

Possessing Eden: Victoria's Ghosts

by
Christina Esther Nilsen
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Supervisor: Dr. Annalee Lepp (Department of History)

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the city of Victoria, British Columbia has developed a reputation as an extraordinarily haunted place. An impressive array of local ghost tales, spooky legends and haunted landmarks have, since the city was established as a Hudson's Bay Company Fort in 1843, accumulated in local histories, pioneer reminiscences and newspaper stories, in compilations of supernatural lore and in historical fiction. Exploring points of intersection between the politics of past and place encrypted in literary renderings of ghosts and hauntings, and the construction of regional identity, "Possessing Eden" ties local hauntings to the role of the past – and popular understandings of it – in both Victoria's popular image and identity as a "little bit of Old England," and its shadowy alter-ego, as an unruly frontier port city.

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INTRODUCTION

VICTORIA, B.C.: CITY OF SPIRITS

In most cities, it's easy to forget that there are two populations: one living and one dead. Not so in Victoria, British Columbia. Down at the tidy harbor on a warm August evening, there was lots of evidence of the lively side of the city. Crowds of tourists watched an acrobatic dancer while nearby a bag-piper bleated like a wounded sheep. In the harbor itself, the final heats of the weekend's dragon-boat races were playing out. Flowers bloomed in profusion from every patch of open ground. The living, breathing side of Victoria, the lovely provincial capital that occupies southern Vancouver Island, was all around me.

As dusk gathered, though, so did the gloom. The Fairmont Empress Hotel – a massive brick monolith that looms over the harbor – started to look a little sinister. Across the street, I found John Adams patiently waiting for anyone who wanted to encounter Victoria's other population, the ones whose moments in the summer sun have long since passed. Tall, bearded, and all in black from felt hat to umbrella, he was somber as a shadow. He has taken on the role as spokesman for the city's ghosts, and he's down at the harbor every night during the summer, just in case anyone wants to hear what they have to say.

'I'm not sure why there are so many ghosts in Victoria, but it is the most-haunted city in British Columbia,' he said, opening another walking tour of the Old Town's spirits ...

The tour went on for two hours through Victoria's remarkably well-preserved old town. Adams explained that at one time Victoria was Canada's most important West Coast port. As railways and then highways shifted the emphasis to Vancouver, Victoria became an economic backwater. Ironically, that helped preserve its neighborhoods of historic houses and businesses. As it got darker and the crowds of tourists dissipated, it became easier to imagine the town as it was, an unruly port on the frontier. Every block had its ghosts ...

The Maritime Museum is on the site of the old jail, where Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie sentenced 27 men to hang. The hangings were considered entertainment in those days, drawing hundreds of Victorians for the macabre show. Fan Tan alley, which once transected the opium dens and brothels of Chinatown, was once the site of a gruesome murder of a prostitute. She was beheaded by a spurned suitor with a fish slicer. The bodies from a steamship wreck were stacked behind a bank building (a sight that traumatized Robert Service, who was living in an apartment on the third floor at the time.) Another prostitute slashed the throat of her boyfriend when she found out he was two-timing her. For each of these events and resulting corpses, Adams produced anecdotes of disturbances, ghost-sightings, or poltergeist-like activity nearby ...

I found the town's cheery British façade much tempered knowing it rested on a foundation of lust, addiction and murderous greed. It was Cambridge meets Deadwood.

Chris Welch, *StarTribune*, 17 July 2004

The city of Victoria – capital of British Columbia, city of gardens, and long promoted as a “bit of Old England” set amidst the magnificent scenery of the Pacific Northwest – is also known for its ghosts.¹ Victoria is “the most haunted city in British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest,” writes local historian and ghost expert John Adams in his 2002 compendium of local ghost-tales, legends, and historical associations, *Ghosts & Legends of Bastion Square*.² “Ghost stories abound in Victoria and many love to tell them,” begins Danda Humphrey’s 1997 *Favourite Ghost Stories From the Tours of The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria*.³ “Those interested in Canadian ghostlore will be impressed by the sheer volume of British Columbia ghost tales,” observes Robert Belyk in his 1990 compilation of provincial hauntings, *Ghosts: True Tales of Eerie Encounters*. “In relation to population, only the Maritime region, with its long history of phantom ships, ghostly crews and the like, clearly has more ghosts than British Columbia.”⁴ And according to Jo-Anne Christensen, author of *Ghost Stories of British Columbia* (1996), ghost stories are a part of B.C.’s social history: “[L]ove it or hate it, believe it or not – it would seem that, as a society, we can’t get enough of these mysteries.”⁵

Indeed, known from newspaper stories, radio and television documentaries, popular literature, innumerable internet sites, and from the ghostly walking tours led by Adams through the city’s most haunted districts, British Columbia, and Victoria in particular, is home to an impressive repertoire of ghost tales, spooky legends and haunted landmarks. Many prominent heritage sites in and around the city have at least one associated ghost,

¹ Kenneth Lines, “A Bit of Old England: The Selling of Tourist Victoria” (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1972), 35.

² John Adams, *Ghosts & Legends of Bastion Square* (Victoria: Discover the Past, 2002), vi.

³ Danda Humphreys, *Favourite Ghost Stories From the Tours of the Old Cemeteries Society* (Victoria: Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria, 1997), 4.

⁴ Robert Belyk, *Ghosts: True Tales of Eerie Encounters* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 1990), x.

⁵ Jo-Anne Christensen, *Ghost Stories of British Columbia* (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1996), 10.

including Craigdarroch Castle, Point Ellice House, Helmcken House, the Empress Hotel, Bastion Square, the Maritime Museum, Royal Roads Military College, Old Morris Tobacconists, the “Olde England” Inn, Ross Bay Cemetery, Beacon Hill Park, parts of Chinatown, Rogers Chocolates, the Royal and MacPherson Theatres, and John Tod House. But there are also an impressive array of haunted restaurants, hospitals, offices, alleys, highways, ghostly shorelines, watercourses, and private residences. There are white and gray ladies, Aboriginal ghosts, Chinese ghosts, Black ghosts, phantom Hudson’s Bay Company traders and apparitions of British and American colonists and settlers. There are hitchhiker ghosts, spectral tramps, smoking and drinking ghosts, apparitional prostitutes and spinsters. There are ghosts of suicides, accidents, murders and gravesite disturbances. There are also ghost ships, echoes of a phantom chain gang, ghost pets, ghost lights, and poltergeists. A celebrated cast of eccentrics, city-builders, and high-society colonials haunt Victoria as ghosts (or tangentially as characters in ghost stories), including Francis Rattenbury (the famous eccentric who designed two of Victoria’s most prominent architectural landmarks, the Empress Hotel and the British Columbia Parliament Buildings), Joan Dunsmuir (coal baron Robert Dunsmuir’s widow), Caroline and Katherine O’Reilly (nineteenth-century gold commissioner Peter O’Reilly’s wife and daughter), *British Colonist* founder and B.C. Premier Amor de Cosmos, and Supreme Court “hanging judge” Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie. But there are also ghosts of lesser-known figures from Victoria’s past, including R.H. “Soap and Water” Johnson (a nineteenth-century barber who allegedly committed suicide by slitting his throat with straight razor) and Doris Gravelin (a young nurse strangled by her estranged husband near the Victoria Golf Course in 1936). And there are also scores of nameless ghosts,

their vague and lifeless shades given form and meaning by the patterns of their appearances, or by association with the particular individuals or places they haunt.

Why is Victoria so haunted? No one knows for certain, but according to John Adams, some have sought explanations in the geography. “Perhaps it is the damp mists that hang over the city at certain times of the year,” he suggests. Or perhaps it is the region’s 6,000 year history of human occupation. Or perhaps Victoria is located “at the conjunction of many ley lines (forces of energy that run through the earth in straight lines).”⁶ Long associated with age and notorious for haunting old buildings, ghosts gain currency from apprehensions of spookiness associated with both the physical geography and the past. But they also lend qualities of mysteriousness and intrigue to landscapes, and in this sense, Victoria’s reputation for ghosts seems to especially befit a city so noted for its romantic and enchanting qualities. Since 1843, when Hudson Bay Company trader James Douglas dubbed southern Vancouver Island “a perfect ‘Eden’ in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the North,” popular descriptions of Victoria have returned to an image of the Queen City as a romantic British garden.⁷ Advertised as a “bit of old England” since the early twentieth century, Victoria’s nineteenth-century architecture and abundant flower gardens have proved durable assets in its promotion as an attractive and unique holiday destination.⁸ Testimonials to the beauty of the city’s picturesque scenery, temperate climate, and English character abound in tourist literature and popular histories, in which, akin to the long tradition of allegorical gardens in literature, it is not

⁶ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, vi.

⁷ James Douglas to James Hargrave, 5 February 1843, cited in John Lutz, “Preparing Eden: Aboriginal Land Use and European Settlement,” Unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association, 1995 in Janis Ringuette, “Beacon Hill Park History 1842-2004,” 2004

<<http://www.islandnet.com/beaconhillpark/contents/chapter1.htm>> (10 September 2004).

⁸ Lines, “A Bit of Old England,” 35.

unusual to find the language of enchantment.⁹ For example, in her 1947 sketch of local history and pioneer reminiscences, *Romantic Vancouver Island: Victoria Yesterday and Today*, local author Dorothy Abraham wrote that Vancouver Island is known as “the Enchanted Island of the Pacific.”¹⁰ Neither an empty nor an isolated assertion, Abraham’s observation coheres with the romantic and nostalgic thrust of much of the popular historical literature about Victoria.¹¹ According to Abraham, “the good old days” when Vancouver Island was a Crown Colony, were “days of pioneering, of hardships, privation, and adventure, of human beings wrestling with nature in this wild and romantic part of the Pacific Coast.” They were “days of sailing ships, of fur trading, of attempted invasions, tribal wars, and boundary disputes ... Of duels, murders and hangings; of desperate men who drank deeply and shot to kill. Of Indian disturbances ...”¹² Filled with celebratory biographical details about the lives of early white pioneers, offset by titillating tales about “savage” Indians, crime, murder, duels, hangings, and shipwrecks, *Romantic Vancouver Island* – in its emphasis on dramatic episodes from the past – is typical of both popular historical literature and ghost stories set in Victoria.¹³ Indeed, due in part to the role of local historians, who have done much of the work of ghost-story-telling here, the history of haunting in Victoria is bound up in the role of the past - and popular perceptions of it - in the British cultural nostalgia of the city’s popular image and identity.

⁹ Lines, “A Bit of Old England,” 35.

¹⁰ Dorothy Abraham, *Romantic Vancouver Island: Victoria Yesterday and Today* 6th Edition (Victoria: Acme-Buckle Printing Co. Ltd., 1968), n.p.

