to the Executive SubCommittee on Unemployment.

12.Ibid.

13.Miner magazine, "the responsible organ of the British Columbia mining industry," was certainly the heavy equipment pin-up periodical of the decade.

14.These factors were reiterated in both the press (See Figure 1), and in the Annual Report of the Department of Mines; the frontspiece of the report provided additional impact, portraying the miner as an independent, overwhelmingly masculine character complete with cabin, rifle, and gold pan temptingly displayed. One of these illustrations is seen at the beginning of Ch. 1.

15.For a discussion of the gold standard and FDR's controlling role in its use and abandonment, see Arthur M. Schleschinger, The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988 edition), Chapter 12, "The Dollar Dilemma."

16.British Columbia--Department of Mines, John Galloway, "Placer Mining in British Columbia," (1933), Preface.

17.These maps were constructed by analyzing the reports of work given in the Dept. of Mines/Ministry of Mines Annual Reports for the years 1932, 1934, 1936, and 1938. Claimholders and leasors were requested to fill out a summary of the work that had been performed on their claim[s] during the year, and submit it to the Resident Mining Engineer.

18.Fred J. Peet, Miners and Moonshiners: A Personal Account of Adventure and Survival in a Difficult Era (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1983), passim.

19.Emma de Hullu with Evelyn Cunningham, Bridge River Gold (Vancouver: Bridge River Centennial Committee, 1967?), pp. 51-53.

20.Vancouver Province, 3 September 1938.

21.L. Cooper, audiotaped interviews with Ron Riley (Nanaimo, B.C.:6 December 1994), and Bill Sharlow (Victoria: 15 January 1995).

22.British Columbia--Department of Mines, Annual Report (1934).

23.The discussion of Bill Sharlow's experiences draws entirely from Lesley Cooper, interviewer, "Bill Sharlow," (audiotape: Victoria, B.C., 15 January 1995).

24.Lesley Cooper,interviewer, "Dorothy M. Marryat," (audiotape: Victoria, B.C., 8 November 1994).

25.Lesley Cooper, interviewer, "Hal Rumming," (audiotape: Nanaimo, B.C., 6 December 1994). This section draws entirely from the interview.

26.Ibid.

27.John Shearman to T.D. Pattullo, 3 June 1937. Gr 1222--Box 20, File 7, Premier's Papers -- Minister of Mines. (BCARS).

28.Ibid.

29.The school for this district has always been located at Likely. Likely was known as Cedar Dam until 1922, when local miners decided to rename the community after an old time miner and "philosopher," John Plato Likely. The school was opened in 1922, and there have been four buildings used over the past 73 years; the first was an old pool hall, then a log structure, followed by a frame building augmented by "greenalls" and finally in 1977, a modern school facility. All of this is germane to the discussion of placer mining and community memory -- because when the current building was erected, School District #27 did not listen to the "old timers" who told them they were building directly over old mine tunnels. In 1986, the school had to be renovated when it started sinking into the ground. Local knowledge does matter.

30.B.C. Directory, 1930; British Columbia -- Department of Education, Annual Report, 1930-1939; A.L. Farley, Atlas of British Columbia: People, Environment, and Resource Use. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979), viii.

31.Elaine Bennett, Whitewater Gold, unpublished MSS, (Likely, B.C.: 1980), pp.114-115.

32.Unemployment Relief Branch, Narrative History of Unemployment Relief 1931-1937, BCARS.

33.David G. Falconer, interviewer, "Bernice Prior Poirer MacDonald," (Videotape: Williams Lake, 1988).

34.For recent scholarship on the changes in logging technology and managerial structure, see first, Richard Rajala,"The Rude Science: A Social History of West Coast Logging, 1890-1930," (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1987). His work is thorough on coast logging, although focussing more on Oregon and Washington, and he does not deal with logging in the interior of this province. For emphasis on the Chandler thesis, and her application to the rising managerial structure of the logging industry based in Williams Lake, see Mary

McRoberts, "Emergence of Corporate Structure in Williams Lake district lumber industry," Canadian Papers in Rural History Vol. 6 (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1990). She deals with the postwar era, closer to the feel of the district, but in no way complete in her assessment. There is no current work specific to rurally based small business in the B.C. logging industry of any period -- as there is none concerned with the small time placer miner as entrepreneur.

35.Bruce Ramsey, Ghost Towns of British Columbia (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1963), 48; and B.C. Directory for the years 1923 to 1930, inclusive.

36.Karen Pierce, "A Social History of Schooling in Likely, British Columbia, 1922-1990," unpublished paper, Lantzville, B.C.: 1990.

37.Lesley Cooper, "When The Past is Too Close: Cariboo Women, Back-to-the-Land, and the Counterculture of 1969-1979," BC and Beyond: Gender Histories Conference (University of Victoria: June 1994).

38."Clean-up" is the periodic or semi-seasonal recovery of gold from catchment equipment: e.g., the sluicebox.

39.British Columbia -- Minister of Mines Annual Report, 1937.

40.David G. Falconer, interviewer, "Tom Kinvig." (Videotape: Williams Lake, 1988).

41."Outside" refers to any urban area outside of the normal trading area of the Likely district: for example, Vancouver is outside, while Prince George may not be because certain supplies come from there. In the 1930s, the definition was more localized, but generally, it referred to the world "outside" of the immediate locale. The term is was still widely used in the district until the late 1980s, when private telephone lines became available and the road into Likely was finally paved.

42."Good ground" is gold bearing gravel with a constant show of "colour" or gold in a free state. "Hungry ground," is just that ; gold may be present, but barely enough to make recovery worthwhile. Sydney Hutcheson (Depression Stories, New Star Publishing, 1976), tells about recovering just enough to buy 60 cents worth of groceries, after 10 to 12 hours of cold wet labour sluicing in the river. Good ground, by comparison, would yield between $2.00 to $4.00 per day, per man.

43.Earl S. Baity, Wilderness Welfare, (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1966), p. 51.

44.This section draws entirely on the Tom Kinvig interview, with the exception of the statistic regarding relief grubstakes: this information derived from the report of the Minister of Mines.

45.Falconer, "Tom Kinvig," and B.C. Directory, 1942.

46.Williams Lake Tribune, 31 August 1933.

47.The Midas mine was owned and operated by Saddle Mines, Ltd., a subsidiary of Britannia Mining and Smelting Co., Ltd., and the Cariboo Yankee Belle, by the company of the same name. Each was a small operation: the Midas group of claims was worked by two men in 1934. The point here is that miners saw the success that could be had in a limited "company" operation, and believed that they too could enjoy success in their mining ventures.

48.Falconer, "Tom Kinvig."

49.British Columbia -- Sessional Papers, Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1930.

50.Lesley Cooper, interviewer, "Margaret Murray Remembers the Depression," (Audiotape: Likely, B.C. July 1992).

51.Ibid.

52.Gillian Creese, "The Politics of Dependence: Women, Work, and Unemployment in the Vancouver labour movement World War II," in Greg Kealey, ed., Class, Gender, and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology (St. John's, Nfld: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1988).

53.Falconer,"Bernice MacDonald."

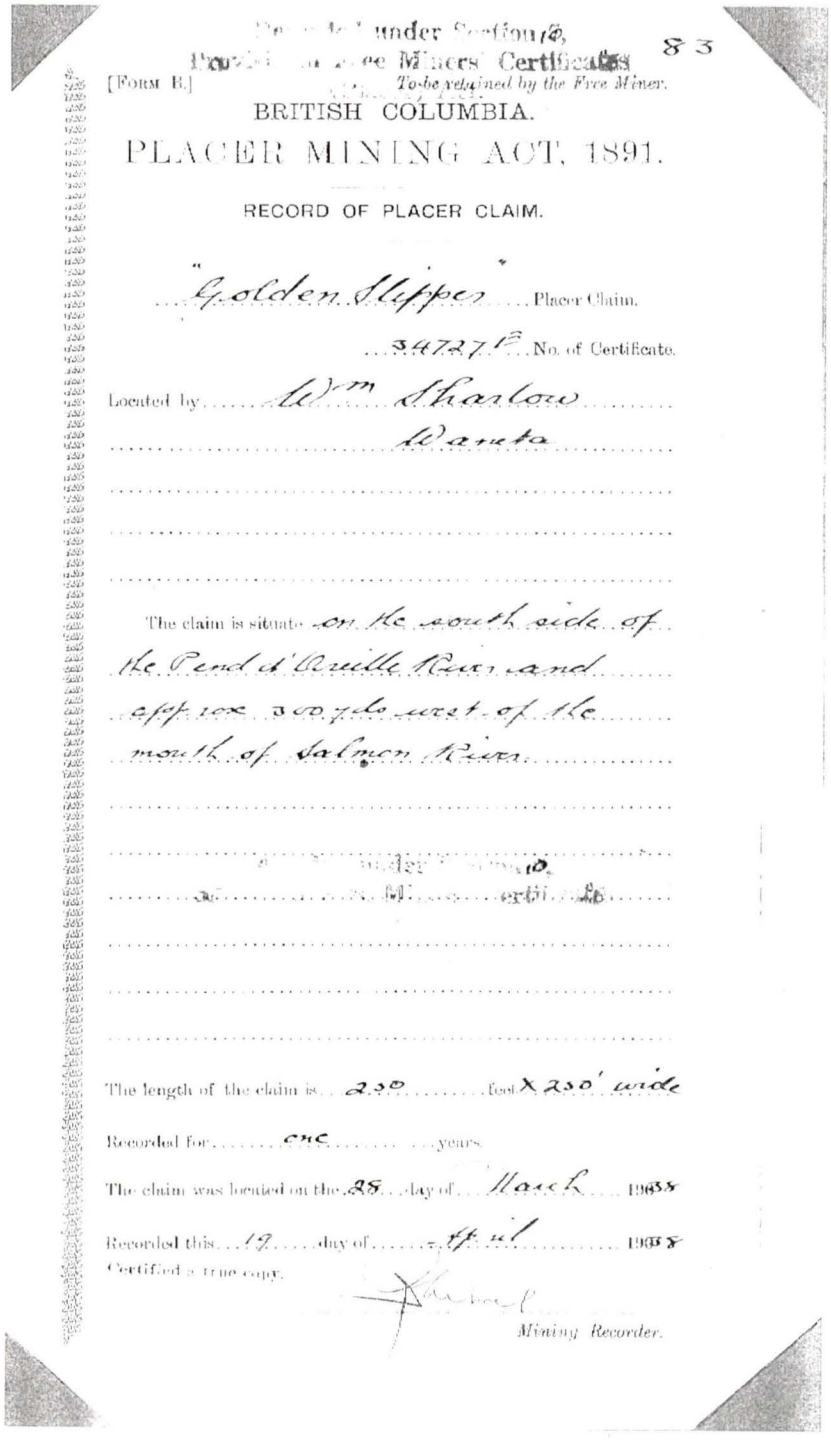
54.Bruce Ramsey, Ghost Towns of British Columbia, (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1963), p. 48. Note, however, that his material in regard to vital statistics and his appraisal of Quesnel Forks as a Chinese settlement are less than accurate.

55.Falconer,"Bernice MacDonald."

56.David G. Falconer, Likely Cemetery Society Newsletter, 1992.

57.L. Cooper, interviewer,"Bill Sharlow."

Figure 6: Record of Placer Claim - "Golden Slipper"



[Form B.] Placer Miners' Certificate 83
To be retained by the Free Miner.

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

PLACER MINING ACT, 1891.

RECORD OF PLACER CLAIM.

"Golden Slipper" Placer Claim.

34727 F No. of Certificate.

Located by Wm Sharlow
Wanta

The claim is situate on the south side of the Pend d'Oreille River and approx 3000 ft west of the mouth of Salmon River

The length of the claim is 250 feet x 250' wide

Recorded for one years.

The claim was located on the 28 day of March 1958

Recorded this 19 day of April 1958

Certified a true copy.

Mining Recorder.

CHAPTER TWO: GOVERNMENT, GOLD, AND GRUBSTAKING

> Fraser River bar mining was being loudly ballyhooed in Vancouver and Victoria. Relief boards, the police and politicians were trying to get men away from the congested cities. The press and the radio were urging men to come to the Fraser where gold could be had for the taking. They painted glowing pictures of camp life by rippling streams, but offered no suggestions of how a man who was broke was to acquire the equipment to camp....They told in flowery language of the freedom and independence of working for yourself, but didn't tell you how to get the tools to work with.
>
> Earl S. Baity, Wilderness Welfare.[1]

The expanding placer mining industry, especially independent operations, placed considerable pressure on the provincial government during the Depression. The provincial government responded to these pressures in two ways: as a matter of continuing the traditional policy of support to mining starts, and it legislated an amendment to the Placer Act, as one form of fiscal restraint. This chapter will examine the role of the provincial government in the encouragement and regulation of placer mining during the Depression. The amendments to the Placer Act and other Depression era incentives will be discussed and assessed for their intent and effectiveness. Thus, much of this discussion will be concerned with why changes to the Act occurred, and whether or not state intent and the interests of mining capital corresponded with popular outcome.

Placer mining in British Columbia prior to the Depression was a relatively uncomplicated matter in terms of legal forms and regulatory devices. The regulations and fees for miners engaged in the activity were purported to be the most liberal in Canada, and the barriers to entry were almost non-existent.[2] Information about placer mining and possible prospecting areas was available from the Department of Mines in Victoria, from the Resident Engineers of the six mining districts, and from the twenty-five Gold Commissioners throughout the province.[3] The Chamber of Mines in Vancouver offered advice and rudimentary prospecting lectures from 1918 on to the present, without missing a year even in wartime.[4] All in all, there was a considerable infrastructure in place that served miners reasonably well and without imposing unmanageable expense on the individual. This question of cost changed drastically when British Columbia slid into the Depression.

In general, the fees for placer mining were such that the individual prospector was encouraged in his efforts. This encouragement took two forms. Titles in reference to claims and leaseholds were perfect -- without complications in regard to tenancy unless abandoned or forfeited after a generous default period. The other form of encouragement was the low cost in fees attached to the activity. Table 3 summarizes those fees typical to a first and second year operation.

Table 3: Table of Fees in Regard to Individuals, Mineral Act and Placer-Mining Act.

Individual Free Miner's Certificate	$5.00
Recording Mineral or Placer Claim	2.50
Rerecord of Placer Claim	2.50
Recording lay-over	2.50
Recording abandonment, placer claim	2.50
Recording any afidavit under three folios	2.50
Per folio over three, in addition	.30
Filing documents, "Placer-Mining Act"	1.00
Recording certificate of work, placer lease	2.50
For every lease under "Placer-Mining Act"	5.00

Source: British Columbia--Department of Mines Annual Report (1928).

As seen above, the fees for licensing and initial filing of a placer claim were not excessive. For most of the placer miners of the Depression era, who worked a claim for a season at best, these were the only applicable fees. Those who continued in the activity had additional expenses to consider: if a prospector went on to acquire a placer lease, there was an annual lease fee, and the requirement to spend a minimum of $250 per year in development work. In most cases, this requirement was easily met through their own labour, or by "hiring" another person to work on the lease.[5]

Prior to 1930, several options existed for the individual who wished to placer mine. The only legal hurdle was a Free Miner's Certificate, which could be purchased by anyone (male or female) over the age of eighteen. The cost was a mere five dollars, and the permit ran from date of issue until the 31 May next after its purchase date. The certificates could be obtained at a prorated fee for any portion of a year, ending on 31 May.

Once the permit was secured, the needs of the miner were minimal and inexpensive. He or she needed elementary mining tools like a shovel and gold pan, a grubstake of necessary provisions, and some advice on where to pan. A small investment meant a relatively small endeavour, but a larger capital investment involving more sophisticated machinery would not provide a guarantee of success in the enterprise.

More capital-intensive enterprises made use of a variety of hydraulic lifts (to move gravel) and monitors (essentially water guns operating under a head of pressure and used to literally wash down mountainsides of their gold-bearing gravels).[6] These larger operations also made use of steam shovels, dredges, drag-line scrapers, and other heavy earthmoving machinery that increased the amount of ore that could be processed in a day.[7]

Prospectors had four main sources of assistance prior to the onset of the Depression. He or she could seek help from the Department of Mines and its various officials -- mining engineers, district supervising engineers, assayers, and the resident Gold Commissioner. Each of these officers was responsible for giving geological and practical advice to miners in the field, and for advising neophyte miners in their new explorations. The information provided was based on local knowledge, the level of expertise of the official, and on information available through the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC).[8]

If lucky enough to find gold, the prospector could have it assayed by the Provincial Assayer in Victoria. It was the policy of that Department to offer this service so as to encourage the discovery of new or rare minerals or ores, and also to encourage prospectors to enter new mining districts that had not previously been exploited. The only provision the Assay Office attached to these free assays was that the finder disclose the location of the mineral deposit.[9]

The Chamber of Mines in Vancouver began to offer an elementary prospecting course in 1918, a practice that has continued down to the present day. This course introduced the would-be miner to basic geology and the identification of native rocks and minerals. It also introduced the use of the gold pan and rocker box, using elementary equipment set up for that purpose beside the rain barrel behind the Chamber of Mines office.[10]

The prospector could find out about placer mining by enrolling in a private mining course, such as that run during the 1920s by Ben R. Barlow in Vancouver. These courses were available for a fee, and made use of the career experience of the men who offered them as another way to exploit the mining game.[11]

Finally, the individual interested in placer mining could go straight to the man on the ground -- the established miner. In the 1920s, there were still a few of the original "argonauts" of the Cariboo and Klondike rushes around. In the

early 1930s, there were a number of newspaper articles about the "old timers" and their trials and tribulations on the old claims. The articles treated the men as heroes of old, and the mentors of a new era of gold miners.[12]

In 1930, independent placer mining suddenly became less accessable for people who found cash hard to come by. Placer fees remained the same, but the ability of people to pay had diminished. One way of viewing these difficulties is to look at the minutes of the Sub-Committee of the Executive Committee on Unemployment, formed under the Tolmie administration in 1931. This committee received a range of correspondence from the public in regard to the problems of unemployment and a cash poor society.

The committee was formed coincident with the inauguration of unemployed persons registration in August, 1931. The members were W.A.MacKenzie, Minister of Labour; R.W. Bruhn, who held the Public Works portfolio; S.L. Howe, the Provincial Secretary; and J.W. "One Percent" Jones the Minister of Finance.[13] The actual work of the Committee was carried out by a Sub Committee comprised of the Deputy Ministers, a group that received much of its direction from the Deputy Provincial Secretary, Paschal Walker.[14]

The minutes of the Sub-Committee reveal much about the financial state of affairs under the waning Tolmie government. Actual meetings of the Sub-Committee did not take place until the spring of 1932; and they continued until the end of July,

1933. The minutes contain submissions from individuals for possible relief schemes, public grievances in regard to the lack of assistance for the unemployed and summaries of employment centre reports.

More importantly, the minutes of the Sub-Committee reveal the repeated denial of responsibility by the provincial government for municipal fiscal difficulties. The most common response of this overburdened committee was that the solution to unemployment that the individual was petitioning for had to be refused on the grounds that "the policy did not admit of Direct Relief of this description." The Committee could accept and advise on grass roots demands, but the role was an empty one without sufficient funding to see the successful implementation of proposed unemployment relief schemes. And while it is not within the purview of this work to elaborate on these proposals, it should be noted that a great number of practical schemes were forthcoming from the public. These ranged widely in scope from the military cut of the "Youth Retraining Corps" proposed by C.L. Burton, president of Robert Simpson Co., (Toronto) store, to individuals such as George Ness of Lumberton who offered his own property and skills as a training site for placer miners.[15]

The solutions offered in these submissions demonstrate a pattern of community effort, and emphasized the desire of B.C. communities to take things into their own hands. While none of the submissions are from organized co-operatives, the co-

operative spirit of community members in constructing their own solutions to the Depression crisis is strong and clear.

The minutes of the Sub-Committee are useful to the discussion of the placer miner during the Depression because it is here that the first documented pleas for grubstaking assistance appear. Letters from Government Agents about green miners demonstrate a level of concern for their welfare. These letters also express the Agents' frustration at the possibility of having to deal with more than their share of the unemployed on the municipal doorstep during the winter months of the year, should their district receive an influx of placer miners.

In May 1932, the Government Agent at Quesnel wrote an urgent letter to the Committee, in which he stressed his concern that the large numbers of people who were invading the area in the hope of finding gold were unprepared for such an enterprise. Most of them were unaware that the Fraser River would soon be in flood after the spring thaw, and that no mining would be possible until the river had receded in late summer. His most pressing concern was that he would be asked to provide direct relief for these men and their dependents. This matter was dealt with by a notice in the press from the Minister of Mines, accentuating the need for would-be miners to adequately prepare themselves with both information and supplies before setting out.[16]

Many of the requests received by the Sub-Committee for

consideration were for grubstaking. The requests were usually for one month's relief issued in advance.[17] In May 1932, such a request from the Government Agent at Prince George was granted, for "several unemployed young men." The condition attached to granting the request was that the men be determined as "bona fide miners" by the Government Agent.[18] There were no written guidelines for such a determination: the onus of proof fell to the Government Agent, his knowledge of the mining game, and his recommendation that the miners could manage in the bush without direct assistance. The miners themselves had a different view of the judiciary power of the Government Agent, stating that more often it was "who you knew," than what you knew about the mining game.[19]

This was, in fact, the last decade in which the Government Agents would wield such regional authority. These public servants had, since the inception of the office in 1858, been influential members of their local communities, a prominence that they carried with them when they assumed the office of Government Agent. Most Government Agents also carried out a number of statutory appointments as well, such as Gold Commissioner, Mining Recorder, Water Recorder, Stipendiary Magistrate, Commissioner of Lands, and Clerk of the Peace. For the placer miner during the Depression, then, this was a man to be on good terms with, since the Agent would be the person responsible for issuing the miner's permits, giving him advice on prospects, registering his claim,

inspecting his lease, purchasing his gold, and perhaps censuring his public conduct after a night on the town. The Government Agent was, as Dennis Anholt has discussed in his administrative history, truly a "Man of Many Hats."[20]

In contrast to this successful petition for a grubstake from unemployed men in Prince George, there were others that were unsuccessful in their pleas. Later in May 1932, a request from two Victoria unemployed single men was refused. Generally those requests coming from men living in urban ennvironments were refused, perhaps because of the difficulty of proving oneself to be a bona fide miner, a condition seemingly tied to those with a rural background.

By July 1932, the Sub-Committee appears to have relented to some extent on their approach to grubstaking unemployed men. Applications were received from two Government Agents, asking for a definitive ruling about grubstaking men who were already in the field prospecting. The Committee agreed to advise the Agents that this, again, was contrary to policy, but that a certain amount of discretion could be used to provide legitimate cases with relief in the form of groceries and essentials. If we consider that a man working poor gravel had a chance to make at least .50 a day (at least $12.00 a month), and that the full amount of relief available to single men was $9.60 a month, then the destitution of these applicants must have been severe indeed -- or their luck exceptionally adverse.[21]

Word about the possibilities of gold panning as a means of making at least a subsistence living spread to the unemployment relief camps. In March 1933, one Col. Dennis, the supervisor of these camps which would soon be under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Defense, raised the question of policy in regard to men who wished to leave the camps to go placer mining. It was his opinion that the "sentiments and ambitions" of these men should receive as much support as possible. The Committee agreed, and pointed out that it was well within the authority of the Unemployment Relief Commission to grant these requests.

The power of authority and the finances to use it, however, were two different matters. This was the long hot summer immediately preceding the election call of September 1933: the provincial coffers were empty, and the power of the state was severely compromised by a lack of faith in the Tolmie government to achieve anything -- let alone incentives toward useful, remunerative work.

What, then, had been accomplished by July 1933 in the way of assistance to the placer miners? First, and perhaps most important, the Provisional Free Miner's (Placer) Act (1931) allowed men or women over the age of 18 to obtain a Provisional Free Miner's Certificate at no cost.[22] The bearer could find, locate, and work a placer claim for the first year without paying the fees noted above in Table 3. The government did not have the means to provide a cash amount

for relief, but chose this system of free permits as an alternative that would accomplish three important things. The unemployed person would be given the opportunity to work for himself under a government granted sanction of mining expertise -- even where no such expertise existed. The government would eventually see an important source of Mines Department revenue rejuvenated, by keeping established miners in the game and attracting new ones.[23] The miners may not have been able to pay for their permits during the bad years -- but by encouraging the enterprise, subsequent years would see an increase in permit and filing fees collected by the provincial government. And finally, the communities such as Likely, Quesnel, and Bridge River that saw a great influx of miners over the years of the Depression would benefit from the increase in business and development of a more active service sector in the hinterland areas of the province. All this, by merely issuing free permits to hopeful gold miners.

In the first full season of mining after passage of the Act, 10,000 such permits were issued. Almost thirty percent of these permits were issued to men in the Vancouver and Victoria districts, showing that one of the goals of the provincial government had been served - get the unemployed men out of the city and into the hills, away from the public eye.[24]

In response to the requests from the public for grubstakes, the ongoing indignation over the problems of the unemployed, and the concerns of Government Agents who were

forced to cope with inexperienced miners, the government formulated a unique plan for mining training in 1933.

Placer Mining Training was a program of unemployment relief that served a limited number of young men who lacked practical skills in the wage labour force because they finished their formal education during the Depression. The initial intent was to give the men a healthy outdoor experience, teach them basic manual skills and the art of placer mining by hand, and encourage them to go into the hills on their own after they had been properly trained and grubstaked. Over the years that the school operated (1935-1939), the administrative umbrella changed to include financial assistance from the federal government, under the Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Program (DPYTP). The intent of the state to provide practical skills training shifted to a focus on a more professional training scheme that would instead provide trained men to replace those in capital mining ventures lost through attrition each year. When the war broke out in 1939, state intent shifted yet again, to training men to identify "war minerals" and also to serve as an ad hoc West Coast defense force. In 1935, the intent was to teach unemployed men to handle a gold pan and survive in the bush on their own; by 1939, the intent was industry oriented toward providing trained mines labour at a middle-management level of expertise.

The provincial election of 1933 occured after the mining

season was effectively over for placer miners. The legislative groundwork for assistance to the placer miners was laid by the Conservative Tolmie government, but it would take T.D. Pattullo and a brash approach to finance to see the training school begin operations.

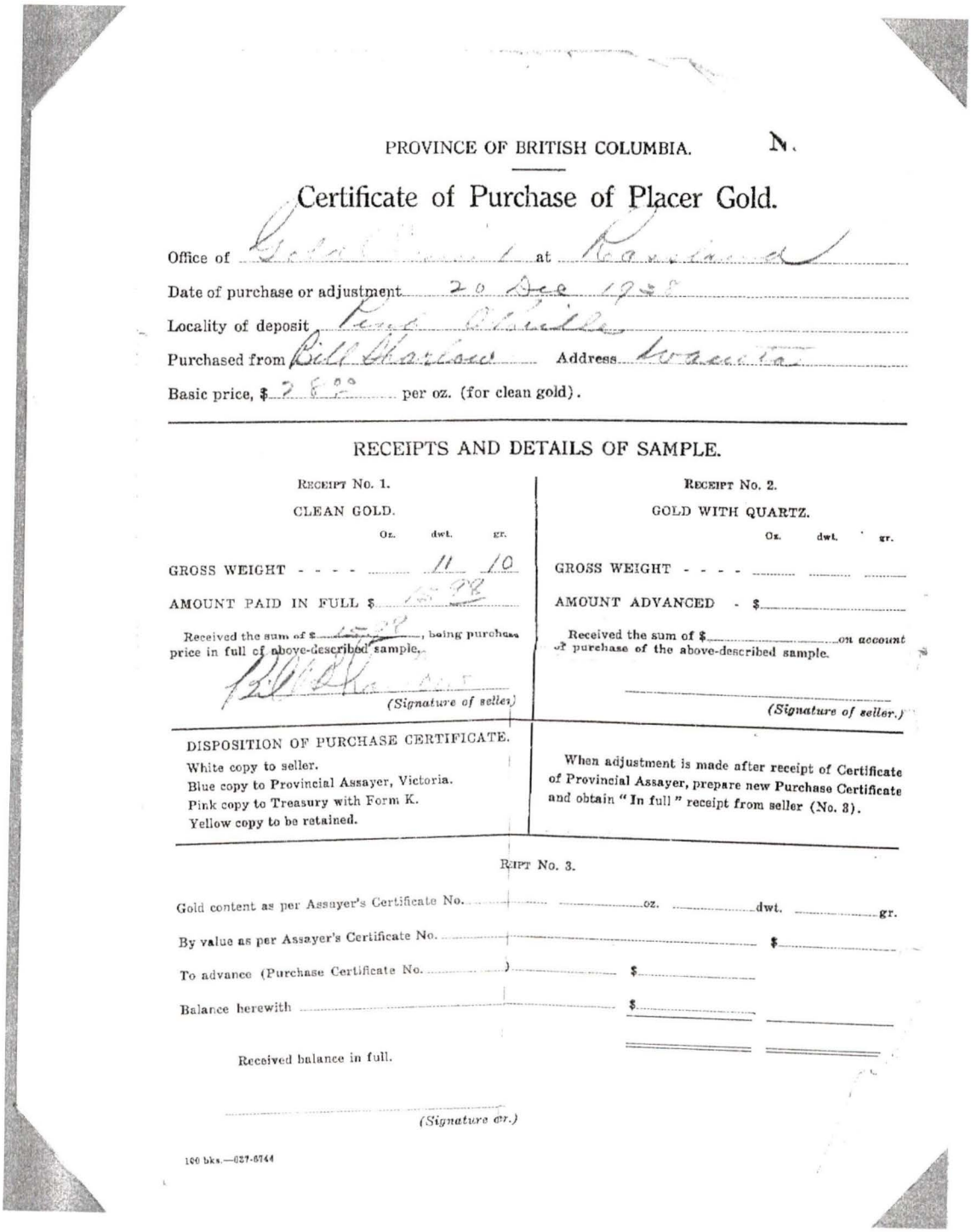
The event that had the most positive resonance with gold miners, whether corporate, partnership, or individual occurred during the winter of 1933. On 31 December 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt abandoned the gold standard, and pegged the price of gold at $35.00 an ounce, increasing the value from $28.00. Suddenly, the gold mining activities that had known such a revival because of the onset of the Depression received an added incentive. It became viable to work prospects of lower grade ores, instead of exploiting only high grade ore bodies. The profit margin received a hefty boost, and encouraged an already active enterprise to work more intensively.

Still, the increase in price could only help the individual miner with a small operation if he or she had the opportunity to sell their gold at frequent intervals. The ability to purchase goods and services on a regular basis was limited by the necessity of saving up the gold findings until the end of the season. In recognition of this, and as a means of getting the gold miner's earnings more quickly into the marketplace, the provincial government devised a gold purchasing plan. Late in 1935, the Department of Finance and the Department of Mines began to purchase small lots (two

ounces or under) of gold from individual placer miners. The purchasing price was $28 per ounce on the spot for clean gold, and at the same price on a deferred basis for dirty gold and amalgam (See Figure 7). The benefit to the miner was a more frequent turnover of output, as well as a better price - the handling charge of one percent ordinarily levied by the Royal Canadian Mint was not applied to these purchases. In 1936, the cost to the province of this program was about $500.00, and the government felt that the minimal expense was well worth the additional return and incentive to the individual miner. In the general stores all over the province, it meant that the cash register rang out a little more often, since the miner now had greater purchasing power.[25]

Another incentive to the individual placer miner was the series of lectures to prospectors. These lectures were assembled by the Provincial Mineralogist, in conjunction with the Department of Education. The lectures were also used by the Department of Education in correspondence courses. Inaugurated in the winter of 1934-35, the lectures were given by the Resident Mining Engineers throughout the province. The lectures were popular with men, women, and secondary school students alike. In 1934-35, the average total attendance was 1,576; in 1936-37, the average was 800; and in 1938-39, the number declined to a total estimated average attendance of 264.

Figure 7: Gold Purchase Slips.



PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. N.

Certificate of Purchase of Placer Gold.

Office of Gold Commissioner at Revelstoke

Date of purchase or adjustment 20 Dec 1928

Locality of deposit Lardeau District

Purchased from Bill Garland Address Lardeau

Basic price, $ 18.00 per oz. (for clean gold).

RECEIPTS AND DETAILS OF SAMPLE.

RECEIPT No. 1.

CLEAN GOLD.

	Oz.	dwt.	gr.
GROSS WEIGHT		11	10

AMOUNT PAID IN FULL $ 15.98

Received the sum of $ 15.98, being purchase price in full of above-described sample.