¹¹ Abraham, *Romantic Vancouver Island*, 58, 80.

¹² Abraham, *Romantic Vancouver Island*, 13.

¹³ Abraham, *Romantic Vancouver Island*, 24.

This thesis began as an investigation into Victoria's reputation as an exceptionally haunted city. But as I read my way through the local repertoire of ghosts and ghostly tales, I found myself wandering away from my subject, seduced by an endless web of literary precedents, psycho-social explanations, and historical contexts. Tangents as seemingly disparate as German mermaid lore, architectural design history, and spectral poetics in contemporary literary theory kept me busy for months in the University of Victoria's MacPherson Library. I read my way through academic histories of ghosts and ghost-belief, through popular as well as "serious" local histories, through writings which linked ghosts to the Enlightenment, modernity, colonialism, nationalism, political subjectivity, postmodernism, time, death, spiritualism, heritage preservation, vaudeville, romantic literature, horror fiction, ancestor worship and graveyard design. I read dissertations on subjects as seemingly far-flung as rhetorical conventions in the promotion of tourism and the post-colonial politics of environmental preservation. Fixated on Art Bell's paranormal radio program, *Coast to Coast AM*, I listened to thousands of on-air reports of alien abduction, time-travel, supernatural encounters and psychic science. I read countless place-name guides and tourist brochures, local fiction, religious discourses, historical maps and microfilmed newspaper stories. I spent a chilly October evening with John Adams touring some of Victoria's more famously haunted landmarks. And gradually, as my apparitional subject began, at last, to materialize, I realized that the wide-ranging derivations, associations and implications of Victoria's ghosts were anchored by precisely what made them *Victoria's*. I was, I discovered, investigating the construction of regional identity. Why then is Victoria so haunted? My answers begin from the premise that despite their otherworldly associations, their

backward-looking semblances, and their seemingly private and psychological derivations, ghosts and ghostly emanations are conjured by and serve the social and cultural worlds they haunt.

Historiography

Searching out scholarship on ghosts to construct a methodological and theoretical framework for my own study, I became quickly aware that if anything like a historiography of haunting may be said to exist, it owes its existence less to the historical discipline, than to literary and cultural studies. However, although historians (an empirically driven bunch) have tended to sidestep ghosts as immaterial, inscrutable and even inconsequential, two germinal exceptions – W.E.H. Lecky and Keith Thomas – began a dialogue on ghosts which continues to echo through more recent scholarship from a variety of disciplines. In his *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, nineteenth-century intellectual historian Lecky wrote that there had been “no change in the history of the last 300 years more striking, or suggestive of more curious enquiries than that which has taken place in the estimate of the miraculous.” Between 1650 and 1800, according to Lecky, European society had undergone a seismic shift in attitudes toward the supernatural:

Yet, a few centuries ago, there was no solution to which the mind of man turned more readily in every perplexity. A miraculous account was then universally accepted as perfectly credible, probable, and ordinary. There was scarcely a village or church that had not, at some time, been the scene of supernatural interposition. The powers of light and the powers of darkness were regarded as visibly struggling for the mastery. Sainly miracles, supernatural cures, startling judgments, visions, prophesies and prodigies of every order, attested the activity of the one, while witchcraft and magic, with all their attendant horrors, were the visible manifestations of the latter.¹⁴

¹⁴ W.E.H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1865), quoted in Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14.

Nearly a century later in his 1971 study of hitherto neglected facets of popular religion in early modern England, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*, Keith Thomas attributed the alleged decline in ghosts after the eighteenth century in England to a growing sense of disregard toward the past, a shift propelled in part by the theological changes wrought by the Protestant Reformation, but which owed its deepest debt to the modernization of English society. “So long as it lasted, the doctrine of Purgatory gave impressive reinforcement to the notion of society as a community uniting the dead and the living,” wrote Thomas.¹⁵ But contrary to Catholic teachings, which explained ghosts as souls trapped in limbo, the repudiation of Purgatory which accompanied the Protestant Reformation reconfigured ghosts (at least in formal, theological terms) as Satan’s work or Popish fraud.¹⁶ Moreover, the belief that sons could no longer atone for the sins of their fathers rent a spiritual cleft between generations, who were alienated further by the material transformations which accompanied the modernization of English society.¹⁷ Industrialization and urbanization scattered once tightly knit communities. Average life-spans increased, and with the onset of retirement, the elderly were increasingly removed from active social life. Additionally, the advent of bureaucratic policing institutions after 1700 had usurped, in part, the traditional role of ghosts as agents of social control.¹⁸ “If men stopped seeing ghosts in eighteenth-century England,” wrote Thomas, “it was because apparitions were losing their social relevance, not just because they were

¹⁵ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 603.

¹⁶ Thomas, *Religion*, 587-9.

¹⁷ Thomas, *Religion*, 587-9.

¹⁸ Thomas, *Religion*, 598, 602-5. On ‘traditional’ English society, Thomas wrote that “eighteenth-century England was not a traditional society in the sense that fifteenth-century England had been. Men’s actions were less explicitly governed by concern for the wishes of their ancestors or their spiritual welfare.” *Religion*, 606.

regarded as intellectually impossible.”¹⁹ Beneath all of their ghoulish historic ends, from keeping the guilty awake at night to exemplifying church teachings, the essential and enduring task of ghosts was, according to Thomas, “to ensure a reverence for the dead and to deter those who sought to molest their bones or frustrate their dying wishes.”²⁰ But as “men grew prepared to accept innovation, unmoved by the prospect of their ancestors turning in their graves ... their relationship to their forefathers ceased to be close enough for the threat of ghostly vengeance to make much sense.”²¹

In contrast to meaning-driven studies of the internal coherences of belief systems, Thomas’ functionalist approach to ghosts as sociological phenomena combined anthropological and historical methods in what has been both applauded and faulted as an example of how (or how not to) apply methodologies derived from the study of “primitive” or “traditional” cultures to western industrial settings.²² Anthropologist Hildred Geertz, for example, wrote that “the construct ‘magic’ as used in much of today’s current thinking about exotic belief systems draws its aura from the social prestige of the cultivated groups who employed the construct as an ideological weapon in the past.” Beliefs and ideas, argued Geertz, cannot properly be understood apart from the particular, historical worldviews in which they emerge.²³ However, defending his use of an older functionalist approach to the study of religion and magic, as opposed to newer structuralist and post-structuralist models which emphasized the linguistic and symbolic

¹⁹ Thomas, *Religion*, 606.

²⁰ Thomas, *Religion*, 602.

²¹ Thomas, *Religion*, 602.

²² On the Keith Thomas’ use of anthropological methods, see, for example, Alan Macfarlane, “Keith Thomas, Religion, and the Decline of Magic,” *History Today* 31 (February, 1981): n.p. <<http://www.historytoday.com/index.cfm?Articleid=15733>> (3 March 2004); Thomas, “History and Anthropology,” *Past and Present* 24 (1963): 3-24.

²³ Hildred Geertz, “An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6,1 (Summer, 1975): 88.

determinants of human thought and action, Thomas countered that although “religion” and “magic” might be inappropriate categories of analysis in cross-cultural studies, they were concepts which grew apart from one another in the early modern English setting, and were thus, appropriate to its study:

The classic distinction between the two ... normally associated with E.B. Tylor and other nineteenth-century anthropologists, was in fact originally formulated by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers. It was they who first declared that magic was coercive and religion intercessionary, and that magic was not a false religion, but a different sort of activity altogether. The error of Tylor and Sir James Frazer (but not, I think, of Thomas) was to make this distinction universal by exporting it to other societies.²⁴

Keith Thomas has also been critiqued for assuming that ghosts are hallucinations, an assumption with its own cultural and historical contingencies. For example, according to Terry Castle, a specialist of eighteenth-century literature and culture, the metamorphosis which historians have commonly identified as the withering of ghost-belief has been widely misunderstood. The so-called Age of Enlightenment supernaturalized the mind itself, argues Castle in *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, gesturing to the preponderance of ghosts in the literature of the Romantics and to the development of psychoanalysis as examples of how, with the rise of scientific rationalism, ghosts were internalized and psychologized as dream figures, repressions, and neuroses:

One cannot speak in the end, it seems to me, of a ‘decline of magic’ in post-Enlightenment Western culture, only perhaps of its relocation within the new empire of subjectivity itself. The apparition writers in the decades around 1800 took on the traditional world of spirits, and like sorcerers apprentices performed on them the very act of magical metamorphosis that Freud would later celebrate – the transformation of metaphysics into metapsychology. But the effect was to demonize the world of thought. We have yet to explore very deeply the social, intellectual, and existential implications of the act of demonization. Instead we continue to speak – innocently perhaps but also with subtle anxiety – of being ‘haunted’ by our thoughts and pursued by ‘ghosts’ inside our heads. We fear (and legislate against) the madness of the phantom-world within. Until it is possible to speak of the ghost inhabiting, as it were, the mind of rationalism itself, this

²⁴ Keith Thomas, “An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, II,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6,1 (Summer, 1975): 91.

sense of being haunted is likely to remain – far more than any nervous fear of the police – the distinctive paranoia of modern life.²⁵

Modern consciousness, however, is distinctly political, argues American literary scholar Renée L. Bergland in *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. According to Bergland, at the same time as ghosts were internalized and imagined to be psychological phenomena, Europeans and Americans began to internalize political and specifically national identities. The enlightened rational mind which Terry Castle characterized as a haunted mind was in fact, she claims, a haunted *national* mind. Linking the birth of political subjectivity to the internalization of spectral entities, she writes that among Europeans and Americans, public communal and national ghosts increasingly replaced familial ancestral ghosts. “In Europe, the ghost of Communism. In America, ghosts of slaves and Native Americans.”²⁶ Acknowledging that women, African Americans, foreigners, and the impoverished have all been spectralized in American literature, Bergland writes that the ghosts of Native Americans perform a unique role in the American national imaginary. Calling the ghosting of Native peoples a discursive technique of Indian removal, she asserts that “the American subject ... is obsessed with an originary sin against Native people that both engenders that subject and irrevocably stains it.”²⁷ Sustaining messages of both national guilt and triumph, Indian ghosts haunt American literature, according to Bergland, “because the American nation is compelled to return again and again to an encounter that makes it both sorry and happy, a defiled grave upon which it must continually rebuild the American subject.”²⁸

²⁵ Castle, *Female Thermometer*, 189.

²⁶ Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 9.

²⁷ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 22.

²⁸ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 4, 22.

Published amidst what English Professor Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock terms the “‘spectral turn’ of contemporary literary theory,” *The National Uncanny* attests both to the currency of phantoms “as a privileged poststructuralist trope,” and to contemporary preoccupations with the constructed nature of history and memory.²⁹ Since the 1980’s, writes Weinstock in his introduction to an edited collection of essays on the supernatural in American culture, *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, ghosts and hauntings have attracted increasing attention among academics, particularly in cultural and literary studies.³⁰ For example, citing examples of recent books on ghosts in literature and film, Weinstock lists Howard Kerr, John W Crowley, and Charles L Crow’s *The Haunted Dusk: American Supernatural Fiction, 1829-1920* (1983); Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar’s *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women* (1983); Katherine A. Fowkes’s *Giving Up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts and Angels in Mainstream American Comedy Films* (1998); Kathleen Brogan’s *Cultural Hauntings: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998); Lee Kovacs’s *The Haunted Screen: Ghosts in Literature and Film* (1999), and Dale Bailey’s *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (1999).³¹

Particularly suited to the deconstructionist impulse, ghosts also surfaced as central metaphors in Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1994); Jean-Michel Rabaté’s *The Ghosts of Modernity* (1996); Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997); Peter Buse and Andrew Stott’s *Ghosts: Deconstruction,*

²⁹ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “The Spectral Turn,” in *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 4.

³⁰ Weinstock, “The Spectral Turn,” 3-4.

³¹ Weinstock, “The Spectral Turn,” 4.

Psychoanalysis, History (1999); and Peter Schwenger's *Fantasm and Fiction* (1999).³²

Favored by poststructuralist scholars for their interstitial qualities, ghosts disrupt the modernist *telos* of past, present, and future. Belonging properly to neither the past nor the present, they have been used to question the linearity of history, and to call attention to what Peter Buse and Andrew Stott call “the fact that the sense of the past has been summoned through an iteration that takes place in the context of the present.”³³

Associated with silenced pasts which lurk, or haunt, in the cracks of received histories, “the ghost is a crucible for political meditation and historical memory,” writes Avery Gordon paradigmatically, and “to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories.”³⁴

However, as Judith Richardson points out in her study of upstate New York hauntings, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley*, while many recent studies of ghosts “begin to approach the real-life implications of haunting as social memory, and of ghosts as social artifacts and tools, their findings tend to hover in rarified literary and theoretical spheres.”³⁵ Exploring what ghosts reveal about “the marginal and invisible things that, for many recent scholars, texture and define identity, politics, and social life,” Richardson is unique for locating the politics of memory within what she calls a politics of place.³⁶ *Possessions* is a history of the Hudson River Valley's haunted reputation, made and remade in regional folklore, newspapers, local histories, travel guides, theatre and fiction between the early nineteenth century and the present.

³² Weinstock, “The Spectral Turn,” 5.

³³ Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, eds., *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 15.

³⁴ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 17-18.

³⁵ Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4.

³⁶ Richardson, *Possessions*, 4.

Paying special attention to the writings of Washington Irving, the legend of Sleepy Hollow, conservation initiatives, and local character, Richardson rejects “vestigial superstition or superfluous tradition” as explanations for the ghostly-seeming river valley between Manhattan and Albany. Instead, she finds a multivalent social memory at work in its headless horsemen, Indian ghosts, Revolutionary War soldiers, Dutchmen, slaves and Spook Hollows.³⁷ In a place where rapid growth and wavelike settlement fueled endless problems regarding possession and dispossession, she argues that the combined effect of a spotty official record and a landscape littered by layers of material and immaterial accumulation, “in the form of place-names, ownerships, historical markers, museums, pollution, genes, legends, and ghosts,” was a past that seemed murky and mysterious.³⁸ According to Richardson, “ghosts operate as a particular, and peculiar, kind of social memory, an alternate form of history-making in which things usually forgotten, discarded, or repressed become foregrounded, whether as items of fear, regret, explanation, or desire.”³⁹

Today, however, as ghosts grow increasingly popular across the spectrum of popular and academic culture, the Hudson Valley, and indeed, the city of Victoria, find themselves in league with a growing array of “most haunted” locations around the world. For example, according to an online advertisement for *Hauntings*, a Georgia-based haunted-tour company, Fox Television’s *Scariest Places on Earth* has proclaimed Savannah, Georgia “the most haunted city in America.”⁴⁰ Similarly, *Discover Charleston*

³⁷ Richardson, *Possessions*, 209.

³⁸ Richardson, *Possessions*, 209.

³⁹ Richardson, *Possessions*, 3.

⁴⁰ Nonameco, “Hauntings Tour,” n.d. < <http://www.hauntingstour.com/haunt2.html> > (10 January 2005).

promotes Charleston as “the most haunted city in North America.”⁴¹ “York is the most haunted city in the world,” asserts a BBC story about the 504 hauntings credited to that city by the “Ghost Research Foundation International.”⁴² “Virginia City is [Nevada’s] most haunted city,” claims ghost researcher Janice Oberding of the town with more ghosts to its name than even the much larger Las Vegas, where the flashier yet less numerous ghosts of Elvis, Liberace and Redd Foxx are said to haunt certain local casinos and hotels.⁴³ “A Wisconsin folklorist named Robert Gard once stated that Wisconsin may have more ghosts per square mile than any other state in America,” claims “Haunted Wisconsin.”⁴⁴ “New Orleans has been referred to as the most haunted city in the United States,” claims its *Ghost & Spirit Walking Tours* outfit.⁴⁵ A Philadelphia business invites visitors to “Hear the chilling tales of America’s most historic ... and most haunted city” on a “candlelight walking tour.”⁴⁶ Niagara “is the most haunted place in the most haunted city in Canada,” claims the *Ghost Tour of Niagara Company*, promising “real stories of people’s real experiences with real spirits.”⁴⁷ “If you looked at the files stacked in my office, you’d think Alberta was the most haunted place in the universe!, laughs Barbara Smith, author of three books about the province’s ghosts.”⁴⁸ “Locals and newcomers alike are fascinated by these glimpses into the darker history and haunting of

⁴¹ “Discover Charleston,” n.d. < <http://www.discovercharleston.com/intro7.html> > (10 January 2005).

⁴² “York: Most Haunted City in the World!,” n.d.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/northyorkshire/uncovered/ghost/most_haunted.shtml > (10 January 2005).

⁴³ Janice Oberding, “Janice Oberding’s Haunted Nevada,” 2003 < <http://www.hauntednevada.com/> > (10 January 2005).

⁴⁴ “Ghosts of the Prairie: Haunted Wisconsin,” 2003 < <http://www.prairieghosts.com/hauntwi.html> > (10 January 2005).

⁴⁵ Gray Line New Orleans, “Ghost & Spirit Walking Tours,” 2002

<<http://www.graylineneworleans.com/ghost.shtml> > (10 January 2005).

⁴⁶ “Ghost Tour of Philadelphia,” 2002 < <http://www.ghosttour.com/Philadelphia.htm> > (10 January 2005).

⁴⁷ “Ghost Tours of Niagara,” n.d. < <http://www.ghrs.org/ghosttours/index.htm> > (10 January 2005).

⁴⁸ “Alberta’s Past is Old Enough to Haunt You,” *Travel Alberta Canada*, 1 May 2004

<<http://www1.travelalberta.com/Stories/index.cfm?action=display&storyID=27>> (10 January 2005).

the Nation's Capital," advertises Ottawa's *The Haunted Walk* tour company.⁴⁹

Landmarks including the Alamo, née Mission San Antonio de Valero, Alcatraz, Ashton Villa in Galveston, Texas, Cinderella's Castle at Disney World, the Banff Springs Hotel in Alberta, Music Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Capital and the White House in Washington DC, Stonehenge, the Tower of London, the Pyramids of Giza, and the Great Wall of China have all been extolled as examples of the world's "most haunted" architecture.⁵⁰ And neither are highways exempt from this apotheosis of haunted places: "Just keep driving ... if demon dogs approach you in the night," Linda Dunning warns motorists crossing the Utah desert via Route 666, dubbed "highway to hell" for its legends of apparitions and history of accidents.⁵¹

How are we to understand individual assertions of exceptional hauntedness in light of the contemporary ubiquity of "most haunted" locales? The answer is deceptively simple: history. Stories about ghosts – the dead who return from their graves to haunt landscapes and imaginations - accumulate over time and in place. Surfacing in the shadowy realms of history and memory, conjuring "secrets" from the past, they are bound up in a politics of memory and mourning, which is also a politics of inheritance and belonging, and ultimately, as Judith Richardson is correct to observe, a politics of place.

Scope

⁴⁹ "Haunted Walks Inc.: Walking Tours of Kingston and Ottawa, Canada," 2000 <<http://www.hauntedwalk.com/ottawatour.htm> > (10 January 2005).

⁵⁰ "Haunted Architecture," n.d. < <http://www.angelfire.com/sk2/stparanormal/haunted3.html> > (10 January 2005).

⁵¹ Linda Dunning, "Haunted Utah: Highway to Hell, Mysteries of Route 666 Across Utah," 2003 <<http://www.prairieghosts.com/highway666.html> > (10 January 2005).

Spread over four chapters, “Possessing Eden” investigates literary renderings of ghosts, ghostliness, hauntings and spirits from the colonial period onward, set in and around the four municipalities which today comprise Greater Victoria: the City of Victoria and the District Municipalities of Saanich, Esquimalt and Oak Bay. Set in Victorian Victoria, Chapter One looks at the city’s earliest recorded ghost stories, including reports of apparitions and haunted houses published in the *Victoria British Colonist* between the 1860’s and the 1880’s, discourses on the local spiritualist movement, and David William Higgins’ two volumes of occult-flavored pioneer reminiscences, *The Mystic Spring and Other Tales of Western Life* (1904) and *The Passing of a Race and More Tales of Western Life* (1905). Exploring the nexus of aesthetic, religious and cultural developments which influenced literary renderings of Victoria’s earliest ghosts and spirits, we tease out the simultaneously contrapuntal and complementary relationship between ghosts and the spirit of modernity (preoccupations with reason, order, and progress in particular). Moreover, unraveling the social and political geography of Victorian hauntings, we see how ghost-story-telling was explicitly mobilized as a mode of popular history-telling beginning during the early twentieth century, and how it consequently dovetailed with the construction of regional identity.