Bill Garland

(Signature of seller)

RECEIPT No. 2.

GOLD WITH QUARTZ.

	Oz.	dwt.	gr.
GROSS WEIGHT			

AMOUNT ADVANCED - $

Received the sum of $ on account of purchase of the above-described sample.

(Signature of seller.)

DISPOSITION OF PURCHASE CERTIFICATE.

White copy to seller.
Blue copy to Provincial Assayer, Victoria.
Pink copy to Treasury with Form K.
Yellow copy to be retained.

When adjustment is made after receipt of Certificate of Provincial Assayer, prepare new Purchase Certificate and obtain "In full" receipt from seller (No. 3).

RECPT No. 3.

Gold content as per Assayer's Certificate No. ..... oz. ..... dwt. ..... gr.

By value as per Assayer's Certificate No. ..... $

To advance (Purchase Certificate No. .....) $

Balance herewith $

Received balance in full.

(Signature or.)

100 bks.—027-6744

Table 4. Lectures to Prospectors - Locations in 1934-35.

Althamer-Invermere	Hazelton	Quesnel
Burnaby	Prince George	Revelstoke
Castlegar	Smithers	Rossland
Nelson	Lumberton	Victoria
Cranbrook	Moyie	Vernon
Fort Steele	North Vancouver	Winfield
Skookumchuk	Penticton	Williams Lake
Wardner	Prince Rupert	Kelowna
Fernie	Princeton	Ashcroft
Michel-Natal	Premier	Vancouver

Table 5. Lectures to Prospectors - Locations in 1938-39.

Abbotsford	Kitchener	Nanaimo
Vancouver	Victoria	Yahk

The community lectures were based on a brochure entitled "Elementary Geology Applied to Prospecting," and as with the Department's placer mining Reports, this brochure was a popular reference. In 1938, 822 copies were distributed at a cost of .35 each. In addition, identification sets of B.C. rocks and minerals were made available at .50 each. The demand for the latter was great; although requests came in from across Canada and into the U.S., the Department was only able to supply these sets to British Columbia miners.[26]

By the spring of 1935, placer miners in British Columbia had several incentives available to them. They could attend community lectures to introduce them to the game, or learn about elementary geology through night school and correspondence courses. They could obtain a Free Miner's Certificate without cost if they were unable to pay the usual fee, and once they filed on a claim and found mineral, they could have it assessed free of charge by the Provincial

Assayer's office. If they were successful in finding gold, there was a ready market and easy conveyancing of the values into cash. Through the offices of the Department of Mines, Chamber of Mines, Gold Commissioner or Mining Engineer, the placer miner could obtain advice on methods and promising prospecting areas. If they were unemployed, and could prove that they were bona fide miners, a grubstake was available from the provincial government in lieu of direct relief. And finally, the independent placer miner, with minimal experience, had the support of the single resource communities in their endeavour. In an era known for the anger and rejection vented toward the unemployed man, this support was a positive step in toward the recovery of both the hopeless unemployed and the economic well being of small communities.

It was not until the summer of 1935, however, under the Liberal administration of T.D. Pattullo, that Placer Mining Training School began its first sessions. This school represented the final leg of the provincial government's support for the unemployed who wished to go into placer mining on their own behalf. The measures that came into effect prior to the summer of 1935 all contributed to the support and ultimate success of the school. It will be seen, however, that the original intent of the school - to train unemployed men as placer miners - swerved ever so gently over the five years of its existence, to a program of industrial training for the chosen few.

NOTES

1.Earl S. Baity, Wilderness Welfare: An Epic of Frontier Life (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1966), p.58. Baity's book details the wilderness experience of his family's life in the Cariboo during the Depression. Theirs was a life that included gold mining, trapping, and outright flight from urban life for a self-sufficent one in "the deep, still woods." (Prologue). Perhaps the next such escape was the "back to the land" movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s in the Cariboo -- but with reasons of political and environmental ideology, not stark survival.

2.British Columbia -- Department of Mines, Annual Report (1934), A40.

3.Ibid., (1906, 1928, 1930, 1934). The mining districts, formed in 1906, and the Gold Commissioners were as follows:

Mining Districts and Divisions, 1934:
Northwestern District (No. 1): Atlin, Stikine, Liard, Nass River, Portland Canal, Skeena, Queen Charlotte, Bella Coola.
Northeastern District (No. 2): Cariboo, Quesnel, Omineca, Peace River.
Central District (No. 3): Nicola, Vernon, Kamloops.
Southern District (No. 4): Grand Forks, Greenwood, Osoyoos, Similkameen.
Eastern District (No. 5): Fort Steele, Windmere, Golden, Ainsworth, Slocan, Slocan City, Nelson, Arrow Lake, Trail CReek, Revelstoke, Lardeau.
Western District (No. 6): Nanaimo, Alberni, Clayquot, Quatsino, Victoria, Lillooet, Clinton*, Ashcroft*, Yale*, New Westminster, Vancouver.
*included in District No. 3 previous to 1934.

Gold Commissioners - Regional Offices, 1934:

Atlin	Golden
Telegraph Creek	Cranbrook
Prince Rupert	Kaslo
Smithers	Nelson
Barkerville	Revelstoke
Williams Lake	Rossland
Clinton	Nanaimo
Kamloops	Alberni
Princeton	Victoria
Vernon	New Westminster
Greenwood	Vancouver
Grand Forks	Lillooet
Penticton	

*Note: Gold Commissioners also served other sub-offices within

their mining district: for instance, the G.C. at Prince Rupert was responsible for the Skeena, Nass River, Portland Canal, and Bella Coola mining divisions within Northwestern District (No. 1).

4.Sanford Woodside to Lesley Cooper, 20 October 1994. Woodside was with the Chamber of Mines for forty-eight years.

5.British Columbia--Department of Mines Annual Report (1928), and Lesley Cooper, interviewer, "Bill Sharlow" and "Ron Riley."

6.The Bullion Pit, in the Cariboo, was one such open pit hudraulic operation. Initially exploited by a syndicate under the direction of J.B. Hobson, the mine operated off and on under various ownership from 1892 to 1942. The mine involved digging a 21-mile long canal to draw water to the monitors that washed down the gravel, an activity that eventually saw the creation of a man-made canyon, two miles long and 200-300 feet deep. The first six years saw an output of $1,250,000. Its impact on local resources was extreme. In 1938, the mine used more water per day in its operations than the entire city of Vancouver. The mine was a major employer of labour from 1892-1906, and again during the Depression years under Raymond Sharpe. Abandoned in 1942, the scar on the land has not lessened with the years of inactivity. Bruce Ramsey, Ghost Towns of British Columbia (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1963), p. 40-43; and Department of Mines, Annual Report (1928, 1934, 1936).

7.Gold mining communities have made an effort to preserve the material history of gold mining, at various levels of endeavour. Cedar Point Park, in Likely, has a small display of carefully preserved steamshovels and monitors from the turn-of-the century era. The Williams Lake and District Museum, the Barkerville interpretive site, and the town of Quesnel, and the Sooke Museum all have material history displays that recall the gold mining machinery of the past century, as do others throughout the province. At times, the community ownership of such artifacts is questioned - for example, some buildings and machinery belonging in the Quesnel Forks area was appropriated by Barkerville in the 1970s, and subsequently left to deteriorate. More care needs to be taken in ascertaining the provenance of such artifacts.

8.Ibid.

9.Ibid.

10.Sanford Woodside; and Eddie James to Lesley Cooper, November 1994.

11."Seeking New Gold in the Old Fraser," Vancouver Sun, 16 July 1938:4.

12.There are too many newspaper articles to list here, but one good example of the style and historicity is Vancouver Sun, 16 July 1938, "Seeking New Gold in the Old Fraser." The genre is preserved in the "gold rush and ghost town" writing that was prevalent during the 1960s and early 1970s.

13.British Columbia--Department of Labour Annual Report (1931); and Ormsby, British Columbia, p. 444. Minister of Finance Jones had brought in a one percent supertax on earnings over $25 per week of married men and $15 per week of single men -- earning him the soubriquet of "One-Percent Jones."

14.The Minutes of the Sub-Committee are held in the British Columbia Legislative Library. It is clear from the pages that Paschal Walker, Deputy Provincial Secretary, was the most consistently present and vocal in this committee's work. Notes pencilled in by him after the fact indicate that he did not always agree that the other members were in fact as diligent as he in attending to the responsibilities of this entity in dealing with the requests of the unemployed.

15.Ibid; and C.L. Burton to T.D. Pattullo, 30 May 1935, GR 1222 Box 136 File 4 Premier's Papers -- Unemployment (BCARS).

16.Minutes...SubCommittee: Department of Mines, Annual Report (1933): and Vancouver Province, 31 July, 1932, "Army of Placer Miners Make Wages Washing Gold." Of course, there was a lapse of several months between the Government Agent's letter and the response of W.A. MacKenzie -- by which time there were some 300 or more men on the Fraser River in the vicinity of Quesnel.

17.Canada Welfare Council--Relief Schedules and Procedures--Province of British Columbia (Autumn 1936: Revised Spring 1938). British Columbia Legislative Library.

18.Minutes...Sub-Committee.

19.Lesley Cooper, interviewer, "Bill Sharlow," and correspondence, Eddie James to Lesley Cooper, December 1994.

20.Dennis Munroe Anholt, "Friends of the Government: An Administrative History of the British Columbia Government Agents," (University of Victoria: PhD dissertation, 1991), Introduction, and pp. 190 and 242.

21.The example of 50 cents a day comes from Sidney Hutcheson, Depression Stories, (Vancouver: New Star, 1973), in which Hutcheson describes a working of "poor gravel" yielding 50-60 cents in gold values for a ten-hour day worked. Another example are the purchase slips of W. Sharlow, working on the Pend d'Oreille River, where the average take for a month's time spent was between $15 and $20.

22.The applicant also had to have been a B.C. resident for at least six months.

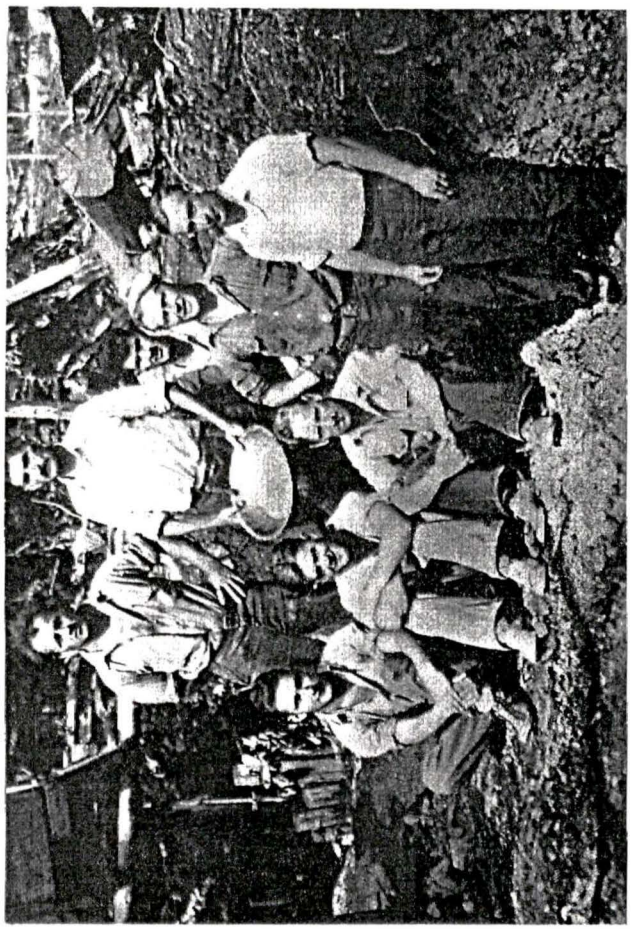
23.In 1934, for instance, these fees accounted for over 30% of Mines Department revenue: $90,708.50 of a total $299,235.04. British Columbia -- Department of Mines Annual Report (1934).

24.Department of Mines, Annual Report, (1932, 1934, 1936). The number of Vancouver/Victoria permits in 1934 was 4,718 out of a total 14,554; in 1936, 2,103 out of a total 9,113; and in 1938, 2,623 out of 10,191. The next highest number of permits were issued at Lillooet, not surprising in light of the intense gold mining activity at Bridge River.

25.Department of Mines, Annual Report (1936), and L. Cooper, interviewer, "Bill Sharlow."

26.Department of Mines, Annual Report (1934, 1936, 1938). One of the prospector's sets is in the possession of the author's daughter, who inherited it from a Depression-era miner, Harry A. Thielman.

Figure 8: Placer Mining Training Field Party, Quesnel Forks, 1939.



CHAPTER THREE: GRAND DESIGNS-PLACER MINING TRAINING SCHOOL

> The Mines Department has been trying to help as much as it can. One of its important concerns is to encourage men to go out into the hills and try to find reasonable prospects and then give them some guidance until they can get on their own feet.
>
> Hon. George S. Pearson, address to Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, December 1935.[1]

By the spring of 1935, the Pattullo government had in hand several incentive programs that assisted the general public in placer mining. Some of these were of help to the unemployed or those struggling to stretch their earnings from seasonal employment: for example, changes to the Placer Act removed the fee structure of locating and filing claims for neophyte gold seekers. Another incentive was the community lecture series on mining techniques and basic geology that began in 1934.[2] These drew large groups of both men and women. The lecture series continued throughout the decade because of the popular appeal of independent gold seeking, regular public attendance and the devotion of district mining engineers.[3] The grubstaking of prospectors according to financial need as assessed by Government Agents was not as common, and was certainly dependent upon the sympathies of the government official concerned. [4] All of these incentives were of short duration; they did not represent long term support for the placer miner in the field.

Certainly, none of the incentives represented a serious

effort at the retraining or placement of unemployed young men in British Columbia. The onus was on the individual to take up the tools and create his own reality of labour and income. The problem for the unemployed individual without financial support who wished to get to a prospect still existed. This problem was especially severe for young men without previous mining experience.

By 1933, the threads of popular protest, grass roots demand, and mining training curriculum began to weave tentatively together with the help of a few dedicated individuals in the Department of Mines and the Unemployment Branch of the Department of Labour. The fiscal and psychological stresses associated with having a large pool of transient males within urban communities were unacceptable and unmanageable. Not all unemployed single men were assisted (or perhaps more aptly, restrained by) the relief camps. As the Depression wore on, Premier T.D. Pattullo came to believe that able-bodied single men should take care of themselves during the summer months -- that they should "get out and rustle."[5]

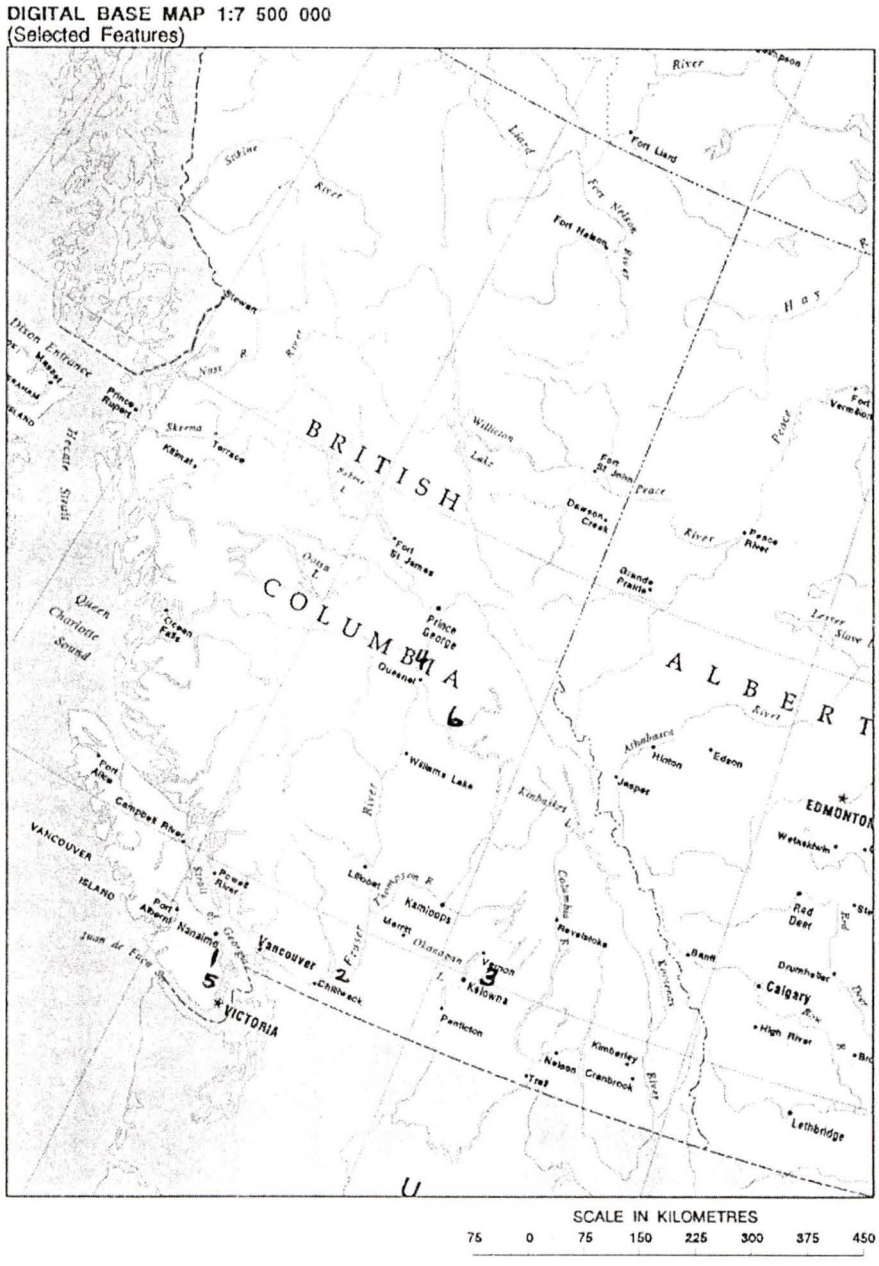
The maximum amount that a single unemployed male would receive as direct relief payment during the 1930s was $9.60 per month, and many British Columbians felt that it would be better to use that amount to get unemployed young men started in placer mining than to have them remain idle in the city.[6] The idea that gold could be used to

effectively lure these men into less populated areas and engage them in a kind of subsistence activity was preferable to the spawning of radicalism by association in the cities.