Chapter Two looks at both the broad contexts and the particular actors responsible for transforming Victoria from a city whose sparse population of ghosts was lamented by local observers as late as the 1950’s, into one heralded, at the end of the twentieth century, as British Columbia’s most haunted locale. Examining the patterns of haunting which characterize the preponderance of “heritage hauntings” associated with Victoria’s nineteenth-and early twentieth-century architecture, we see how mid-century centennial

celebrations, local heritage conservation initiatives, and surging nationalism propelled appetites for stories about local ghosts and hauntings in conjunction with a broader demand for stories about old homes and pioneers. Paying special attention to the hauntings of Craigdarroch Castle, Point Ellice and Bastion Square, we encounter ghosts of upper-crust British pioneers and settlers, whose phantoms look backward with nostalgia to nineteenth-century white privilege and mourn subsequent periods of decline. Among them, we find a subset of pioneer ghosts whose eccentricities and failures to conform to the norms of upper-crust British colonial society parallels a broader appetite for scandal and sensation evident in popular history-telling about Victoria. And last, but certainly not least, we explore some of the reasons for the preponderance of women (especially prostitutes and spinsters), ethnic minorities (the Chinese, Black people, and Natives), and the poor, whose ghosts turn up with regularity in association with murders, melancholy, suicides, accidents, disturbed grave-sites, dispossession, impoverishment, and miscarriages of justice. This brings us to Bastion Square, whose reputation as the city's most haunted domain derives from its history as the colonial gaol and hanging yard. Harkening back to the gold-rush period in Victoria's history, a preponderance of ill-behaved, disorderly and transient phantoms, offset by the specter of the famous Supreme Court "hanging judge" Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, haunt this architectural symbol of British law and order. Here we explore the nationalist implications of a haunting which refracts an age-old link between ghosts and law through the contours of local history and memory, in a place where spectral emblems of public injustices unsettle a landmark which symbolizes the imposition of British law.

Chapter Three traces stories about the ghosts and spirits of First Nations peoples associated with places in and around Victoria as they have appeared in white writings from the colonial period through the twentieth century. Beginning with one of David Higgins' occult flavored pioneer reminiscences, "The Mystic Spring," we investigate the relationship between public memory and colonialism in four individual places associated with Aboriginal ghosts and spirits: Cadboro Bay, the old Craigflower school-house and museum, John-Tod House and Beacon Hill Park. Therein, we find a range of sometimes contradictory messages and meanings attached to Aboriginal hauntings, which mourn the displacement of Aboriginal peoples from their ancestral lands, and look backward for ancient origins, even as they reinforce the colonization of landscapes and imaginations. Moreover, using Renee Bergland's study of the figure of the Indian ghost in American literature as a guide to the nationalist meanings encrypted in local stories about Indigenous ghosts and spirits, we compare literary representations of Natives in American and Canadian frontier myths, in conjunction with the myth of British colonial benevolence, and the regional significance of the Fort Victoria Treaties, in an effort to tease out the reasons for the paucity of Aboriginal ghosts in local literature, relative to their numerous American counterparts.

Meditating on some of the broader, abstract ways in which history and haunting may bear upon one another, Chapter Four begins with an exploration of the continuing evolution of ghosts and hauntings in two recent works of juvenile fiction, Kit Pearson's *Awake and Dreaming* and Penny Chamberlain's *The Olden Days Locket*. Using haunting as a narrative device to imagine subjects which resist conventional historical methods, both novels navigate tensions between distance and proximity in

relation to the past through the particular possibilities afforded by the notion of possession. Moreover, both novels explicitly deploy and manipulate existing historical understandings for present-oriented purposes, a move which ultimately illustrates what I attempt, in varying ways, to demonstrate through this thesis. That is, ghosts – who by haunting seem to arrive from the past to possess landscapes and imaginations in the present – are, conversely, products of the social and cultural worlds they haunt. In sum, tracing the worldly agents responsible for Victoria's otherworldly reputation – a reputation which, although recent, draws upon more than a century of ghostly accumulations - this thesis explores not only the relationship between historical consciousness and local hauntings, but the ways in which ghost-story-telling has, in Victoria, functioned as an alternative kind of history-telling.

CHAPTER I

VICTORIAN HAUNTINGS: 1862 - 1905

‘Ghosts ! There are no ghosts in Canada !’ said Mr. D—. ‘The country is too new for ghosts. No Canadian is afraid of ghosts. It is only in old countries, like your'n, that are full of sin and wickedness, that people believe in such nonsense.

This theory of Mr. D—'s had the merit of originality, and it is not improbable that the utter disbelief in supernatural appearances which is common to most native-born Canadians, is the result of the same very reasonable mode of arguing. The unpeopled wastes of Canada must present the same aspect to the new settler that the world did to our first parents after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden; all the sin which could defile the spot, or haunt it with the association of departed evil, is concentrated in their own persons. Bad spirits cannot be supposed to linger near a place where crime has never been committed. The belief in ghosts, so prevalent in old countries, must first have had its foundation in the consciousness of guilt.

Susannah Moodie, *Roughing it in the bush*, 1852

As to ghosts or spirits they appear totally banished from Canada. This is too matter-of-fact a country for such supernaturals to visit. Here there are no historical associations, no legendary tales of those who came before us. Fancy would starve for lack of marvelous food to keep her alive in the backwoods. We have neither fay nor fairy, ghost nor bogle, satyr nor woodnymph; our very forests disdain to shelter dryad nor hamadryad. No naiad haunts the rushy margin of our lakes, or hallows her with her presence our forest rills. No Druid claims our oaks; and instead of poring with mysterious awe among our curious limestone rocks, that are often singularly grouped together, we refer them to the geologist to exercise his skill in accounting for their appearance.

Catherine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada*, 1836

Although *Roughing it in the bush* and *The Backwoods of Canada* were written specifically about Upper Canada during the first half of the nineteenth century, they capture paradigmatic associations between ghosts, historical consciousness and perceptions of landscapes which help to explain early developments in the history of haunting, decades later and thousands of miles west on Vancouver Island. Like most nineteenth-century immigrants, Susannah Moodie and her sister Catherine Parr Traill believed that North American history began with the arrival of Europeans. To them, Canadians - who were building history, not burdened by it - seemed a forward-looking,

utilitarian and un-superstitious people. Upper Canada's earliest haunting, the Baldoon Mystery, had only barely taken place when *The Backwoods of Canada* was published in 1836, and others followed, including the haunting of Eldon House in London, Ontario in 1856, and that of Hawley-Breckenridge House in Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1899.¹ But apart from Aboriginal myths and legends, nineteenth-century Ontario seemed, to white colonists and settlers, to possess nothing like the long-established tradition of ghosts and supernatural beings which Moodie and Traill would have remembered from their native Britain.²

Thousands of miles west in Victoria, early developments in the history of ghosts and haunting were similarly anemic. The *British Colonist* published a few reports of apparitions and haunted houses between the 1860's and 1880's, and the spiritualist movement attracted a brief flurry of attention from local reporters during the mid 1870's. But the history of ghosts and hauntings from this period is best known retrospectively from two volumes of short fiction published in 1904 and 1905, David William Higgins' *The Mystic Spring and Other Tales of Western Life* and *The Passing of a Race and More Tales of Western Life*. Influenced by the gothic and romantic tastes of the late Victorian literary scene, Higgins' theatrical sketches of nineteenth-century history and life on the

¹ According to Canadian ghost expert John Robert Colombo, the Baldoon Mystery was Upper Canada's "earliest and eeriest" haunting. Set in the "ghost colony" of Baldoon, a short-lived settlement established in 1804, but already in decline by the War of 1812, the haunting took place between 1829 and 1831 at a farmhouse where dozens are alleged to have witnessed phantom reenactments of battle scenes. The haunting of Eldon House took place in 1856 in London, Ontario. A young woman named Sarah Harris reported that one night, while awaiting a visit from her fiancé, an officer in the British Army, a disheveled gentleman appeared at the door to her father's home. The stranger turned away without saying a word, and disappeared into the night. Later that night, Sarah's fiancé's horse was found at the gate, and the young man's body was found in the Thames River the next day. He had been thrown from his horse en route to the Harris home. Hawley-Breckenridge House in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a southern colonial style house built in 1796, was first reported to be haunted in 1899 when its then owner, Major Charles Stanley Herring, an officer in the British Army in India, claimed to have seen an apparition of a woman in a grey dress. John Robert Colombo, *Ghost Stories of Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2000), 81, 84, 109.

² For examples of ghosts in British folklore, see Jennifer Westwood, *Albion: A Guide to Legendary Britain* (London: Granada, 1985).

California and British Pacific coasts included sentimental romances and tragedies like “Into the Depths” and “The Mystic Spring,” sensationalist mysteries and crime tales like “The Saint and the Sinner” and “A Fugitive from Justice,” and a handful of what Higgins termed “tales of the occult.” With titles like “Weird Messages and Appearances,” “Ghosts” and “The Haunted Man,” the latter included vaudeville-esque sketches of the local spiritualist scene, ghost stories, and supernatural thrillers which, navigating between the sublime and the ridiculous, explored dreams, the unconscious mind, clairvoyance, illusions, and a host of second- and third-hand accounts of shadowy visitations. This chapter traces the history of ghosts, spirits and hauntings in Victoria between 1862, when the *British Colonist* printed the first public report of a local apparition – a “woman in white” seen haunting a downtown alley, and 1904-1905, when Higgins’ pioneer reminiscences and tales of the occult were published by Toronto’s William Briggs. In addition to their importance as the first collection of short supernatural fiction set in Victoria, Higgins’ tales of the occult - which were, in large part, based upon nineteenth-century newspaper coverage of spiritualist activities, apparition sightings and haunted houses - offer a retrospective window into the history of ghosts and hauntings in Victorian Victoria. At the same time, however, Higgins’ tales are social and cultural artifacts which link ghosts to historical consciousness, to perceptions of regional identity, and to the making of modern Victoria. Littered with references to British and American romantic literature, and to the iconography of spiritualism, which together, offered an intellectual and aesthetic vocabulary for exploring rational subjectivity, his literary renderings of the local uncanny were shaped, in no small way, by diffuse and broadly engendered intellectual, cultural and religious developments which fueled appetites for

supernatural subjects elsewhere across North America and Europe during his lifetime. But in both his “reminiscent” and “occult” stories, Higgins’ primary subject was the setting itself. “During the half century that I was in active life,” he wrote in his preface to *The Passing of a Race*, “I carefully studied the peculiarities of speech, the habits and mode of life, and the frailties as well as the virtues of the early gold-seekers on the Pacific Coast, and now venture to lay some of the most startling incidents that came to my knowledge before the reading public.”³ “Entering the province while it was yet in the Hudson’s Bay Company’s hands,” wrote the *Colonist* when *The Mystic Spring* was published in 1904, “Higgins has been closely identified with the social, industrial and political changes that have since occurred. ... [He] has had quite exceptional opportunities of gathering material for the vivid sketches with which he has enriched Western literature.”⁴

Although Victorian Victoria was geographically remote from British and American metropolitan centers like London, New York, Chicago and San Francisco, the southern Vancouver Island locale was neither unaware nor untouched by the intellectual, religious, and aesthetic developments which fertilized nineteenth- and early twentieth-century preoccupations with the supernatural elsewhere across North America and Europe. Already by the eighteenth century, gothic literature, with its haunted castles, irrational terrors, psycho-social disintegration and ontological paradoxes had grown

³ David William Higgins, “Preface,” in *The Passing of a Race and More Tales of Western Life* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1905), n.p..