In 1933 an amendment to the Placer Act established the right of the provincial government to create and administrate placer mining training camps, located on a reserve allocated to that purpose [See Map 3].[7] These camps would be used to provide training opportunities for selected groups of young unemployed men between the ages of 18 and 25. It would be an experience that would benefit them physically as well as preparing them for work in the basic industries of the province.[8] Although passed in 1933, the legislation was not acted upon until the spring of 1935, at which time an Order-in-Council formally brought the program into existence.[9] All the while, letters from would-be placer miners begging for assistance to get out in the field continued to be received by various government officials such as the Chief Engineer of the Department of Mines and Government Agents. For the most part, these requests continued to be denied as they had been during the demoralized Tolmie administration. The reason cited in most cases was lack of policy.[10]

The idea of training prospectors was not entirely new. A school in Vancouver, in operation during the 1920s, had proven that this kind of training of men before they started out for the field made good sense.[11] The instructor, Ben

Map 3. Placer Mining Training Sites, 1935-1939.



1. Nanaimo River: 1935-1936
2. Emory Creek: 1935-1939
3. Cherry Creek: 1935
4. Fraser River: 1935
5. Lake Cowichan: 1938-1939
6. Quesnel Forks: 1939-1939

Barlow, was well known in the province for his ability to train young men in the basic art of placer mining. The problem with training through the private sector was the tuition -- privately educated mining students were limited to those who could pay. With the onset of the Depression the inability of many of those men interested to pay eliminated this training option and Barlow's school closed. In 1935 he was hired by the provincial government as the first instructor of Placer Mining Training.[12]

Other prospecting instruction, such as the prospector's course held annually since 1918 by the Chamber of Mines and the Department of Mines lecture courses held around the province for community members were well attended. These courses, however, were short. They were basic demonstrations, not in-depth occupational training in the field. At most, they taught a person how to handle a gold pan, a demonstration usually carried out using a rain barrel in the back lot of the Chamber of Mines office. Basic literature on placer methods was distributed and office staff would direct the individual to a district deemed by the district Mining Engineer to be a likely prospect.[13]

By 1933, then, there were several unresolved issues at hand. The first was the continuing number of requests from all over the province for grubstaking assistance, requests that came from people of all ages and of varying levels of mining expertise. The second was the widely-discussed

problem of employment for young men who had completed school during the early days of the Depression, but had never been able to find work. There was also a growing need to find young men to replace older miners, a need given urgency by the gold boom started when Roosevelt pegged the value at $35 per ounce. Suddenly, up to four hundred men per year were required to fill positions vacated by attrition in established mines.

The school, by the end of 1938, received wide press coverage across Canada: and by 1939-40, various American mining organizations and government programs were expressing their interest in the curriculum of the B.C. program and its relative success.[14] Why was there such an interest in this provincial program of unemployment relief?[15]

The unemployment relief work programs of the Depression usually took the form of public works projects such as road building. Hundreds of relief camp men had laboured as the Royal Twenty Centers through a variety of boondoggles and road building projects.[16] To create work for an army of unemployed, modern roadbuilding machinery and labour-saving devices were often left idle in a gross display of production inefficiency.[17]

The Placer Mining Training School (PMT) was a relief program with a difference. During the years 1935-1939, each summer season saw a select group of B.C.'s unemployed young men trained in the art of placer mining for gold. By

the autumn of 1939, almost twelve hundred men had gone through the program. In an era increasingly reliant on mechanization of labour, PMT taught traditional persistent skills: how to handle a shovel, use a crosscut saw, carry out construction of mining structures and log buildings, handle a gold pan and sluicebox, and to cook competently for oneself or a crew of labourers. Unlike the unemployed who carried out relief work on roads, or municipal projects like pulling dandelions, the use of a traditional and essentially non-mechanized means of production was more cost efficient while at the same time allowing more individuals into the game.[18] And rather than assisting a return to the waged labour force, the men enrolled in the Placer Mining Training School were encouraged by the state to believe that an independent, back to the hills lifestyle was good -- not only for their pocketbook, but also for their soul.[19]

The first sessions of Placer Mining Training were held in 1935. The primary objective of the course, according to the Unemployment Branch, was to offer a selected group of young men a valuable experience that would benefit them physically as well as preparing them for work in the basic industries of the province. The belief publicized by the government was that training would further the opportunities of these young men in obtaining employment, and encourage them to become resourceful,useful citizens.[20]

The program initially operated under the joint

supervision of the provincial Department of Mines and the Unemployment Branch of the Department of Labour, with qualified mining instructors in charge of each site. The funding for the program was shaky in 1935, and in 1936, a flurry of telegrams between an irritated T.D. Pattullo and the federal Ministry of Labour finally secured that year's funding. In 1937, with an already established training program and a number of applicants awaiting an answer, Pattullo cut to the chase without preamble, sending Norman Rogers a wire that ended with a short "As no appropriation was made by Legislature last session I presume Dominion will lend us our share of the cost."[21] Pattullo held fast to his belief that the federal government should pick up the tab for unemployment measures. Rogers had, a few days previous, sent Pattullo the outline for a new retraining initiative, the Dominion Provincial Youth Training Program. In 1937, then, under the provisions of the Unemployment and Agricultural Assistance Act that secured a vote of $1,000,000 for employment and training projects for unemployed youth across Canada, the program became part of DPYTP. The share of funding accorded Placer Mining Training and the forestry training program was a total of $40,000.00 for the year. After an initially civil response to Pattullo's imperative request, Rogers shot back a wire to the B.C. premier that essentially told him to get in line and wait for his loan application to be processed -- just

like everyone else.[22] The funding was forthcoming just in time for the start of the program.

In the first year there were four camp locations, each designed to serve up to 100 students and their instructors. The camps were located on government reserves created for the purpose, near Cassidy on the Nanaimo River; below Yale on the Fraser River at Emory Creek; on Cherry Creek thirty-five miles from Vernon; and ten miles northeast of Quesnel on the Fraser River. Each site was chosen for access and the reasonable chance of gold recovery for training purposes. In the words of the administrators, these reserves were created to "Avoid interference from the outside."[23]

The concern was not entirely with interference from neighbouring communities and municipal governments. The Placer Mining Training School was intended for men only, and in this, the school merely echoed the priorities of the day. The main priority of the Depression years was, of course, to get unemployed men back into the workforce so that they could resume their role as healthy and productive Canadian consumers.[24]

The Provincial Mineralogist, John F. Walker,and Chief Mining Engineer, P.B. Freeland, provided the course materials and examinations. The application process was overseen by the administrator of the Unemployment Relief Branch of the Department of Labour, E.W. Griffiths. Camp

supervisors were hired from the general public by Griffiths in the first year of operation, with Freeland overseeing the process in subsequent years. By 1938, the administrators were receiving far more applications from potential instructors than they needed.[25]

The role of the camp supervisor, however, encompassed more than instruction. He was also responsible for the general conduct and moral support of the students. Ben R. Barlow, with over thirty years as a miner, trapper, and mining instructor, was the most experienced. Barlow spoke genially about his role as supervisor of the Emory Creek camp in an interview with Maclean's in 1938:

> I explain first what it's all about,and what they can get out of the project if they apply themselves and play the game; I show them what other boys have already accomplished from previous classes; and I insist on their complete co-operation.[26]

Only Barlow was an experienced mining instructor; the program started up late in the 1935 season, and the remaining instructors were hired by Griffiths of the Unemployment Branch without complete background checks. He appears to have relied on local information and verbal references. The Nanaimo camp ran only one session in 1935, because instructor/cook James Rennie was unable to control effectively the behaviour problems among his students.[27]

Placer Mining Training was restricted to young unmarried men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years.[28] The summary of the 1935 program shows that the

supervisors felt that men under the age of twenty were simply not mature enough to warrant the government's investment in them, and the registrations for the following years show that most students were between twenty-two to twenty-four years of age. In his correspondence with potential PMT applicants, P.B. Freeland clearly indicated that applicants must be over twenty years of age.[29]

Under the guidelines of the DPYTP, the age limit could be eighteen to thirty. The institutional belief of the day, however, was that men over 25 were no longer young enough to be apprenticed in new ideas. These men could only be trained in rudimentary skills that would improve their status from "sweeping up the floors or shining up the handle of the big front door," to positions as operators and assemblers.[30] PMT was further restricted to young, physically fit high school graduates who had lived in British Columbia for five years. Preference was given to suitable young men who were in needy circumstances.[31] Testimony from some of the students shows that on occasion the students were under age: John Fee stated that he was sixteen when he participated, and that this was the only time that his father ever allowed him to lie about anything. Another underage student was Vic Sorenson, also sixteen when he attended PMT during his summer break from high school.[32]

In the 1937 training year, only 84 of 484 applications came from what John Gawthrop of the Unemployment Training

Branch termed the "country places." In Gawthrop's opinion, these lads were the best workers, and more of their kind should have been encouraged to join.[33] In 1939, the administrator of the Unemployment Branch did finally issue an order to Government Agents and employment officers in country places to broaden the circulation of advertising about the course.[34]

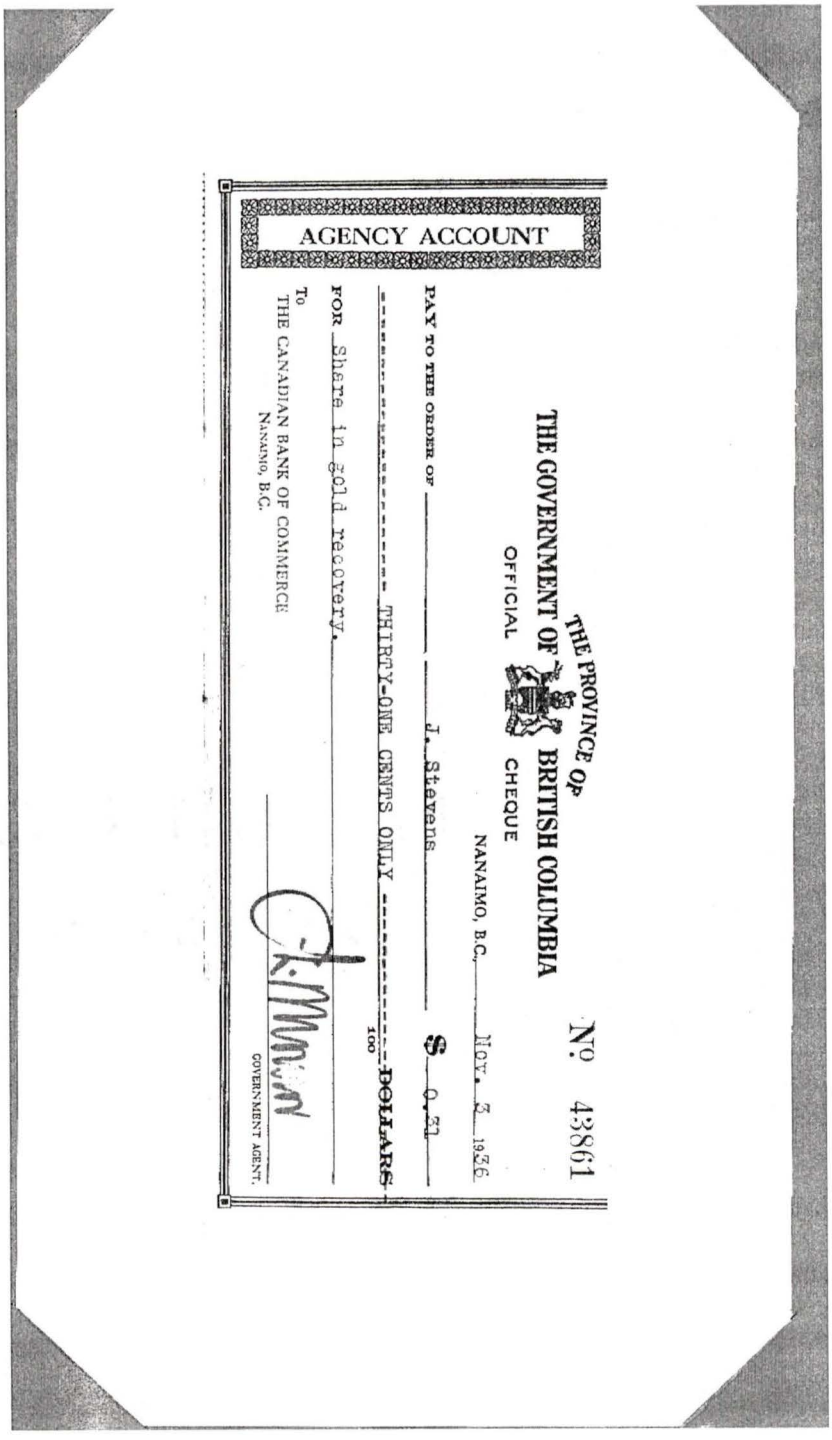
Speculation as to why the country lads did not participate more fully should consider that perhaps it was because they did not feel the program represented a departure from the lifestyle and labouring skills that they already possessed. They may have recognized from the outset the elitist nature of the program -- that it was structured more toward the men with an urban upbringing. Perhaps they were resentful of the state's attempt to co-opt what they felt should be regional opportunities. Letters from the public to the B.C. government in 1932 and 1933 show that those from the country districts were more interested in grubstaking assistance and state support through legislation for independent efforts at subsistence, than they were in regulated education as a form of unemployment relief.[35]

The original plan for the placer camps called for a pay rate of seventy-five cents per day during the six weeks of training.[36] In actual fact, no wages were paid to students until PMT became part of the Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Program in 1937. At that time, the wages became

$1.50 a day, less .75 per day for board. Instead of a higher rate of pay, the proceeds from gold recoveries accumulated during the 1935 and 1936 sessions were divided among the students after the season. After assessment by the Provincial Assayer and the administrators of the course, cheques were sent to the home address of the student.[37] The cheques became a source of amusement for some, since it undoubtedly cost more to issue and mail the cheque than it was worth. Jack Stevens received a cheque for thirty-one cents, which his father cashed for him and then retained as a family memento (See Figure 9).[38] Other cheques were issued for similarly meagre amounts. The largest cheque to an individual was $5.87; the average, between $1 to $3.[39]

The structure of payment for placer camps differed from the forestry camps, also initiated during the Liberal administration, where a set monthly wage rate was paid.[40] In the case of the placer camps, it was felt that the men were obtaining skills that would allow them to be more easily self-supporting, because of the autonomous nature of prospecting for gold.[41] The predominant popular thought, echoed repeatedly in the newspapers, was supportive of this, and there was no public protest about the inconsistency. Considering that the students were transported to and from the camps, fed and lodged, and outfitted at the end of the course for prospecting parties that were supervised to ensure their safety, PMT would appear to have offered far

Figure 9. Placer Mining Training share cheque.