⁴ “Mr. Higgins’ Book: An Appreciation From Eastern Canada of the Author and His Work,” *British Colonist*, 1 September 1904, 6.

popular in Europe and America.⁵ Drawn to historical localism, folklore, the natural world, the mysterious, the exotic, the fantastic, and the supernatural, nineteenth-century romantic writers embraced the subjective realms of emotion and imagination over scientific rationalism and materialism.⁶ At the same time, as the increasingly scientific, rationalist and materialistic imperatives of the Enlightenment bore down, an arresting overlap of spiritualist and scientific discourses dramatized the epistemological questions which troubled and entranced the Victorian world, a world which was deeply spellbound by novel technologies of the invisible. As science fiction novelist H.G. Wells wrote of his 1895 *The Time Machine*, “It occurred to me that instead of the usual interview with the devil or a magician, an ingenious use of scientific patter with advantage might be substituted.”⁷ Needless to say, ghost stories were immensely popular during this period. “Between 1820 and 1920, the great age of the American ghost story,” writes Howard Kerr in *The Haunted Dusk: American supernatural fiction, 1820-1920*, “most major and countless minor writers tried their hands at supernatural fiction.”⁸ In America, Washington Irving, Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry James, Mark Twain, W.D. Howells, Edward Bellamy, Ambrose Bierce, and Jack London all wrote ghost stories, as did Bulwer-Lytton, Wilkie Collins, Amelia Edwards, Rhoda Broughton, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Charlotte Riddell, M.R. James, Bernard Capes,

⁵ Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 36.

⁶ Laura Dabundo, ed. *Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain, 1780s – 1830s* (New York & London, Garland Publishing, Ltd., 1992), 2-3; William F. Naufftus, ed., *British Short-Fiction Writers, 1880-1914: The Romantic Tradition* (Detroit: Brucoli Clark Layman, 1996), 15; Richardson, *Possessions*, 36.

⁷ H.G. Wells, quoted in Naufftus, ed., *British Short-Fiction Writers*, xvi.

⁸ Howard Kerr, John W. Crowley and Charles L Crow, eds., *The Haunted Dusk: American supernatural fiction, 1820-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), i.

Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Vernon Lee, Oscar Wilde and Richard Middleton in Britain.⁹ In Victoria, there was David Higgins.

In 1903, when the first of Higgins' "western tales" were serialized in the *British Colonist*, the nearly seventy-year-old had already made a name for himself in journalism and politics. Born in 1834 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, he had trained as an apprentice printer in Brooklyn before traveling to San Francisco where he began his newspaper career at the *Morning Call* in 1852. In 1858, he followed the gold-rush north to British territory, and after a two year stint in Yale where he ran Ballou's Express Office and wrote copy for the California press, he settled in Victoria and found work at Amor de Cosmos' *British Colonist*. There, he filled (in his own words) "every position ... from 'devil' to editor and proprietor," in addition to serving in a variety of public roles, including City Councilor, Chairman of the Board of Education, President of the Victoria Fire Department, President of the National Electric Tramway Company, a Member of the Royal Commission on Fisheries, and for nine years, Speaker of British Columbia's Legislative Assembly.¹⁰ "It is not very surprising that so many of the editors of the *British Colonist* of early days were prominent in politics," wrote the *Colonist* in 1958, reflecting on the small group of elite opinion-makers and politicians who had presided over public life a half-century earlier. "After all, they were among the few intellectuals of the frontier."¹¹

⁹ Naufftus, ed., *British Short-Fiction Writers*, xv-xvi.

¹⁰ David Higgins, "The Author," in *Tales of a Pioneer Journalist: From Gold Rush to Government Street in 19th Century Victoria* (Surrey: Heritage House, 1996), 4-6; David Higgins, "Preface," in *The Mystic Spring and Other Tales of Western Life* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), n.p.; Henry James Morgan, ed., *The Canadian Men and Women Of The Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), 348.

¹¹ "Higgins Was a Fighter," *Daily Colonist*, 7 December 1958, 2.

Familiar with the classics of British and American literature, Higgins quoted liberally from the likes of Burns, Pierpont, Scott, Longfellow, Bulwer-Lytton, and especially Shakespeare. “Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn’d,” began “Weird Messages and Appearances,” prefacing a chronicle of séance sequences, encounters with spiritualists and clairvoyants, and ghost-sightings with lines from *Hamlet*. Likewise, “Ghosts” opened with an epigraph from Sir Walter Scott’s “My Aunt Margaret’s Mirror”:

There are times
 When fancy plays her gambols in despite
 Even of our watchful senses, when in sooth,
 Substance seems shadow, shadow substance seems,
 When the broad, palpable and marked partition
 ‘Twixt that which is and is not seems dissolved
 As if the mental eye gained power to gaze
 Beyond the limits of the existing world.
 Such hours of shadow dreams I better love
 Than all the gross realities of life.¹²

The verse alluded to a state of reverie which rationalists pathologized during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reverie was dangerous because it precipitated hallucinatory visions of apparitions, claimed many like William Newnham, who wrote in his 1830 *An Essay on Superstition* that, “The bad habit of indulging the love of mental wandering, without guidance or fixed rule, or definite object,” led to “brainular irritation” – a dangerous precursor to seeing ghosts.¹³ Higgins, however, used the verse to introduce a series of vignette sequences akin to vaudeville theatre sketches, which roved between melodramatic meanderings on the question of spiritual life after death, retellings of local ghost stories together with a few of his own uncanny experiences, and satirical renderings of the local spiritualist scene. Recounting a magic show which he had attended in New Westminster some years earlier, for example, Higgins mocked the

¹² Higgins, “Ghosts,” in *Passing of a Race*, 102.

¹³ William Newnham, quoted in Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 183.

stagecraft of the Australian “spiritualist and necromancer” Professor Bushnell.

Bushnell’s tricks included reviving a dead sheep on stage, restoring the sight of a blind man, concocting love potions and conjuring phantoms. But the illusionist, according to Higgins, was unduly influenced by more than one kind of “spirit” and one feat after another fell flat. The blind man whose sight had been “restored” sprained his ankle and nearly broke his neck when, leaving the stage, he fell into the orchestra pit. The wrong man responded to the love potion. And the “tragic” ghost of the widowed “Mary Doherty” conjured in the dim light of the theatre glided straight off the stage following the blind man into the orchestra pit, tearing her dress on the way down to reveal “the lusty form of a half-clad youth named Seymour.”¹⁴

Professor Bushnell was one of a small number of traveling entertainers who ventured from California as far north as Barkerville during the 1860’s and 1870’s, and in 1862, he brought his “Mysterious and Laughable Entertainment in Electro Biology and Electricity, and Grand Expose of Spirit Rapping” to the Pacific Northwest.¹⁵ Vaudeville road shows were a popular form of entertainment during the nineteenth century, and their programs incorporated a range of ingredients, including trapeze acts and contortionists, can-can and hootchie-kootchie dancers, farce-comedy extravaganzas, absurd poetry, musical medleys, hypnotists, phrenologists, magicians and spiritualists. Girado Leon’s We 3 Company, which toured the Northwest in 1889, for example, featured Dr. Casanovia, a vivisectionist and illusionist, balladeers, an Irish comedian, a bicyclist, and two trained donkeys who were credited with the ability to do everything except talk.

¹⁴ Higgins, “Ghosts,” in *Passing of a Race*, 102-114, 106.

¹⁵ Michael R. Booth, “Gold Rush Theatre: The Theatre Royal, Barkerville, British Columbia,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 51, 3 (July 1960): 97; David Parry, “American Theatre of the West Coast, and its Influence on the Beginnings of Theatre in British Columbia, 1846-1885,” Paper for Theatre 504, University of Victoria, January 1973, 21.

Steen and Wood's World of Mystery and Novelties, which performed in Vancouver in 1891, featured Mr[s]. Steen, a multi-talented clairvoyant who could also float in the air.¹⁶

Séances also provided a popular form of theatre entertainment after the 1850's, and in 1875, the *Colonist* reported the first performance of this kind in Victoria:

At the residence of James Fell, Esq., View street, last evening, there were assembled eighteen ladies and gentlemen who had been invited to witness a series of astonishing spiritual manifestations produced through Mr. Jacobs, a famous medium. A sort of cabinet was improvised with a woolen blanket hung at the door which faced the company. The medium was placed in a chair, his wrists secured with a pair of patent handcuffs (borrowed from the City Police) and the key retained by Mr. Fell, and the medium tied in the chair. Beneath each chair leg was placed white writing paper on which was marked a ring with a lead pencil and within each ring a leg of the chair rested. This was a precaution taken so that if the medium moved the chair legs, being without the rings, would expose the fact. An harmonium and three small bells were placed on a chair distant about four feet from the medium. The blanket was then lowered, the lights turned down and the medium sat as before. Darkness again prevailed for a few moments; when the light was turned on the medium was found sitting with an iron hoop between one of his wrists and the handcuff; soon afterwards a scuttling, rubbing sound was heard from within the cabinet. The medium called out that something was sitting on his knees. All this time rappings on the sides of the cabinet were going on. Presently a man's heavy hand drew aside the blanket, made a motion as if about to shake hands and was then withdrawn. Lights being turned on the medium sat as before. Darkness again prevailed for a few moments; when the light was turned on the medium was found sitting with an iron hoop between one of his wrists and the handcuff; soon afterwards a scuttling, rubbing sound was heard from within the cabinet. The medium called out that something was sitting on his knees. On examination a box of pears which had stood 12 feet distant in another room, and weighed about fifty pounds was found on his knees. All this time rappings on the sides of the cabinet were going on. Presently a man's heavy hand drew aside the blanket and shook its fist at the company. Next followed a small white hand, evidently a woman's which was soon withdrawn and was followed by a child's hand. The next manifestations were most surprising. The head of a Negro appeared at the side of the cabinet – the eye being distinctly visible; next a deathly white face, with white hair, was shown. Then a little baby in long clothes, and finally a man's head with a hat on peered out into the uncertain light of the room. But the most astonishing demonstrations were yet to come. A small hand appeared at the door of the cabinet and was told that the spirit of a little girl wished to speak with her. The first letter of the lady's surname and finally the whole name were given by the medium, and the spirit wrote on her hand the words, 'Margaret Alice -.' It is proper to remark that the lady was an entire stranger to the medium, and that Margaret Alice was the name of her deceased daughter. Next the presence of a man's figure was announced with a scar on the left hand, which was recognized as having been on the left hand of the lady's husband. 'Robert Owen' supposed to be a colored barber came next and laughed and spoke to the company. Several others spoke – one played several tunes on the harmonium, but did not leave their names, and the curtains were drawn back while the music was going on and the medium disclosed and seated passively on the chair, handcuffed and bound. The séance closed at 10 o'clock, all present being mystified and astounded by the extraordinary manifestations. During the evening a spirit expressed a desire to shake hands with THE

¹⁶ Chad Evans, *Frontier Theatre: A History of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainment in the Canadian Far West and Alaska* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983), 174-7.

COLONIST reporter. The reporter complied and found the hand to be warm and pleasant to hold; but it slipped from his grasp and touched him three or four times on the back of his hand and was gone. We understand that Mr. Jacobs will give another private *séance* this evening.¹⁷

A few nights later, the medium Mr. Jacobs performed at the Theatre Royal. “As nothing of the kind has been seen in this city before there will be a full house attracted by the novelty of the entertainment,” promised the *Colonist*, whose review of the performance was less than flattering:

The Spirit Séance at the Theatre last evening was an undoubted failure. Whether owing to the state of the atmosphere, the thin house, the discordant elements present, or the poor machinery, the spirits didn’t show worth a cent. The cabinet trick was closely watched by Mr. Fell and Mr. Allatt, and although spirit hands were seen, musical instruments played and bells rung by Mr. Jacobs, who was supposed to be tied therein, the work was considered unsatisfactory. A gentleman of the San Francisco *Chronicle* mounted the stand and made a short address, expressive of his disgust and then retired. Mr. – rose in the audience and declared that ‘everything that was wicked on earth must be unlocked on earth.’ He was invited into the cabinet and the door closed. When the door was opened the two men were found tied together. Mr. – at once said he had felt a hand – a human hand – upon him. ‘Where did he touch you Bill?’ asked a god from the gallery. ‘On the head,’ replied Bill. Whereupon he was comforted by the remark that he was gone. In the dark séance the medium was tied to two men and the lights put out. A guitar was swung through the air a few times while Haynes struck up a tune on his violin. When the lights were turned on the men were tied as before and the guitar lay on the table! The audience was then dismissed.¹⁸

Anti-spiritualists also traveled the entertainment circuit, the most prominent among them being Harry Houdini, who spent the last thirteen years of his life debunking spiritualist frauds.¹⁹ In Victoria, spiritualism was *exposéd* on stage for the first time in 1876 by Professor S.S. Baldwin and Clara Baldwin, and again in 1877 in *The Egyptian Mystery*, a performance in which extravagant illusions were produced using scientific apparatus, to reveal how “spiritualist” phenomenon could be mechanically produced.²⁰

The *Colonist* advertised the performance as follows:

¹⁷ “Wonderful Spiritualist Manifestations: SPIRIT HANDS, VOICES, FACES AND FORMS!,” *British Colonist*, 13 October 1875, 3.

¹⁸ “At the Theatre,” *British Colonist*, 16 October 1875, 4.

¹⁹ Ruth Brandon, “Magician Among the Spirits,” in *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 164-189.

²⁰ Evans, *Frontier Theatre*, 181.

The first exhibition in this city of this marvelous mystery will be given at Theatre Royal to-night, and as it astonished the public in Philadelphia and other Eastern cities there can be no doubt that it will attract a great amount of attention here. While the entertainment is mystifying to a degree it is also purely scientific, and it is claimed by the manager of the affair that everything Spiritualists attribute to the work of mediums can be executed in a more perfect manner by the instrumentality of scientific appliances. During the entertainment, some most wonderful spectacles will be produced. Amongst them children will be seen floating through the air supported by angels, ladies suspending themselves most incomprehensibly, and specters innumerable will be distinctly beheld. Ghosts walking, tumbling, vanishing, and reappearing will startle the mystified spectators, forming a perfect carnival of diablerie.²¹

Spiritualists believed in two-way communications between the living and the dead, who although they could not be seen, might be “channeled” and thus known through spirit mediums. Both a religious movement and a popular phenomenon, spiritualism’s European beginnings are usually identified with the ideas of the Swedish thinker Emanuel Swedenborg. In America, by contrast, twelve-year old Katie Fox and her thirteen-year old sister Margaret of Hydesville, New York unleashed the spirit-rapping craze in 1848, when they played a trick on their mother, asserting that mysterious rapping noises which they produced by cracking their toe joints against the headboard of their bed were caused by the ghost of a murdered peddler.²² Word of the mysterious manifestations traveled quickly, and as Western New Yorkers converged upon what had previously been a quiet household, the girls were whisked away to Rochester by their older sister Leah. Besieged by a public hungry for what they called “spiritual telegraphy,” the sisters capitalized on their talents as ventriloquists and toe-crackers and by the end of the year, all three had become professional “spirit rappers.”²³ By 1850, one could find a spirit medium or clairvoyant in almost any city or town across North

²¹ “The Egyptian Mystery,” *British Colonist*, 16 May 1877, 3.

²² Howard Kerr, “The Epoch of Rapping Spirits,” in *Mediums, and Spirit Rappers and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 4.

²³ Kerr, “The Epoch of Rapping Spirits,” 4-5; Sheri Weinstein, “Technologies of Vision: Spiritualism and Science in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 124-5.

America, and although the movement's early history in Victoria remains obscure, by 1870, Christ Church's Bishop Cridge had seen fit to warn his congregation against using "incantations, charms, invocations, physical and mental agitations to procure spiritual influence or supernatural signs." Entitled '*Spiritualism': or Modern Necromancy*, Cridge's sermon lambasted what he called "modern [wizardry]" at length, faulting reason, if taken too far, for fueling "superstitious sentiment" by leaving its disciples with naught but the "dreary throneless dominion of materialism."²⁴

Epistemological dilemmas to do with the limits of vision and knowledge were central to discourses on spiritualism. Moreover, as Sheri Weinstein points out in her study of spiritualism and science in nineteenth-century America, "Spiritualists were not the quacks in counterpart to the rational, educated men of science in the nineteenth century." Rather, the movement overlapped with the empirical premise of contemporary scientific developments.²⁵ Electricity, for example, was once surrounded by as much mystery and intrigue as spiritual phenomenon: both were invisible, and since science had illuminated the one, spiritualists saw no reason why it might not illuminate the other. Telegraphy and later the telephone similarly inspired awe over the technological disembodiment of the human voice, leading Robertson T. Barrett to write in his 1931 *The Telephone's Message* that "the apparatus (itself magically hidden from view) allows the spiritualized voice to walk on water. Through mechanical invention, these ethereal bodies attain the very touch of an angelic connection."²⁶ Similarly, the inventor of the daguerreotype, Louis Daguerre's reputation as a gifted illusionist whose *trompe l'oeil*

²⁴ Edward Cridge, B.A., '*Spiritualism': or Modern Necromancy. A Sermon With Preface and Notes* (Victoria: David W. Higgins, 1870), 12.

²⁵ Weinstein, "Technologies of Vision," 126.

²⁶ Franklin Booth, quoted in Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 243.

sets at the Diorama Theatre in France during the 1820's had toyed with the boundaries between reality and deception, lent the early photographic medium an uncanny aura.²⁷

Alan Trachtenberg describes how the daguerreotype elicited associations with the supernatural:

From the beginning, the daguerreotype excited people into states of awe, wonder, reverence clashing with disbelief, and provided a *frisson* of something preternatural, magical, perhaps demonic. A flickering image on mirrored metal, encased like a jewel in a decorated box, the daguerreotype seemed a simulacrum of the real: too real to be understood as just another kind of copy of the world, too immediately compelling to seem only a likeness. Its effect derived, too, from the image's capacity to negate itself when viewed in another light at another angle, to cancel itself into shadow, and rematerialize, as it were, from within itself.²⁸

Using light to capture spectral images, photography was quickly linked to the ideas of Emmanuel Swedenborg and to spiritualism. "Photography became the industrial-age equivalent of alchemy, employing dangerous and elusive elements to discover the elixir of youth, namely the human face immortalized," writes Nancy West of how photography could "potentially render *everything* visible and thus transform all the world into a lucid text." The daguerreotype, like a ghost, could preserve a disembodied image, and capture – through its uncanny use of light – hidden and darkened matters, likening photographs, for some, to representations of the unconscious.²⁹

For Higgins, too, the promise of spiritualism derived from the possibility that science would one day unravel the mysteries of psychic and supernatural phenomenon. "May there not be some law of nature, as yet unrevealed to mortals, by the action of which these remarkable effects are obtained, and which, once understood, will seem plain to the simplest minds?," he asked in "Ghosts." "Scientists, who are hard at work upon

²⁷ Nancy M. West, "Camera Fiends: Early Photography, Death and the Supernatural," *The Centennial Review* 40, 1 (Winter, 1996): 177.

²⁸ Alan Trachtenberg, "Likeness as Identity: Reflections on the Daguerrean Mystique," quoted in West, "Camera Fiends," 176.

²⁹ West, "Camera Fiends," 178.

the many problems that disturb the minds of men, may some day furnish a key to all that is mysterious at this moment, and lay bare to the world much that is hidden behind a veil of uncertainty.”³⁰ A range of notable scientists entertained similar hopes, including early members of the Society for Psychical Research, physiologist and Nobel Laureate Charles Richet, physicists Sir William Crookes and Lord Raleigh, philosopher Henri Bergson, and psychologist William James.³¹

However, although he believed that science might one day provide rational explanations for psychic and supernatural mysteries, Higgins doubted the credibility of most spiritualists. For example, describing a performance given by Eva Fay, a spirit medium who performed in Victoria in 1896, he pointed out how Fay had used ventriloquism, jugglery and a kind of magic writing pad which worked like a palimpsest, to record duplicates of messages written on chemically prepared paper. “I entered a cabinet with her and held both her hands firmly in mine; in spite of which banjos and tambourines were played upon, vegetables were thrown, and my face was slapped by unseen hands,” wrote Higgins of the spectacle which was both mystifying and comic.³² “It’s a queer thing that mediums should appear to tell so much and yet tell so little,” he continued. “I do not know – I cannot recall a single instance in my own experience where a warning from spiritland prevented a catastrophe.”³³ Fay, a clairvoyant as well as a medium, had forecasted “fine weather” for Queen Victoria’s birthday celebration in Victoria, but had failed to predict what would be one of the worst bridge disasters in North American history. “Not a word about a defective bridge which even then was

³⁰ Higgins, “Ghosts,” in *Passing of a Race*, 102-114, 103.

³¹ The Society for Psychical Research, “The Society for Psychical Research,” n.d. <<http://www.spr.ac.uk/>> (August 2004).

³² Higgins, “Weird Messages and Appearances,” in *Passing of a Race*, 144.