AGENCY ACCOUNT

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

OFFICIAL CHEQUE

No. 43861

NANAIMO, B.C. Nov. 3 1936

PAY TO THE ORDER OF J. Stevens $ 0.31

THIRTY-ONE CENTS ONLY 100 DOLLARS

FOR Shere in gold recovery.

To THE CANADIAN BANK OF COMMERCE
NANAIMO, B.C.

GOVERNMENT AGENT.

more in the way of benefits than mere wages.[42]

What did these men learn, while participating in the program? The following is a selected example of the range of practical skills taught during the first sessions.

Table 6.
Placer Mining and Practical Skills Taught.

Dam building
Open and closed flumes
Penstocks and wing dams
Laying pipe on water grades
Wooden pressure tanks
Panning; sluice boxes; long toms; rocker boxes
Different types of riffles
Mercury traps
Use of blankets for capturing fine gold
Tailings disposal
Taking up and cleaning bedrock
How to stake placer claims
Defrosting frozen dynamite
Building log cabins; lean-tos; as well as root-houses for food storage
Cooking over open fires; use of reflector ovens for bread baking.
Basic first aid training
In short: all the skills necessary to survive in the bush for an extended period of time, on a better diet than "Beans, bannock, and bacon."
Note:however,that no firearms training or allowance was included, although it was expected that prospectors would obtain their own meat supplies.

Source: British Columbia--GR 202, File 1 (BCARS).

In addition to acquiring these practical skills, the students of the 1936-1939 sessions also attended daily lectures on mineralogy and geology, which were followed weekly by written examinations.

On Sundays at the Emory Creek camp, the men enjoyed baseball games held in field by the CNR tracks, goldpanned,

or swam in the creek.[43] Occasionally, the men initiated different sporting entertainments. Jack Stevens,a student at the Nanaimo camp, had been a Golden Gloves contender in a Seattle bout. When word of this spread through the camp, a match between Stevens and another student was arranged. The supervisors stayed well away and did not interfere with the event, satisfied that it was all in good clean fun and not an instance of aggressive behaviour given free expression. The bout went forward, much enjoyed by all of the students - except the loser.[44]

All of the camps had a small allowance toward recreation included in their budget, which usually meant that there was a bat and ball available for use. Many of the men spent their leisure hours panning the riverbank on their own account, stripped to the waist in the late summer sun and enjoying the independent activity.[45]

Those students who passed the core course were eligible for a grubstake to get them started prospecting on their own behalf. This assistance was equal to three months relief, at the rate of $9.60 per month; the loan of a limited amount of placer mining equipment, which had to be returned to the province at the end of the season; and transportation to and from prospecting areas approved by the officials of the Department of Mines.[46] This last mentioned condition, in effect, restricted those in the program from going further north than the Quesnel area. The amount of

supervision built into the scheme also contradicted to some extent the ideal of independence that Placer Mining Training had intended to promote.

An advanced training session was held at Cowichan Lake during the years 1938-1939, under professional geologists from the University of British Columbia. Graduate geology students completed some of their field work by supervising PMT prospecting parties in the Cowichan Lake area. Those PMT students who completed this course went for a further three months of practical training at Quesnel Forks in the Cariboo region, once a hub of gold mining and freighting activity during the nineteenth century.[47] Ron Riley, a third generation miner and one of the assistant instructors for PMT, was placed in charge of one of these field parties at Quesnel Forks. Contrary to government reports, that emphasize that there was a paternalistic supervision of these students, Riley stated that this was not the case, and that the departmental control over the men was minimal.[48] The men who went to Quesnel Forks as the last part of their field training had a great deal of independence from this supervision. Once they were in the bush their only real contact was with Lim Sing, the proprietor of the last grocery store at Quesnel Forks. And it was from Lim Sing and his new battery operated radio that the students in the Quesnel Forks field parties first heard of the outbreak of World War II.[49]

By 1937 an article in Maclean's declared that "the clean-up records to date show some 600 eager, throbbing, purposeful men recovered from a motley heap of puzzled, inefficient boys." [50] The total number of men served by PMT was relatively small; some twelve hundred from the time of the first sessions in June, 1935, until the closure of its last session in September, 1939 when Canada entered World War II.[51] Most of the men, according to Maclean's, felt that they would be able to support themselves through placer mining efforts. They were heartily grateful for their PMT experience:

> This is not a job...We work entirely for ourselves here. Right on our own...What's more, when we're through we get a grubstake to go and work for ourselves. Yes sir! PMT is okay with us.[52]

While not all of the trainees pursued careers in mining, the students felt that the general skills they had gained and the boost to their self-confidence was well worth the time they had spent at PMT. In the words of one student who completed training at Emory Creek in 1938: "...[The] camp has set me right. I am thinking straight...a fellow seems to have to get away from home to think straight." Other memories of the school were offered to the writer more than fifty years after the sessions took place:

> Personally I found the experience invaluable and a whole lot of fun to boot.[53]

> They had us occupied there. That was the job we had to do -- and it was something to do.[54]

> It was a good place to start in placer, to start a new skill.[55]

> The duties at the [Nanaimo River] camp were detailed in a military fashion, but we weren't treated that way. It was a good way to spend that summer.[56]

> The more you worked, the better we'd make. We got the best recovery with the sluiceboxes we made. There were several buttons [of gold] poured in those six weeks.[57]

> The experience of Placer Training planted the gold bug in me for life.[58]

> If you spent your life at that kind of thing, you could be successful -- you could survive.[59]

Some of PMT students were negative about their training experience, wishing never again to wash gravel in a cold stream or live in an isolated camp situation.[60]

> Forty-three cents! for all that work. So that was it for that. I heard that the instructor took off for the Old Country with some of the earnings.[61]

The sessions ended when Canada entered World War II in September, 1939. Many of the students went overseas, and several went on to careers in the military. It is interesting to note that in comparing the two experiences -- Placer Mining Training, and military training and service -- those former PMT students interviewed in 1994 felt that the more beneficial program in terms of personal growth and basic skills training had been the mining course. Certainly, they remembered it with more warmth and affection than they did their wartime experiences.[62]

Placer Mining Training was never held again in British Columbia. John Gawthrop's hopes for a continuing, low-cost

placer training program for boys from the country places of B.C. were never realized, although the publicity it received as part of the Dominion Provincial Youth Training Program led to inquiries from the United States and Alaska about how to set up such a program. In particular, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the Western Mining Association (Seattle) showed a real interest in the program curriculum. Although placer mining demonstrations and grubstaking as a form of unemployment relief were common in the Pacific Northwest and in Australia, the B.C. program was the only one with an organized curriculum carried out through intensive field training.[63]

The PMT program had long-term goals in terms of increasing the trained labour force for the mining industry in British Columbia, not merely the provision of temporary relief to the unemployed.[64] When the B.C. government discontinued PMT, declaring it a budget cut made necessary by wartime, there was a sharp response from the Vancouver Board of Trade. The 1939 training session was to have been the first part of a three year program, a program in which the focus would be amended to include aspects of lode mining as well as basic placer mining. The VBT believed that the school should continue, in order to increase the number of trained prospectors in British Columbia. Its concern was centred on the need to have trained men to look for war minerals, as well as keeping these jobs for British

Columbia's own young men -- not out-of-province "foreigners."[65] The protest was not heeded. The placer mining training program was not renewed, even though the comments about its general usefulness to youth were positive:

> The plan is, to a great extent, due to the possibilities to be found in British Columbia for prospectors and miners. Large areas of the Province still remain unexplored and there is room for many young men who have had some practical training and seek an independent, happy,though rough life in the hills.[66]

As a program of unemployment relief, PMT was not for everyone -- in fact, it was for a select and urban few, who came for the most part from Vancouver, New Westminster, and Victoria.[67] Eddie James, who attended PMT in 1937 and 1939, remarked later that it was entirely who you knew that seemed to be the main criteria for getting onto the course.[68] In a letter to a potential employer of PMT graduates, P.B. Freeland assured the manager of Livingstone Mining Company that the students were "carefully chosen from those living at home, not unemployed troublemakers."[69] This form of selection is nothing less than an example of the power that the state afforded itself, in the construction of the deserving and undeserving poor during the Depression era.

Mining capital evidently concurred with this kind of social engineering in conjunction with the training of prospective mining labour. Consider this statement by the

Secretary of the Ontario Mining Association, reprinted in the B.C. edition of Miner magazine in 1935:

> ...We neglect those with the divine spark and lavish money and training on the pinheads. We have an obligation to the unfortunate that must be recognized but if on the one hand we are to consider their interests paramount and...we stifle the initiative of the few who are the real constructive forces of the world, we are opposing the immutable law of nature,and must expect the inevitable result.[70]

The success of the plan depended largely on the co-operation of mining capital. The men who successfully completed the program needed company mining jobs in the winter so that they could save up a grubstake for placer mining the following summer. The Polaris Taku Mine in Atlin set a hiring quota of twenty percent PMT men, and Granby Mines on Vancouver Island was responsible for hiring more trainees than any other company.[71] Two of the PMT trainees that received placements with mining companies related that the mine managers were compelled, not willing, to accept them as employees. Eddie James caustically remembers the cold attitude of the mine manager when he arrived at his placement. And, as former blasting instructor Claude Cumming put it, "Why would they want to hire a trainee, when there were experienced mining men unemployed on the streetcorners of Vancouver?" While some mining companies did hire PMT men, many more were unable to hire additional workers during the years of the Depression, even if they were willing to.[72]

The vital link between training and industry was fragile at best, a point that Chief Engineer Philip B. Freeland constantly reiterated in his annual reports of the training school. It was his often-stated opinion that placer training could not provide the basis for adequate employment, since it required hard workers with an independent spirit. Freeland had little faith in the individual. In his view, young men had not been brought up to be independently hard working, and government funds would be better spent training men for lode mining, where the men worked at specific, assigned tasks under supervision. In his assessment of the underuse of the gold and mineral resources of the province, scientific management and training of the labour force were integral to reversing this condition. Although Freeland believed that the course was of benefit to the young men in terms of practical mines training, he had little hope for the ability of the individual to support himself through hand placer mining.

The deskilling that was a partial result of the post-industrial age, and the increasing anonymity of the wage labour force had created a new generation of worker without sufficient persistent skills such as those required by the autonomous placer miner. In actual fact, the numbers of British Columbians who did placer mine as a way to make a living during the Depression disproved Freeland's hardened thinking, and only underscored as well the relative success

of PMT. In 1932 alone, ten thousand Provisional Free Miner's Certificates were issued, that allowed individuals to prospect and locate gold mining claims without cost for the first year. [73]

If the unemployed were served by the Placer Mining Training program, they were mainly from the gently underemployed, not the destitute.[74] They were members of the middle and upper working class, not the visible streetcorner tin canners of Vancouver, nor the denizens of the Kamloops jungles. Students were selected from urban centres, not resource communities in the country places of B.C. They were unaccustomed to camp life and subsistence living, for these were the "idlers" created by a society experiencing prolonged economic crisis.[75] Only one of the participants interviewed in 1994 (Charlie Wood) had been in the relief camps or an unemployed transient without family support.

Placer Mining Training began as a program of unemployment relief, and it continued to be administered as such throughout the five years it was in existence. In common with most relief schemes of the period, its future year to year was never entirely certain. Placer Mining Training is not easily compared to other programs of unemployment relief: the DND relief camps, the provincial winter forestry camps, the summer reforestation camps for youngsters. The school did not share with such programs the

socially denigrating characteristics of the dole. The basic goal of the course -- to promote independence -- was contrary to a cycle of dependence fostered by reliance on public assistance.

The placer mining course changed over time in response to what administrators in the Department of Mines perceived to be a requirement of an industry suffering from the effects of attrition. Throughout the process of change within the program, the exercise of power by the interventionist state was clear. The Department of Labour felt that the province should "[S]tress the dire necessity of training young men for because most of those already in the business are either getting too old or have insufficient knowledge to promote either their own welfare or that of the mining industry."[76] An injection of younger, properly trained working class men to replace older prospectors was needed before an increase in mining starts would be possible. While the mining interests agreed with this assessment for the most part, their interest during the Depression was more in obtaining the greatest output for the least capital and human investment. To the state, this attitude was counterproductive apathy, and a waste of B.C.'s great untapped store of mineral resources.

It was the opinion of Freeland that the combined Department of Labour and Department of Mines program was not only helping the unemployed, but also helping the mining

industry which was generally apathetic in the promotion of new mining starts.[77] Thus, the general evolution of the course from unemployment relief to the beginning of a state/capital partnership in industrial training was highly directive of labour, and veered widely from the original desires of the unemployed working class for whom it was initially created. The PMT that was to have carried on after 1939 certainly went far beyond training the unemployed single man in the use of sluicebox, shovel, dipper and pan.

The underlying theme of Placer Mining Training is found in the use of power by state and capital interests to further the expansion of the mining industry through the industrial education and social engineering of a select group of British Columbia's young men. Almost from the beginning, the interests of the working class unemployed were subordinate to this grand design. Those interests were better served by changes in the Placer Act that allowed for lower start up and filing fees; by the co-operation of storeowners who provided groceries and supplies on credit; and by the support of rural communities given to would-be miners. And as with many of the unemployed during the Depression, placer mining as a means of getting by was only possible if the will and tenacity of the individual were paired with an adventurous spirit and hands that were not afraid of hard work. Without these attributes, luck and skill were irrelevant to the placer miner.

The public response to Placer Mining Training was, for the most part, positive. The few complaints recorded came from old timers in the Quesnel area who were incensed that the unemployed and inexperienced were receiving grubstaking and training assistance, while the experienced miners were not. This was, however, a minor tremor of dissatisfaction in comparison to the generally enthusiastic response. The establishment and subsequent reports in the newspaper about the school reinforced popular belief about gold panning as a romantic adventure. Along with other sunshine stories in the newspapers during the Depression, the continuing story of PMT and its bronzed young men was a good read and simple proof that the little man could continue to be his own master if he worked diligently enough. There was a way out of the trap of the wage labour force that had disappointed and denigrated so many good British Columbia men.

For most of the men who participated, PMT was remembered as "the best summer of their lives." The experience did not line their pockets with gold, but they gained an immeasurable benefit to their self esteem.

The experience also showed those twelve hundred men that with their self esteem restored, it would be possible to make the choice to either return to the wage labour force (although not necessarily in mining) as Jack Stevens did, or to carve out an independent living based on the mining industry, as Eddie James found it possible to do. As a

grand design to provide the province with a steady stream of trained mining men at low cost, Placer Mining Training held the promise of success. Long term success, however, was impeded by the subtle contradictions of intent between the state and capital -- and denied by the intervention of war and its excesses.

Notes

1.Annual Report of Western Meeting of Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (C.I.M.M.), in Miner magazine, December 1935, pp.19-20.

2.For a list of locations where the lectures were held, see Ch. 2, Table 4 and 5.

3.British Columbia--Department of Mines,Annual Reports, 1930-1939.

4.Minutes...SubCommittee; L. Cooper, "Ron Riley," audiotaped interview (Nanaimo, B.C. December 6, 1994); Eddie James to L. Cooper, 1 December 1994 (letter in possession of author and used by permission).

5.Robin Fisher, Duff Pattullo of British Columbia, (Toronto: UTP, 1991), p. 307.

6."Gold To the Rescue;" Victoria Daily Times, 2 March 1933, p.4; "Single Men Need Help," Ibid., 3 March 1933, p. 3; "Jobless Mining Schools," Vancouver Sun, 13 July 1933, p. 7.

7.Placer Mining Act; British Columbia--GR 202, Placer Mining Training, map file appended to 1935 Summary. (BCARS)(Hereafter GR 202 and file reference).

8.Placer Mining Training.

9.Ibid.

10.Minutes...Sub-Committee; and British Columbia--GR 191, Department of Mines, Chief Engineer, Correspondence Outward, 1937-38, (BCARS)(Hereafter GR 191 and file reference).

11.Edmund E. Pugsley, "Pay Dirt," Maclean's 1 January 1938, p. 33.

12.GR 202, File 1, Placer Mining Training.