³³ Higgins, “Weird Messages and Appearances,” in *Passing of a Race*, 146.

tottering to its fall,” wrote Higgins of the accident which plunged a streetcar and 140 passengers en route to the celebrations in Esquimalt into the chilly water below. “Forty-eight hours after the ‘good time’ was promised by the medium, two-score homes were desolate.”³⁴

Like Fay, most of the spirit mediums and clairvoyants in Higgins’ sketches turned out to be impostors. In “The Old St. George,” for example, Higgins reminisced about a guest at the St. George hotel who had announced herself as a spiritualist. She gave well-attended lecture, at which she demonstrated her (in)ability to intuit the page numbers of passages from a closed book:

With a copy of Shakespeare she was very successful. With the New Testament, which she seemed to know by heart, she was infallible. A gentleman present happened to have in his pocket a small edition of Lindley Murray, and handing it to her asked her to parse a certain phrase which was given as an exercise in the book. She was ‘stumped’ at once: she floundered, and at last abandoned the attempt. My impression has always been that the woman had a phenomenal memory, and that once having read a book, she remembered everything it contained. Her language convinced me that she never looked inside a grammar, and the result showed that I was right. After the book test, spirits were called up; but the results were not convincing and the medium retired under somewhat of a cloud.³⁵

The debacle was followed that night by a somewhat comic attempt to impersonate a ghost:

That night strange things happened at the St. George. Rappings were heard on the walls and doors; bells were heard ringing in parts of the building where no bells were supposed to be, and sepulchral voices resounded in the passages. The landlord and landlady turned out in their *robes de nuit* to investigate, when the noises suddenly ceased. They turned in, and the noises were heard again. They buried their heads beneath the blankets to shut out the din, when a strong hand plucked away the covering. They ran into the hall in time to see a very tall, white figure glide along the passage and disappear at the head of the stairs. They ran to a spot and lying on the floor they discovered a sheet. They proceeded at once to the medium’s room and pounded on the door without getting any response for some minutes. When at last the door was opened by the woman, she yawned as if half asleep. The landlady pushed her way inside, and, proceeding to the bed, found that it was just one sheet short of a complement. The sheet she held in her hand! The next morning the medium quitted the house, and ghosts never again walked the St. George.³⁶

³⁴ Higgins, “Weird Messages and Appearances,” in *Passing of a Race*, 146.

³⁵ Higgins, “The Old St. George,” in *Passing of a Race*, 161-2.

³⁶ Higgins, “The Old St. George,” in *Passing of a Race*, 162.

Higgins was especially critical of females who capitalized on their talents as clairvoyants and spirit mediums. In “Voices and Messages from Dreamland,” for example, he described a medium as “ignorant as a Siwash,” yet seemingly able “read a person at a glance.”³⁷ In the same tale, he parodied another fortune teller, calling attention to her physical largesse, her rude language, and her willingness to exploit the naivety of others for economic gain:

She was a remarkable-looking woman – short and fat, with a waist at least two yards wide; keen, penetrating eyes, and an incisive tongue that was forever dislocating the Queen’s English as she reeled off the fortunes of her auditors, for she claimed to be a clairvoyant. The time was the month of October, 1888. I had gained admittance to the room of the lady upon payment of two dollars. She offered me a chair, while she sat on the side of the bed. Having taken her seat, she swept me from head to foot with a hard, enquiring eye, and, after a moment’s silence, said:

‘You want your fortune told? Well, to begin with, you like the ladies, don’t you?’
‘How do you know?’ I asked.

‘Because,’ she said, reaching out and drawing from my coat collar a long, yellow hair, ‘you carry the sign on your coat.’

She gazed at me intently for a moment, and then said: ‘You are one of the most sperritually inclined men I ever seen. Why, there is sperrits all about you. There is a old man and woman, two or three children, and a young lady wearing a blue turban and big hoops, with her hair hanging down her back – all wanting to speak to you at once.’

‘What are they doing?’ I asked. ‘Playing harps?’

‘They is gazin’ at you. The old man is too weak to talk. He must be a hundred years old, at the very least. I think if you were to come three or four times more he would be able to tell you something important.’

As a single fee was two dollars, and my purse was lean, I began to suspect that the old lady wished, by playing on my credulity, to increase her revenue.³⁸

As historian Adelle Perry points out in *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*, a special and symbolic role was ascribed to white women in the colonial project. They were, as Perry puts it, “expected to shore up white society” by living up to a particular image of white female respectability which

³⁷ Higgins, “Voices and Messages from Dreamland,” in *Passing of a Race*, 216.

³⁸ Higgins, “Voices and Messages from Dreamland,” in *Passing of a Race*, 210.

entailed marriage, motherhood, Christian piety and racial segregation.³⁹ Not that the experiences of white women lived up to the expectations iterated in colonial discourses. In fact, one of Perry's overarching observations is the degree to which "commentators were usually disappointed with the performance of white women who, despite promises, did not succeed in creating an orderly white settler society."⁴⁰ White, male, middle-class, and educated, not to mention a past editor and proprietor of the city's daily newspaper and a public servant in the British Columbia Legislature, Higgins was just the sort of "commentator" Perry refers to. And the women in his tales, most of whom were implicitly white, conform to three basic stereotypes: young, virtuous and unmarried "ladies" with whom he apparently socialized a great deal; virtuous married women; and entrepreneurs, including spirit mediums and clairvoyants, the latter of whom Higgins portrayed as morally suspect, impudent, uneducated, and physically repugnant.

Men also practiced as spirit mediums and clairvoyants. But apart from Professor Bushnell, Higgins only recounted one: Farmer Riley of Port Angeles. Riley, according to Higgins, "appeared to be a very respectable agriculturalist, of the extreme Western type in dress, manner and speech" - not at all like his comparatively vulgar, female peers.⁴¹ Reporting what he witnessed at the farmer's séance, Higgins wrote that the medium had conjured an apparition of an elderly woman, whom two individuals identified independently. "One said she was her grandmother, the other that she was his wife."⁴² Next, the spirit of a young girl appeared. "She wore long ringlets and a white dress. A

³⁹ Adelle Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 174-5.

⁴⁰ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 193.

⁴¹ Higgins, "Voices and Messages from Dreamland," in *Passing of a Race*, 218.

⁴² Higgins, "Voices and Messages from Dreamland," in *Passing of a Race*, 219.

lady recognized her as ‘Rose,’ a cousin who had died many years ago.”⁴³ “If the figures were produced by fraud,” wrote Higgins, “the counterfeit was most clever. If the Farmer used, as some people declare, rubber masks and clothes blown up with air to resemble those ‘we have loved long but lost awhile,’ he was certainly a clever rascal.”⁴⁴

In addition to judging the character and credibility of mediums and clairvoyants, Higgins dwelt at length upon the identities of the spirits conjured in séances and in theatre performances of mediumship, as well as the content of the spirit messages imparted to the living. In “Weird Messages and Appearances,” for example, he reminisced about “a circle for the investigation of the phenomena of spiritualism” to which he had belonged. “We were accustomed to meet each week alternately at each other’s houses, and, resting the palms of our hands on the top of a pine table, received many messages by means of raps from forces that claimed that they were disembodied spirits.” Describing the spirits who manifested as rapping sounds as being generally “in a sedate and serious frame of mind,” Higgins dwelt at length upon the exception, an “unconscionable blackguard” sailor named Richard Loo:

From the way in which he acted I should have thought that he was two or three sailors, and not very sober or moral ones at that. He would attack the table as with a hammer, and would pound upon it with all the vigor of a strong man bent on destroying it. Then he would lift the table two or three feet from the floor, and bring it down again with a tremendous jolt. Upon his approach the other spirits would seem to fly, only returning when Mr. Loo had ceased his operations and gone to some other circle to continue his ill-conduct there. The gentler spirits used to refer to Richard as a ‘bad ‘un’,’ much given to swearing and the use of tobacco and entirely unreliable. The rioter himself said that he was kept near earth because he had been too wicked while in life to mingle with the better natures that inhabit the higher spheres. The whoppers that the former sailor told were so monstrously absurd as to stamp him a lying spirit.⁴⁵

As a kind of theatre, séances offered a temporary reprieve from normal rules of social conduct. Possession freed mediums to say or do a range of things which might otherwise

⁴³ Higgins, “Voices and Messages from Dreamland,” in *Passing of a Race*, 220.

⁴⁴ Higgins, “Voices and Messages from Dreamland,” in *Passing of a Race*, 220.

⁴⁵ Higgins, “Weird Messages and Appearances,” in *Passing of a Race*, 143.

be frowned upon, but which, in the context of a séance, could be attributed to spirits.⁴⁶

Unlike the lying, swearing and smoking spirit of Mr. Loo, however, whose impudent language and deviant behavior provided a comic counterpoint to Christian notions about the spiritual hereafter (what kind of spirit in heaven would swear or smoke?), most of the spirits conjured in Higgins' reminiscences of séances were familial. Identified as the deceased family members and close friends of séance participants, or messenger-spirits who, although they might themselves be unfamiliar to the living, had some important message to pass along from others in spiritland, they admonished drinkers and gamblers, warned of impending misfortunes, forgave the guilty, offered reassurances that the dead had found peace in the hereafter, or simply appeared in enigmatic silent forms, seeming to comfort by their presence alone. For example, although the sketch was clearly intended to be comic, Higgins' description of a performance by a San Francisco medium in "Weird Messages and Appearances" enumerated a fairly typical constellation of spirits. The first emanation, Mrs. Mary Brown, had a message for her daughter: "Tell the daughter that her mother says she has acted wisely, and that prosperity is about to dawn on her and hers," said the medium. The next was Max Popper, who had a message for his brother Ernest: "the spirit says you must stop playing the races or ruin will overtake you. He says you gamble and drink too much." Max had, according to Ernest, "blowed his prains out ven he loosed den thousand tollars at the drack last year." Next came the late son of one Irene Pollard. "The other boys are with him and they are waiting for you," said the medium. "He says he wants you to forgive him for his neglect of you while on earth." Then there was Adelaide Prout, whom six audience members had known before her death by drowning in the San Francisco harbor. "She wishes me to tell

⁴⁶ Evans, *Frontier Theatre*, 174.

you that she is happy,” said the medium. “Much happier than in life.” Adelaide also wished her friend Mrs. Eckert to know that she approved of her divorce, but that the man to whom she was contemplating remarriage would bring her “nothing but unhappiness.”⁴⁷