13.Sanford Woodside to L. Cooper, October 1994, (letter in possession of the author and used by permission). Woodside was with the Chamber of Mines for forty-eight years, and was responsible for directing many unemployed men to placer mining prospects. The mining lectures given under the direction of the Department of Mines are described in the Department's Annual Reports. Some of this lecture material

was adapted for use at Placer Mining Training. British Columbia--GR 202, File 1, Placer Mining Training,(BCARS).

14.Some examples of this interest were an extensive article in Maclean's, 1 January 1938; full page feature articles in the Vancouver Province in 1938; and continuous progress reports on the school in the Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo newspapers, 1935-1939. Miner magazine, the "responsible organ of the B.C. mining industry," also made frequent and complimentary editorial mention of the government program.

15.For examples of placer mining incentives in Australia and the U.S. Pacific Northwest, see Derrick I. Stone and Sue MacKinnon, Life on the Australian Goldfields (Australia: Methuen, 1976), p. 216; and Richard C. Waldbauer, Grubstaking the Palouse: Gold Mining in the Hoodoo Mountains of Northern Idaho 1860-1950(USA: Washington State University Press, 1986), p. 33.

16.GR 202, Placer Mining Training; and British Columbia--Department of Labour, Annual Reports, 1931-1935. The number of unemployed in the relief camps under provincial authority, 1930-1932, and as administered by the Department of National Defense, 1932 to 1935 was in excess of 8000 men, confined to over 200 camps. Jean Barman, The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: UTP, 1991), p. 252-253.

17. See, for example,James Struthers, No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941 (Toronto, UTP, 1983); and two popular history treatments: James Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto:MacMillan, 1966); and Pierre Berton, The Great Depression: 1929-1939, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990).

18.On boondoggling during the Depression, see James Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto:Macmillan, 1966); and Pierre Berton, The Great Depression 1929-1939 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990). Needless to say, the accounts of such activities do not come from the Dept. of Labour Annual Reports, although they were the subject of many newspaper editorials during the decade. The costs of operating the Placer Mining School are found in GR 202, Placer Mining Training (BCARS).

19.This theme is strongly emphasized in the first summary of Placer Mining Training written by John Gawthrop at the end of the 1935 training year (GR 202, Placer Mining Training); it is also clearly illustrated in the graphics used by the

Department of Mines to promote their Annual Reports to the public. The images used are of the independent man of the frontier, prepared for all eventualities but in obvious enjoyment of a pastoral existence.

20.Placer Mining Training Camps.

21.British Columbia--Add MSS 3, Box 76, File 7, T.D. Pattullo Papers, Public Works Program,nb. telegram to F.M. Macpherson from TDP; Add MSS 3, Box 76, File 14, T.D. Pattullo Papers, Unemployment, telegrams and correspondence between TDP and Norman Rogers, Minister of Labour, Canada.

22.Ibid., telegram from Norman Rogers to T.D. Pattullo, 20 May 1937.

23.GR 202, File 1, Placer Mining Training, 1935 (BCARS).

24.The social definition of economic dependence of women in the context of the Vancouver Labour force has been discussed by Gillian Creese, "The Politics of Dependence: Women, Work, and Unemployment in the Vancouver labour movement before World War II," in Greg Kealey, ed., Class, Gender and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology. St. Johns, Nfld: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1988. On the presumption of men's breadwinner status and women's dependency on the part of the state, see Bryan D. Palmer, Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), p. 242. Earlier student work touching the periphery of a discussion on the recovery of the male identity is the BA honours essay of Marion E. Lane, "Unemployment During the Depression: The Problem of the Single Unemployed Transient in British Columbia, 1930-1938," (UBC, 1966).

25.GR 202, Placer Mining Training (BCARS); and GR 191, Correspondence Outward, 1937-38 (BCARS).

26.Pugsley, "Pay Dirt," p. 33.

27.GR 202, Placer Mining Training, summary of 1935 sessions by John Gawthrop, Department of Labour, Unemployment Branch.

28.Placer Mining Training Camps.

29.GR 191, Correspondence Outward, 1937-38 (BCARS).

30.Frederick Edwards, "Youth in Training," (Maclean's 1 January 1938), p. 31.

31.Placer Mining Training Camps.

32.John Fee to L. Cooper, November 1994 (letter in possession of the author and used by permission); L. Cooper, "Vic Sorenson," typescript of interview (Victoria, B.C.: 12 October 1994).

33.GR 202, File 2, Placer Mining Training (BCARS).

34.GR 202, File 7, letter of 8 May 1939, File No. R-259, Unemployment Relief Branch Serial No. 271 (BCARS).

35.Minutes...Sub Committee.

36.Placer Mining Training Camps.

37.The recoveries received by the Provincial Assayer from the 1935 session were as follows: Cherry Creek, 3.38 oz.; Nanaimo, 1.25 oz.; Quesnel, 3.07 oz.; and Emory Creek, 1.12 oz. This was gold recovered during the six week training course. GR 202, File 1, Placer Mining Training, 1935 (BCARS).

38.L. Cooper,interviewer, "Jack Stevens," (Sidney, B.C., 14 October 1994).

39.GR 202, File 1, Placer Mining Training, 1935 (BCARS).

40.Placer Mining Training School was not the only training scheme launched by the Liberal government. Training in basic reforestation was carried out in summer forestry camps for young men, at experimental stations located at three primary locations throughout the province, and some twenty four smaller sites. The Youth Forestry Training Plan was not the same as the winter unemployment forestry camps which were operated in response to the fluctuating number of transient unemployed within B.C.'s boundaries. In 1938, Arthur Mayse wrote in glowing terms of the program which had originated with idea of MLA Hugh Savage (Cowichan). The premise was essentially the same as that of PMT; however,the training was more general, and the age range served was essentially that of the secondary student on summer break. The number of participants was far greater, and the training was carried out at established camps -- settings populated by junior woodsmen, not more mature and disillusioned men. Arthur Mayse, "New Forests Born Under Guidance of B.C. Youth," Vancouver Province, 10 September 1938.

41.GR 202, File 1,, Placer Mining Training, 1935 (BCARS).

42.The costs of the course were higher than the provision of direct relief. In 1935, the total rough cost per man for three month training/board was $102.93; direct relief for a single male for the same amount of time was $28.80. Documentation is less than clear about the division of costs between provincial and federal governments for the years 1935-36, but the total cost of the program in 1935, after adjustment for capital expenditure, was $11,094.49, for 100 men trained. GR 202, File 1, Placer Mining Training 1935 (BCARS).

43.British Columbia--Department of Mines, "Emory Creek," 16mm film, b/w, silent with captions, 1935. (V1988:41/1: BCARS).

44.L. Cooper, "Jack Stevens."

45.British Columbia--Department of Mines, "Emory Creek," 16mm film, b/w, silent with captions, 1935. (V1988:41/1: BCARS).

46.Placer Mining Training Camps.

47.GR 202, File 16 (BCARS); on Quesnel Forks and its role in the Cariboo Gold Rush, see Gordon R. Elliot, Barkerville, Quesnel, and the Cariboo Gold Rush (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1978).

48.L. Cooper, "Ron Riley," audiotaped interview (Nanaimo, B.C.: 6 December 1994).

49.L.Cooper, "Charlie Wood," audiotaped interview (Nanaimo: 6 December 1994). Wood details many of his experiences as an unemployed man during the Depression, including his time spent in relief camps, in the Kamloops jungle, and working as farm help on the Prairies and in the Fraser Valley. For Wood, the time spent in Placer Mining Training was good, but no more significant than any of his other experiences as labourer, lode miner, or transient.

50.Pugsley, "Pay Dirt," p. 32.

51.British Columbia--Department of Mines, Annual Report, 1939.

52.Pugsley, "Pay Dirt," p. 39.

53.L. Cooper, correspondence with Eddie James 30 October 1994.

54.L. Cooper, interview with Charlie Wood.

55.L. Cooper, interview with Hal Rumming.

56.L. Cooper, interview with John Stevens.

57.L. Cooper, interview with Charlie Wood.

58.L. Cooper, interview with John Stevens.

59.L. Cooper, interview with Hal Rumming.

60.Ibid.

61.L. Cooper, interview with Charlie Wood.

62.L. Cooper, interviewer "Jack Stevens," and "Vic Sorenson," and "Charlie Wood" and "Hal Rumming," audiotaped interviews, (Nanaimo: 6 December 1994). Stevens and Rumming went on to complete thirty year military careers; Sorenson served overseas during the war, and Wood, head of a family by this time, was stationed in North Vancouver.

63.Stone and MacKinnon, Life on the Australian Goldfields, and Waldbauer, Grubstaking the Palouse.

64.This point is repetitively made by the Dept. of Mines Chief Engineer, P.B. Freeland, in the Department's Annual Reports and his own correspondence (GR 191--BCARS).

65.British Columbia--GR 1222, Box 30, File 8, Premier's Papers. Correspondence from W.E. Payne, Vancouver Board of Trade, to T.D. Pattullo, 25 October 1940, (BCARS).

66.Gr 202, File 16, memorandum to Minister of Mines (W.J. Asselstine) from Chief Mining Engineer (P.B. Freeland), 30 July 1940 (BCARS).

67.GR 191, Correspondence Outward, 1937-1940. An examination of a sample of the addresses of the applicants (40 letters in regard to the 1938 session) shows a strong tendency toward the West Side, Point Grey, and Main Street areas of Vancouver.

68.Eddie James to Lesley Cooper, November 1994, (letter in possession of the author and used by permission).

69.GR 202, File 1, Placer Mining Training, 1935 (BCARS).

70.C.G. Bateman, "The Advance in the Price of Gold and its Significance to Canada," Miner, December 1935, p. 31.

71.GR 202, File 17, Dominion Provincial Youth Training, (BCARS). In 1937, about thirty trained men were placed with metal mines; another fifteen found employment throughout the province through their own efforts. British Columbia--Report of the Minister of Mines, 1938.

72.Eddie James to L. Cooper, December 1994; and Claude Cumming to L. Cooper, November 1994. Both letters in possession of the author and used by permission.

73.British Columbia--Department of Mines Annual Report, 1934; and GR 191, Department of Mines, Chief Engineer, Correspondence Outward, 1937-1940. Freeland also made his opinion clear in his assessment of the 1938 training year, in which he advocated that the program be discontinued.

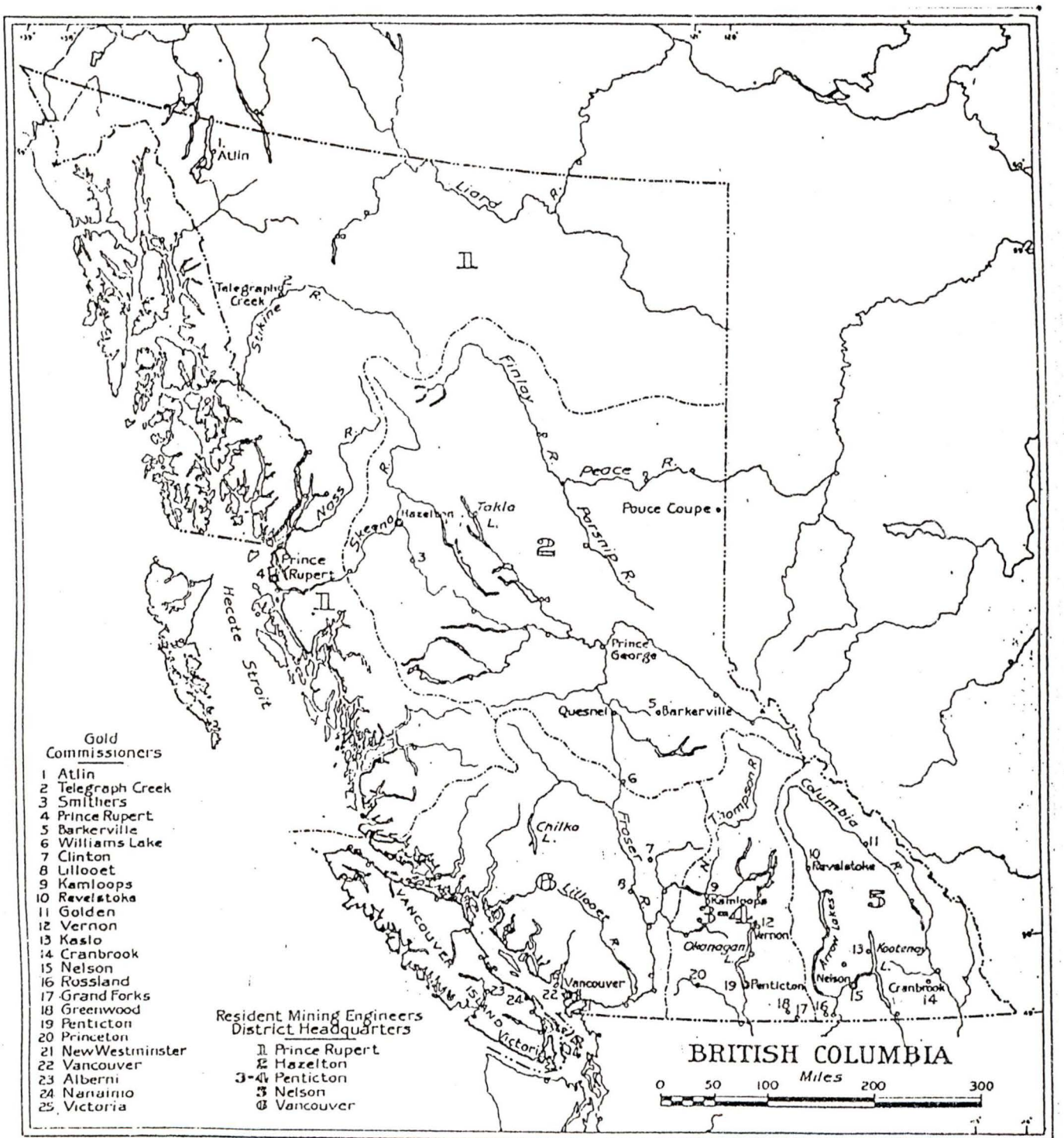
74.Charlie Wood, interviewed in 1994, was an exception to this: see fn 50 above.

75."To Train Idle for Gold Hunt," Victoria Daily Times, 8 May 1933.

76.GR 202, File 9, Engineer-In-Charge Dominion D Party 2: Correspondence. (BCARS).

77.Ibid.

Figure 10. British Columbia Mining Divisions, 1936.



B.C Dept. of Mines.

CONCLUSION

Placer mining on an individual basis was a subsistence activity engaged in by many of British Columbia's unemployed during the Depression. The permanent placer mining culture that began with the Fraser River gold rush of 1858 was the backdrop for government incentives created to assist these new placer miners. Some resource communities readily amalgamated old and new miners into a working unit that benefitted both the community and regional economies. As well, there was a growing trend toward professionalization of the art as the provincial mining industry expanded spatially and economically under pressures from an interventionist government. The Placer Mining Training School is an example of this trend and of how such training programs were received.

Previous frames of class analysis are inadequate to describe the labouring experience of small resource entrepreneurs such as the independent placer miner. By constructing these individuals as a limited petit bourgeoisie, it is possible to consider the possibilities that existed outside of the sphere of wage paid labour during the Depression. In future work, this model could be employed to describe the labouring experience of other independent resource workers, such as hand loggers, trappers, and to some extent, tourist destination service providers such as guides and lodge owners. Each has had a considerable role in the economy during periods of cyclical economic downturn in this

province. This limited entrepreneurial class is exemplified by a demonstrable willingness to create one's own reality of labour, and to accept self-imposed economic constraints.

The experience of independent placer miners during the Great Depression uncovers contradictions to commonly held historiographical assumptions. This work has attempted to illustrate some of those contradictions, and to point to the need for more work in the area of small resource entrepreneurship. This is especially true in the context of economic depression and alternative survival strategies that emerge during those periods.

What contradictions are illustrated by the history of the Depression era placer miners? First, all Depression experiences were not negative. The placer miner's experience was unique, and it was productive on several levels. The first of these was the possibility of making a living for oneself through tenacity and unrelenting hard work. The individual who chose to go out into the hills as a placer miner as an alternative to unemployment had a new range of skills to learn, and a new reality of labour to embrace. That reality was a hand-to-mouth existence that relied on personal output -- how much gold was recovered and sold.

Another productive level of the placer mining experience was tied to a profound discourse of the 1930s -- the loss and subsequent recovery of the masculine identity as family wage earner. Widely discussed by those who were not victims of the

Depression, the common belief of the time was that if a man were put to some useful work, his ability to earn would elevate his personal identity and self esteem, and thus return him to the ranks of the "real consumers" of Canadian society. Certainly, the experience of independent miners such as William Sharlow, on the Pend d'Oreille River, the Marryats on the upper Fraser at Loos, and the influx of miners into the Likely district illustrate that this was possible.

The experience of the Placer Mining Training School students, interviewed for Maclean's in 1938, underscores the positive effect that the course had on young men who were previously disillusioned about their chances for employment or industrial training. If the means of this recovery of masculine identity was predominantly a kinetic response to the philosophical conjectures of church, state, and social reform, the method nonetheless instilled in the individual the idea that possibilities existed for those willing to work diligently toward a specific goal.

The nature of the resource sought by the placer miner was one such powerful incentive. That gold was of a mythical nature ameliorated the reality of backbreaking work that often yielded but a limited return. Gold was where you found it, but many a placer miner would have agreed with Stephen Leacock who averred, "I am a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it."[1] So it was with the independent placer miner of a century past, and that

ethos, that linked hard work and luck, had not yet diminished by the Depression. And so it remains today.

A second commonly held assumption, in an historiographic sense, is that resource history must be about large scale capital enterprises, organized labour, and wage paid labour. This is, as discussed above, what has been common practice among historians. While this body of work is important, it is incomplete by its exclusion of the small resource entrepreneur, who operated outside of the wage paid labour force. What is needed, then, in the historiography of resource development and extraction is not a wholesale change in focus, but a broadening of the picture, to reveal the workers who have always been there. The placer miners, the small show loggers that fed local mills, the trappers who used their winter activities to stake them in summer mining or in the farming enterprise -- deserve equal analytical fervour and historiographical space from academics.

Finally, the case of the placer miner of the 1930s, who worked the gravel using hand methods little changed from a century before, shows us that not all mining ventures were capital intensive. For the placer miner of the 1930s,the tools and the knowledge required were similar to that held by the miners who participated in the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rushes that opened up the province. The establishment of a placer mining culture in British Columbia during these rushes and the subsequent period of provincial development

ensured that traditional manual mining methods survived. Most importantly, the simplicity and economy of these methods ensured that they could be called back into more widespread use as required.

Part of the reason for the exclusion of the small resource entrepreneur can be seen in the methodology employed in labour, resource, and Depression history. Each of these areas have traditionally employed oral history in their investigations, but to varying levels of effect. For the Depression study, oral history has traditionally been the means by which the reader gains a negative sense of the Depression experience: the grit, the hopelessness, the transiency of the Depression come through in words that equate the Depression with pain and loss. No one has given space to emotional positivism in the context of the Depression -- perhaps because we have always asked the wrong questions, or presciently perhaps, encouraged a priori conclusions. The words of the placer miners come through as positive in their recall, and even among the most cautious of remininisces, find something good in what has universally been believed to be a decade of adversity without relief.

In resource history and labour history, the use of the interview has been most widely used in recalling the folk history of organized labour. Documentation of large scale enterprises and corporations is more readily available, and the need to listen to individual voices may not be seen as

paramount. The purpose of industrial or corporate histories is present the unified whole, not the voices of individual players. Thus,presenting a history of small resource entrepreneurs becomes a study in opposites. There is perhaps the problem of isolating a specific group with which to work, and the existing documentation of small resource activities performed by the individual rely on privately held records. Thus, in this work it has been useful to link documentary evidence and popular journalism together with responses elicited through the use of a congenial oral history format. Previous historiographical writing in Depression, labour and resource history has been used as the support for a body of more personalized evidence. It cannot be stressed too heavily, that without the oral history record, this work would not have been as vital, and certainly not valid or responsible in its analysis.

These, then, are the historiographical contradictions that the history of the placer miners illustrate for academics. What is the ultimate use of such a work for the general reader, or for those whose experiences are directly or peripherally woven into this discussion of placer miners and unemployment in the 1930s?

The years of concern for personal privacy are, for those interviewed, long past. The activities of pre-World War II are more than half a century gone, and what remains is a valued residue of memory. The concern of those who

participated in the interview or correspondence process for this work were as a single mind in their opinion of the ultimate use of their memories. The experience of the placer miners should receive a more formal treatment than has been the case, an academic treatment that presents them as an entrepreneurial class that relied on hard work for economic survival. Their lives were not the novelties spun out in the gold rush and ghost town books that fill a number of bookshelves. They do not identify with the fatalism most commonly recalled in the Depression-era literature, and in their view, their words should be heard. A move toward a more comprehensive treatment of placer mining and placer mining culture is long overdue.

In The Rush for Spoils, Martin Robin has described how the Kidd Commission, a cadre of business elites, indulged in "an entrepreneurial dream, a flight from reality."[2] This commission was formed in sincerity and, as with many government reports, could have had an extreme impact, had it been initiated. The point here is that the commission and its flight from reality were given consideration. The placer miners had their own entrepreneurial dream, that took them on a flight from the reality of unemployment and a disillusioned socio-economic existence. The search for gold, however, was not as fanciful an escape as was the search for a balanced provincial budget. The fact that the participants did not believe their efforts to be fanciful or haphazard is another

reason to amplify their history.

The West has traditionally been a working metaphor for possibilities and strength to men and women who had faith in their own endurance. Early in this century, Clifford Sifton commented:

> We know there is no place known to civilization where a poor man with willing and strong hands, and a mind disposed to success, may find a more certain reward for his labour, where he is more assured by a reasonable dilligence and frugality of social advancement and prosperity for himself and his family.[3]

Certainly, Sifton could not have imagined the emotional and economic depths to which the poor man would plunge, under the excesses of the Depression. Nevertheless, thirty years later the same social views held by Sifton held in respect to poor men, and the resources available in the West for those who would work. But many (the state most of all) felt that men had lost the willingness that Sifton spoke of, and that this attribute was only retrievable by separating the poor from a contaminating, urban environment. Those who had lived in rural environments all along maintained a link with the land and its resources. Urban men lost their "strength" during the Depression, while those in rural areas continued to draw on reserves of frugality, tenacity, and manual skills.

The link between gold panning and unemployment was thus evident to those who lived in the resource hinterlands of British Columbia. To them, the barrier was as Ralph Hall discusses in Goldseekers -- solely that of obtaining a

grubstake. Their enthusiasm, expressed through a significant increase in gold recoveries during the early 1930s, provided the government with the fodder it needed to promote independent placer mining as a desirable avenue of endeavour. The Department of Mines Annual Report illustrations capture that better than any volume of statistics. Man, mountains, gold pan, and independent self-sufficiency without revolt or political entanglement.

The image of the relatively poor yet self sufficient gold panner was tremendous propaganda for the flagging Pattullo government. The vision held that the male unemployed would be retrained, energized morally, and almost overnight (in the words of the president of the B.C. Mining Association) be made self sufficient. Or, at least a representative few. The provincial government did not have to show that hundreds of men were trained during PMT, or that many more were assisted by amendments to the Placer Act. Nor was it important to exhibit cost analyses or hiring statistics. The PMT program could remain the project of a devoted few within the departments of Labour, Mines, and Unemployment. The government's initiation of placer mining incentives and training signalled a consensual agreement with the general public, the church, and social reform about the denigrating effects of the Depression. Bowing to the practicality of an old style manual culture, the provincial government came to accept the viability of an historical resource as one means of

economic, social, and psychological recovery for a small yet significant number of the unemployed during the Great Depression. It was grating for the Liberal government to realize that power to effect recovery lay not solely in committee hearings and economic theory -- but in finding gold flakes among the grey gravel of British Columbia's rivers and streams.

Notes

1.Stephen Leacock, The Beaver, December 1936, reprinted in the April/May 1995 issue of same.

2.Martin Robin, Rush for Spoils, p. 238.

3.J.W.Dafoe, Clifford Sifton in Relationship to His Times, (Toronto: 1931), p. 273.

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"Government Mining School, Quesnel Forks, 1938." Photograph. Print originally in possession of Shorty Lehaie of Likely, B.C.; currently held by the Likely Cemetery Society (David G. Falconer, director).

"Emory Creek -- Placer Mining Training School, 1935." 16 mm film. Province of British Columbia. Department of Labour/Department of Education (BCARS).

"Emory Creek Camp." Photographs courtesy of Vic Sorenson, Victoria, B.C. Used by permission.

Placer Mining Equipment diagrams, from British Columbia-Department of Mines reports and addenda, for the years 193?-1939.

Photographs of Pend d'Oreille River area, of the Sharlow mining claim, and of the Thomas Dunn claim, courtesy of William Sharlow of Victoria, B.C. Used by permission.

Interviews

Audiotaped interviews conducted by the writer in 1994-1995, with:
Hal Rumming
Dorothy Marryat
Roland (Ron) Riley
Bill Sharlow
Charlie Wood
Jack Stevens (transcript)
Vic Sorenson (transcript)

Correspondence to the writer in 1994-1995, from:
Eddie James
Sanford Woodside
Claude Cumming
John Fee

Walter Guppy

Interviews by the writer in 1992, with:
Margaret Wilson Murray
David G. Falconer

Other interviews:
Falconer, David G. "Margaret Wilson Murray." Videotape: Williams Lake, B.C., 1988.

--------. "Bernice Prior Poirer MacDonald." Videotape: Williams Lake, B.C., 1988.

--------. "Tom Kinvig." Videotape: Williams Lake, B.C., 1988.

The writer further acknowledges the technical and practical mining expertise of Denis Lieutard, Chief Gold Commissioner, Province of British Columbia; and Cariboo district residents Robert and Beverly Lees and Sandrina Harwood.

Appendix 1

Chronology of Events, British Columbia Placer Gold Mining

1852 Free gold discovered in quartz at Mitchell Harbour, Queen Charlotte Islands, and the first gold rush took place.

1855 Placer gold found at the mouth of the Pend d'Oreille River by former servants of the HBC at Fort Colville.

1857 Placer gold next reported at the junction of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers, now Lytton.
28 December: Proclamation regarding gold mines and regulations about their working issued by James Douglas. Mines specifically referred to were in the Ashcroft, Vernon, and Kamloops areas.

1858 Discovery of placer gold in the lower reaches of the Fraser River caused rush to Yale, Hope, and the Fraser Canyon by miners from California and other parts of the world. Large influx of population to Victoria resulted in the creation of a tent town there.

1859 7 September. Goldfields Act passed.

1860 Placer miners make their way through to Cariboo and Quesnel: others enter the region by way of the Peace River.

1861 Placers on the creeks in southern B.C. worked.
Pete Toy bar at the junction of the Finlay and Parsnip Rivers worked.

1864 Placer gold discovered on Leech River by Capt. Peter Leech.

1865 Dewdney River Trail completed to Kootenay River, at the mouth of Wild Horse Creek from Hope to enable gold escorts to get to Victoria by British territory.
Big Bend area on Columbia River staked for placer by miners from the Cariboo.

1873 Henry Thibert ascends the Liard and discovers placer. McDame also locates in this area. First staker was W.H. Smith. Omineca area also opened up in this year.

1874 John Ash, first Minister of Mines, appointed.

1877 Quartz excitement at Cariboo. Test mill at Richfield at work.

1886 Boundary, Greenwood and Grand Forks areas explored. First stakings by W.T. Smith.

1888 Monarch Mine opened.
John A. (Cariboo) Cameron dies.

1898-
1899 Klondike Gold Rush. Miners turning off to the

east discover the Atlin deposits.

1900 British Columbia set out into six mining divisions, each under the supervision of a resident mining engineer.

1902 J.B. Hobson carries out extensive work at Boullion, in the Quesnel district near Cedar Dam settlement.

1922 Cedar Creek gold rush: settlement of Cedar Dam renamed Likely in honour of pioneer miner/philosopher, John Likely.

1927 Cariboo Gold Quartz Mining Company incorporated. Instant town of Wells is born, named after Fred Wells, founder of CGQ.

1931 10,300 are employed in mines as waged labour.

1932 A number of requests are received by the provincial government from the public, asking for assistance in grubstaking and training in placer mining.

10,000 Provisional Free Miner's Certificates are issued, one of several measures passed by the provincial government to aid the unemployed to placer mine.

At least thirty three areas within the province are being mined by individuals with some success. The most active is the Cariboo.

1933 FDR abandons the gold standard on 31 December 1933, pegs the price of gold at $35 an oz. It now becomes viable to retrieve lower grade ore.

An Order-in-Council under the Tolmie government makes possible the creation of placer mining training schools, but no further action occurs until spring, 1935 (after the Liberal Pattullo government comes to power).

First gold brick shipped from Cariboo Gold Quartz mine at Wells.

1935 First sessions of Placer Mining Training, at Emory Creek, Nanaimo River, Cherry Creek (near Vernon) and Fraser River (near Quesnel).

Provincial government makes a film about the Emory Creek school.

Concentrating plants built at Sheep Creek Gold; Ymir Girl; Second Relief; Ymir Consolidated; Wayside; Morningstar; Meridian; and Kamloops Homestake mines.

1936 Concentrating plants installed at Hedley Mascot Mines; Vancouver Island Gold Mines. Mines enlarged at Cariboo Gold Quartz; Minto; Wayside; Kootenay Belle; Island Mountain; and Vidette.

Second year of Placer Mining Training:held at Emory Creek and Nanaimo River.

1937 Third year of Placer Mining Traing: held at

Emory Creek only because of transportation costs. More elements of geological instruction added to the curriculum.

1938 Fourth year of Placer Mining Training, at Emory Creek only, with additional graduate field work at Cowichan Lake (Vancouver Island) and Quesnel Forks (Cariboo). Expanded curriculum and professionalization of instruction.
Maclean's carries a feature article in its 1 January 1938 issue on Dominion-Provincial Youth Training programs, featuring Placer Mining Training.

1939 Fifth year of Placer Mining Training. Outbreak of WWII means end of the PMT program at the end of October, 1939, and it is not renewed.
Vancouver Board of Trade protests the closure as an unnecessary budgetary measure, citing the necessity of training men to look for war minerals and to provide training for returned veterans.

1943 Wartime Grubstaking Assistance Act

1944 Grubstaking Act amended: $300 per bona fide prospector, $200 for transportation costs.
Between 1944 and 1960, an average of 70 men per year are grubstaked at a cost of about $25,000 per year. This to facilitate new mining starts, a miniscule investment for an industry rated third overall in the province.

1950-60 Grubstaking Act continues in effect.

1980 Changes in Waters Branch regulations and increasing environmental safeguards narrow the options for placer miners. Disturbance of stream gravels now deemed to be even those as small as lifting a few shovels of gravel at the riverside. Dredging (rivers, streams) no longer legal. Greater concerns about impact of mining on fish and wildlife stocks; oxygen floation methods have replaced earlier separation methods such as mercury that were used during the Depression.

1990 More placer claims (individuals) filed now than there have been in several decades. A new generation of "recreational" miners, or a cyclical response to economic recession?

1994 Presentation of the CORE Report and proposals for parkland reserves create tension between NDP government and residents of single resource communities still dependent on seasonally alternating resource activity, such as small logging shows and placer gold mining. What will the future of the small timer placer miner be?

Appendix 2

Annotated Bibliography, Gold Rush and Ghost Town Genre Works.

De Hullu, Emma. Bridge River Gold. Bridge River Valley Centennial Committee, 1968.
Produced as a centennial project, this volume is a colloquial "remember when?" collection organized by year. No references are cited.

Elliot, Gordon. Barkerville, Quesnel, and the Cariboo Gold Rush. Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1978.
Originally released as Quesnel: Commercial Center of the Cariboo, this book is thematically organized: from exploration to links of communication. It denies the lasting placer mining culture as it exists in British Columbia, and is wrongheaded in the view of certain gold mining communities as being of a single culture (eg., Quesnel Forks as a "Chinese community."

Hall, Ralph. Goldseekers. Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1978.
Arguably the best writing about the Depression experience as it applies to the small time miner and general mining labourer. This is an account of Hall's experiences, and he portrays those experiences in an honest and forthright manner.

--------. Pioneer Goldseekers of the Omineca. Victoria, B.C.: Morriss Publishing, 1994.

Lindsay, F.W. The Cariboo Story. Canada: Victoria College Fiftieth Anniversary Fund, 1958.
An example of the genre at its most emotional, this little volume is based on the gold miner's adventures and folk experience - with a helpful little chapter on the "Gold Rush of the Hungry Thirties."

Ludditt, Fred W. Barkerville Days. Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1969.

--------. Campfire Sketches of the Cariboo. Canada: F.W. Ludditt, 1974.

--------. Gold in the Cariboo. Vancouver: Evergreen Press, [1958?] Compiled for the Wells-Barkerville Centennial Committee.
All of Ludditt's work is strictly of the emotional, "boom and bust" adventurism of the gold miner, preserved through tall tales and real experiences. Strictly

armchair enthusiast material.

Paterson, T.W. British Columbia: The Pioneer Years. Langley, B.C.: Stagecoach Publishing Company, 1980.

--------. Encyclopedia of Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of British Columbia. Langley: Stagecoach Publishing, 1979. 2 v.

--------. Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of Vancouver Island. Langley: Sunfire Publications, 1989.
Collections of stories about famous and infamous mines and miners, and about the mining towns that were found all over the province. Many British Columbians will only find out about these through such enthusiast works as these, because the original sites have disappeared.

Patenaude, Branwen. Because of Gold. Quesnel, B.C.: the Author, 1981.
B. Patenaude is a respected Cariboo popular historian and researcher. This book reflects her family ties to the region (one of the historic sites in the Cariboo is the 153 Mile Ranch, preserved by the family), and a commitment to accurate research.
--------. Trails to Gold. Victoria, B.C.: Horsdahl and Schubart, 1995.
A volume on the roadhouses along the Cariboo Gold Trail, this work reflects the amount of time in research although a few minor points are now out of date - for example, Alexandra Lodge is no longer in business.

Peet, Fred J. Miners and Moonshiners: A Personal Account of Adventure and Survival in a Difficult Era. Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1983.
A little more sentimental than the work by Hall, Peet's book is about his Depression experience -- but in his case, he was not so much the footloose vagrant searching for gold, as an underemployed mines engineer. His professional expertise is clear throughout the book.

Ramsay, Bruce. Ghost Towns of British Columbia. Vancouver, B.C.: Mitchell Press, 1963.
A book of short anecdotes on gold rush towns and ghost towns, arranged in travelogue order by region. In its day, a fairly historical exposition, but without analysis.

Stangoe, Irene. Cariboo-Chilcotin: Pioneer People and Places.
Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House Publishing, 1994.
A collection of Stangoe's articles on Cariboo-Chilcotin topics that have appeared in the Williams Lake Tribune over the years. A good introduction to a number of

regional events, families, and characters. Stangoe's husband was the editor of the Tribune for a number of years.

There are, as well, a great number of articles in historical society publications such as the British Columbia Historical News (B.C. Historical Society), and in popular history periodicals such as Canadian West (Langdale Press, Garnet Basque, editor). Local histories of specific mining towns and villages are listed fairly exhaustively in Linda Hale and Jean Barman, eds., British Columbia Local Histories: A Bibliography (Victoria, B.C.: B.C. Heritage Trust, 1991), complete with known provenance for each item. The examples below are found in that bibliography.

Atwood, Mae. Border Gold. Grand Forks: Orris Press, 1981.

Barlee, Neville Langrell. Gold Creeks and Ghost Towns: East Kootenay, Boundary, West Kootenay, Okanagan and Similkameen. Summerland, Canada West Magazine, 1970.

--------. Gold Creeks and Ghost Towns. Surrey: Hancock House, 1984.

--------. West Kootenay: The Ghost Town Country. Surrey,: Canada West Publications, 1984.

Barlee is the name most recognized in connection with collections and history of gold rush memorabilia. He was the host of a long-running television program on the topic of mining and mining towns. At this writing, he is a British Columbia MLA (NDP). He remains involved in historical projects but at times has clashed with communities over provenance and restoration of historic sites such as Quesnel Forks.

Cullins, Warren. Zeballos, Its Gold, Its People, Yesterday and Today: an Historical Documentation. by Warren Cullins and Laura Cullins. Sloughhouse, CA: Cullins and Cullins Publishers.

Downs, Arthur George. Wagon Road North: the Story of the Cariboo Gold Rush in Historical Photos. Quesnel: Northwest Digest, 1960.

Graham, Clara. Fur and Gold in the Kootenays. Vancouver: Wrigley Printing Co. Ltd., 1945.

Harris, Lorraine. Barkerville: the Town that Gold Built. Surrey: Hancock House, 1984.

--------. Gold Along the Fraser. Surrey: Hancock House, 1984.

--------. Halfway to the Goldfields: a History of Lillooet. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1977.

Hong, William M. And So That's How It Happened: Recollections of Stanley-Barkerville, 1900-1975. Wells: Hong, 1975.

McInnes, Alexander P. Chronicles of the Cariboo, being the True Story of the First Discovery of Gold in the Cariboo District on the Horsefly River by Peter C. Dunlevy. Lillooet: Lillooet Publishers Ltd., 1938.

Roberts, John Allan. Cariboo Chronicles: Williams Lake Golden Jubilee, 1929-1979. Williams Lake Golden Jubilee Committee, 1979.

Roberts is now the head curator of the Williams Lake and District Museum, with a longtime concern for the preservation of the history of the region. This is an article derived from other work by Roberts.

Shewchuck, Murphy. Fur, Gold and Opals: A Guide to the Thompson River Valleys. Saanichton: Hancock House, 1975.

Skelton, Robin. They Call it the Cariboo. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1980.

Certainly a more literary rendition of Cariboo history than most, Skelton's book is nonetheless lacking in strict historicity. His admiration for the region, from the viewpoint of an outsider, translates into a volume that serves as a jumping off point into Cariboo history for the enthusiast.

Turnbull, Elsie Grant. Ghost Towns and Drowned Towns of the West Kootenay. Surrey: Heritage House Pub. Co., 1988, 1989.

Wright, Richard. Cariboo Mileposts: Points of Interest Along a Famous Road. Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1972.

As the title suggests, a guidepost book. Wright has been associated with a number of historical and restoration projects in the Barkerville area -- but his tendency to embellish or delete facts has not won him any popularity contests with Caribooites.

Appendix 3

Glossary of Placer Mining Terms

Adit: A horizontal, or nearly horizontal, opening into a mine.

Alluvial: Material deposited by ice or water.

Assay: Analysis to determine metallic content of ore.

Black sand: Deposits composed mainly of grains of heavy black materials such as magnetite.

Bonanza: A rich ore body.

Bushed: A mental state brought on by an extended stay in an isolated location.

Colour: A visible speck of gold.

Concentrate: Enriched ore after a process of waste removal.

Deposit: A natural concentration having enough mineral content to be considered an ore.

Doublejack: A two-man method of drilling rock. One man holds the drill-steel in place while the other strikes it with a sledge hammer.

Drift: An underground passageway driven to follow a vein or lode.

Flume: A trough of wood or metal used to convey water to a sluice.

Grubstake: Provisions to see a miner through a mining season. Also used to denote the earnings made from placer mining that allowed the miner to get through the winter or until mining season opened up again.

Hardpan: Glacial till: gravel and boulders mixed with clay and tightly compacted.

Host rock: The country rock enclosing an ore body or mineral deposit.

Kick: A high or encouraging assay of an ore sample.

Jump: To acquire by staking over and contesting title.

Lode: In place in the rock.

Long tom: A larger version of a sluicebox.

Mining camp: A district where mines and developing prospects are located.

Moose pasture: Ground with no known mineralization that has been staked on speculation as a mineral claim.

Muck: Rock broken in the process of mining.

Ore: Rock that contains enough mineral to be mined profitably.

Outcrop: Surface exposure of rock or ore.
Overburden: Material such as hardpan, soil, etc., that must be removed to expose an outcrop.

Penstock: A sluice or flume with a gate to control the flow of water to a water wheel.

Placer: Pertaining to the recovery of gold from alluvial deposits.

Prospect: A mineral claim or mining property considered to have a potential value.

Pyrite: Iron sulphide: also known as "fool's gold."

Riffle: In a river, a shallow section with swift water running over it; in a sluice box, baffles, such as strips or blocks of wood that create the right conditions to precipitate heavier particles that contain gold.

Rocker: Essentially a box with mineral-catching riffles that can be operated by one person; rocking the box helps to separate the rocks and tailings from the black sand.

Showing: An occurence of mineralization that might have potential.

Singlejack: A one-man method of drilling rock by hand. The drill steel is held in place with one hand and struck with a sledge hammer held in the other.

Strike: The main trend or horizontal direction of a vein, mineral deposit, or rock formation. Also a discovery.

Sulphide: A natural combination of sulphur and metallic minerals.

Tailings: The remnants in a gold pan or sluice after washing or concentration; also rocks removed from surface workings or streambeds in order to get to an outcrop. These were often left left in piles known as tailing heaps.

Workings: An exploratory excavation or mine site.

Appendix 4

ELEMENTARY PLACER EQUIPMENT.

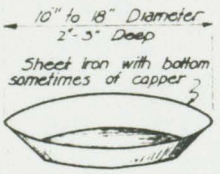
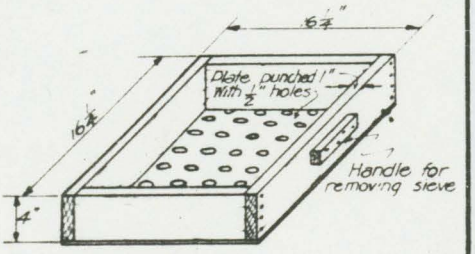


Figure 1. Gold Pan.



Sieve Box

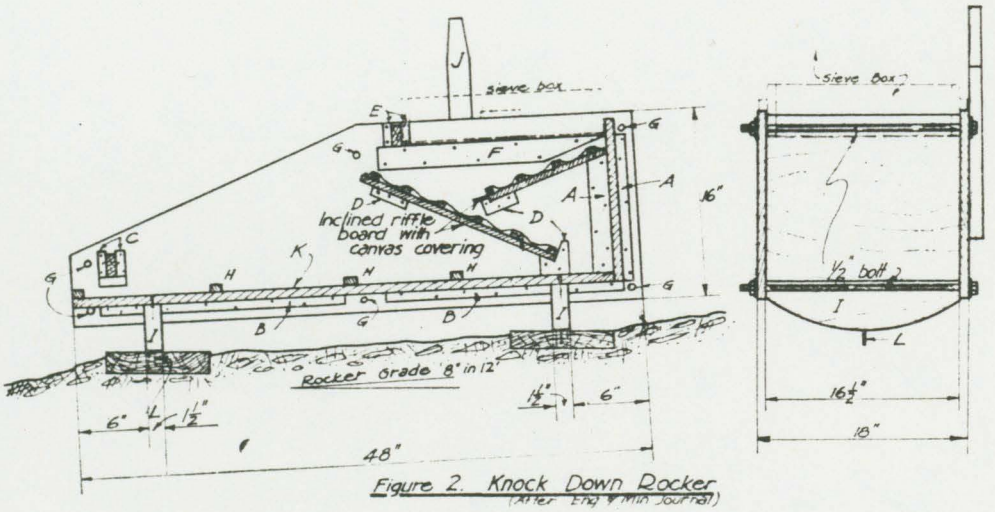


Figure 2. Knock Down Rocker
(After Eng & Min Journal)

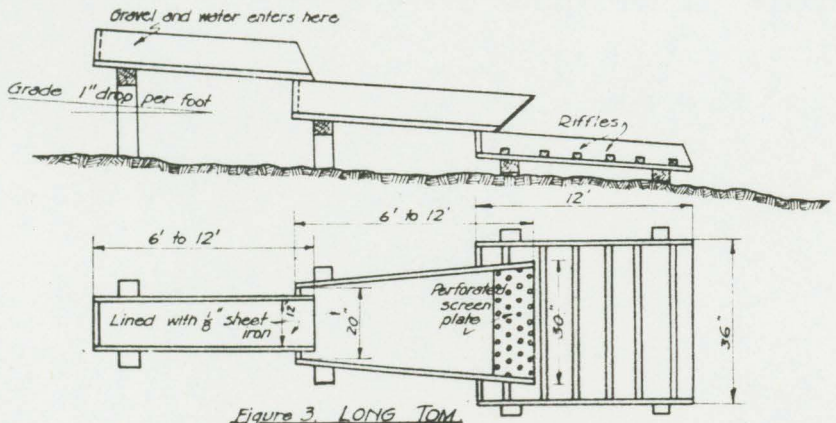


Figure 3. LONG TOM
(After Staley)

With Report by A.M. Richmond
Ass't Res. Eng. Victoria, B.C. 1933
B.C. Bureau of Mines

Appendix 4

TYPES OF SLUICE BOX & RIFFLES.

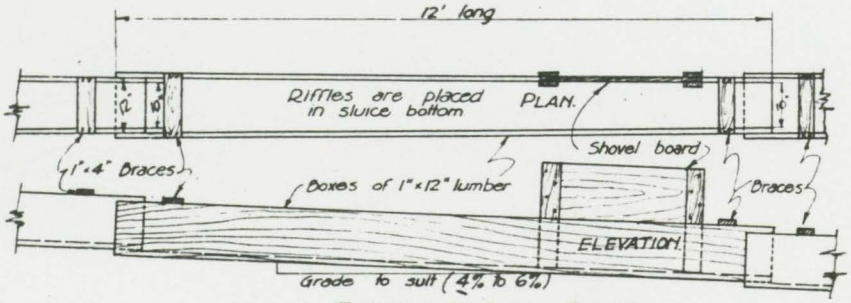
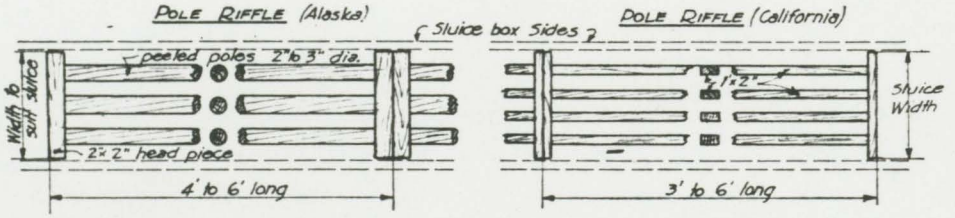
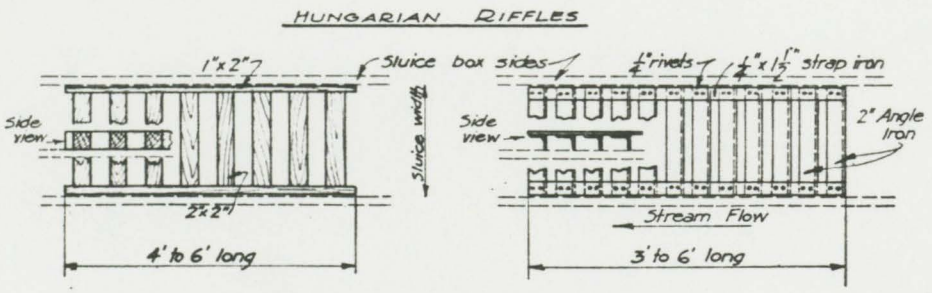


Figure 4. EXAMPLE OF SMALL SLUICE.





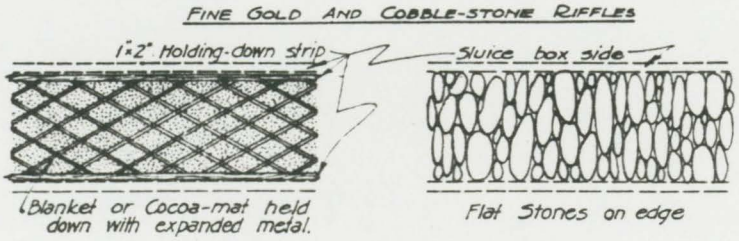


Figure 5 RIFFLES.

With report of A.M.Richmond, Ass't. Res. Eng. Victoria, B.C., 1933. B.C. Bureau of Mines.

A.M.R.

VITA

Surname: Cooper Given Name: Lesley

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Vancouver Community College	1985 to 1986
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University of Victoria	1991 to 1995

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.	University of Victoria	1993

Honours and Awards:

Best Article, B.C. Historical Association	1994

Publications:

"An Explosion of Misunderstanding: The Neweete War of 1850-1851." B.C. Historical News Winter 1994.

"Dominion-Provincial Placer Mining Training School, Quesnel Forks, 1938-39." Likely Cemetery Society Newsletter Summer 1994.

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Author [redacted]
Lesley Cooper
June 15, 1995