Like ghosts, the spirits conjured in Higgins’ occult flavored reminiscences were understood to be disembodied emanations of dead individuals. But ghosts differed from spirits in one important regard. Spirits were souls of the dead who had moved on from earth to a spiritual realm. Benevolent and peaceful, they appeared only when explicitly conjured by the living. They were also race-less or implicitly white. Ghosts, by contrast, were unbidden, almost always unwelcome, and their melancholy and malevolent manifestations provoked fear (along with curiosity and a good deal of ribald humor) among their percipients and story-tellers. They were, however, only rarely reported. Not until 1903, when “Ghosts,” “Voices and Messages from Dreamland,” “Weird Messages and Appearances,” “The Mystic Spring” and others of David Higgins’ occult flavored pioneer reminiscences were serialized in the *British Colonist* did Victoria appear to have accumulated much in the way of a regional repertoire of ghostlore. Filtering nineteenth-century newspaper reports of local ghosts and hauntings through a cross-section of vaudeville, Shakespeare, and local history and lore, Higgins’ tales of the occult provided a lively retrospective of the history of haunting to date. “More Ghosts: A Grim Chronicle of Shadowy Visitations,” for example, included an account of an apparition which was first reported in 1862. “The Quadra street cemetery used to have the reputation of being haunted” by a “woman appropriately costumed in regulation white,” wrote Higgins, of a

⁴⁷ Higgins, “Weird Messages and Appearances,” in *Passing of a Race*, 137-9.

ghost glimpsed “gliding, rather than walking through the graveyard.”⁴⁸ She was Victoria’s famous “white lady,” and although Higgins associated her with the old burying ground, she was usually spotted in a downtown alley about six blocks away.⁴⁹ “Was it a ghost?” the *British Colonist* had asked, somewhat glibly, on 1 January 1862:

What is supposed to have been a ‘woman in white’ was observed to flit across Langley Alley near the Boomerang Inn, about half-past 8 o’clock last evening. Three gentlemen assure us that they saw the figure which they took to be a female of about medium height, habited entirely in white cross the alleyway twice within a few moments, and that though followed closely, it was almost instantly lost to view in the dim light near the carpenter shop. One of the beholders – whose teeth chattered violently whilst telling the tale – positively asserted that some figure passed him at 11 o’clock on Monday night near the same spot, and that he saw the face of a not overly good-looking young woman. Her hair was black and hung over her shoulders. She glided rather than walked along and seemed to fade suddenly away when near Watson’s machine shop. He says, that although greatly alarmed, he yesterday said nothing about what he had seen for fear of being laughed at, and would not mention it now if he had not witnessed the same object in the presence of witnesses last evening. We hardly know what to make of the story or the apparition, but incline to the opinion that some wag in the vicinity has thrown a sheet over his head and perambulated the alley for the purpose of working on the fears of weak minded persons. We advise the police to keep an eye on the ‘haunted’ section tonight.⁵⁰

Reading between the lines of the *British Colonist* report, one senses something of a wink and a nod to what was no doubt a “spirited” New Year’s Eve. Nevertheless, the “woman in white” was later identified as Boomerang Innkeeper and noted spiritualist Ben Griffin’s late wife Adelaide.⁵¹ Dead of typhoid at the age of thirty-three, she haunted Langley Alley and the nearby cemetery for decades. She was Victoria’s first ghost.

Like most nineteenth-century Canadian and American newspapers, the *British Colonist* interspersed news coverage and advertising with proverbs and anecdotes, urban legends, tall tales, short fiction, poetry and an occasional ghost-tale.⁵² Pressed to sell subscriptions, editors capitalized on the sensational appeal of accidents, suicides, drunks,

⁴⁸ Higgins, “More Ghosts: A Grim Chronicle of Shadowy Visitations,” *British Colonist*, 25 October 1903, 6.

⁴⁹ Robert Belyk, *Ghosts: True Tales of Eerie Encounters* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 1990), 154.

⁵⁰ “Was It A Ghost?,” *British Colonist*, 1 January 1862, 3.

⁵¹ John Adams, *Ghosts & Legends of Bastion Square* (Victoria: Discover the Past, 2002), 24.

⁵² Paulette D. Kilmer, “‘Madstones,’ clever toads, and killer tarantulas (fairy-tale briefs in Wild West newspapers),” *Journalism and Mass Communications Quarterly* 78, 4 (Winter 2001): 834.

Indian attacks, freaks, births, deaths, marriages, arrivals and departures, the exotic, any vice and especially crime. “This type of coverage was trivial, morbid and inane, but invariably exciting, a classic instance of news as a form of entertainment,” writes historian Paul Rutherford in his study of the late Victorian Canadian press.⁵³ But newspapers also had standards of credibility to maintain: striving toward dispassionate, objective, investigative reporting, the press imagined itself a kind of “public eye.”⁵⁴ Thus while jokes, caricatures, and burlesque provided some levity for readers, the comic style in which Victoria’s earliest haunted houses and ghost-sightings were reported carried with it the added advantage for journalists of distancing them from their subject matter. “In the hands of a less investigative person,” the phenomenon “would have been sufficient foundation for a mild ghost story,” chortled the *Colonist* in 1886, for example, referring to “the mysterious affair at the haunted house of Cormorant Street.”⁵⁵ For months, the dwelling had been troubled by unexplained rapping noises which locals likened to the sound of a train running by the house, prompting the tenant, in desperate search of a corpse, to dig up his backyard until it looked like a “ploughed field.”⁵⁶ Finally cracking the mystery, the *Colonist* wrote that poultry had caused the rattlings and that “agitated minds” had mistakenly interpreted the “pecking and patterings [of a rooster] on the verandah walk . . . as spirit warnings.” Moreover, the “ghost,” had turned out to be Doc Bailey, who, capitalizing on the public’s interest in the allegedly haunted house, “burst into full bloom as ‘The Celebrated Medium’ ready to exchange unlimited cheek for ready cash and live upon public credulity. But the stars were not propitious,”

⁵³ Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: the daily press in late nineteenth-century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 139.

⁵⁴ Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, 81.

⁵⁵ “Mysterious Noises in Houses,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 9 August, 1886, 3.

⁵⁶ “Haunted!,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 18 August 1886, 3.

mocked the daily, and “having ‘tapped’ his acquaintances to the fullest extent,” Bailey “‘spirited’ himself away on the Sound steamer to manifest elsewhere his efforts to live without working.”⁵⁷

In addition to spiritualists, the *Colonist* also took aim at the Chinese, casting them as, in Higgins’ words, “a superstitious race” which “although apparently calm and stoical in demeanor are plagued by devils and hobgoblins to a remarkable degree, especially when they have been indulging in opium.”⁵⁸ In 1867, for example, the *Colonist* caricatured a Chinese servant who believed his kitchen haunted by some “debbil”:

A dwelling house in the suburbs has the reputation of being haunted. The Chinese servant reports that he has heard strange noises, footsteps, groans and knockings, and that on one occasion a lighted candle which he held in his hand was blown out by some invisible agency. John’s pigtail has stood on end ever since the light was put out, and when he leaves the house for an errand he sets his hat on the point of the tail instead of on his head. A gentleman occupying the house doubts the idea of the place being haunted; but John declares that a personage he dignifies as ‘a debbil’ has taken possession of the kitchen at least. We understand that a young gentleman of this city, who is noted for his courage offers to stay one night in the house, and pledges himself that if the spirit makes its appearance he will ‘lay’ it with ‘a blow between the eyes.’⁵⁹

Decades later, Higgins reworked the tale and included it in “More Ghosts”:

A few days ago, a Chinese servant who has a bedroom in the stable rushed into the house of his employer and throwing himself on the floor, buried his face in his hands and wept aloud. Asked as to the cause of his agitation, he told a story of a large man with a white face and a huge nose gazing upon him as he lay in bed and groaning as if in great trouble. The Chinaman said he leaped from the bed and fled to the house for protection. He says that this is the only time he has seen the ghost and he dreads to occupy the sleeping quarters again.⁶⁰

Early Victorian hauntings also doubled as crime-tales. For example, two of Victoria’s earliest reported haunted houses – the Meares and Cormorant Street hauntings – involved ghosts who appeared as apparitions of frightening intruders. In the case of the Meares Street haunting, the haunted dwelling, which was located near a cemetery, had

⁵⁷ “Haunted!,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 18 August 1886, 3.

⁵⁸ Higgins, “More Ghosts,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 25 October 1903, 6.

⁵⁹ “A Haunted House,” *British Colonist*, 13 October 1867, 3.

⁶⁰ Higgins, “More Ghosts,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 25 October 1903, 6.

been inhabited by the Deas family for only a few days when a servant girl, awakened from her sleep by the sound of fire bells ringing, saw an apparition of a colored man looking in her window:

She leaped out of bed and hung a blanket up at the window shutting out the figure. At about the same moment Deas and his wife, who had been awakened by the fire bells saw an arch of blue, green and yellow fire spanning their room. Every object was distinctly visible – over the time o’night [17 minutes to 1 o’clock] was seen and noted. At one end of this arch of fire stood the form of a colored man, who died some years ago, named R.H. Johnson. He waved one hand over his head and with the other first pointed for the center of the arch and then drew it slowly across his throat. The occupants of the room tried to speak but their tongues clove to the roofs of their mouths. They tried to set up in bed but found that power to do so had forsaken them. At last they drew the bedclothes over their heads to shut out the apparition and lay until daylight, when all signs of the grim visitor had disappeared. They arose at six o’clock and commenced to move their furniture into another house, and last night the haunted house was left alone with the ghosts. Yesterday we learned that two families who had occupied the house previously were frequently disturbed by footsteps, the opening and shutting of doors and the frequent presence of supernatural visitors, and had moved away. The affair is very mysterious and opens a field for the researches of the curious.⁶¹

The next day, the *Colonist* reported that the mystery had been solved:

At last we have a solution of the terrible mystery that has hung for three days over the Meares street house. It will be remembered that the occupants of the house saw a bright, flashing light enter the room, followed by a man’s head, and that the servant saw a man looking in at her window. These phenomena are now accounted for. They were created by a colored man who, with a bull’s eye lantern in his hand stood looking into the window. The light was flashed into the two bedrooms to the great terror of the occupants, who having just moved in had not had time to put up blinds. The happy solution of the mystery causes much merriment in quarters where it first created alarm.⁶²

Higgins retold the tale in “More Ghosts,” identifying the ghost, as had the original *Colonist* report, as “Soap-and-Water” Johnson, a colored man who had committed suicide in the dwelling by slitting his throat. “Before noon the family had moved out,” wrote Higgins, “and although the house was afterwards occupied by another family who did not believe in ghosts and never saw any, its evil reputation continued until it was finally torn down.”⁶³

⁶¹ “A First Class Sensation: A Haunted House on Meares Street,” *British Colonist*, 21 October 1871, 3.

⁶² “The Haunted House,” *British Colonist*, 22 October 1871, 3.

⁶³ Higgins, “More Ghosts,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 25 October 1903, 6.

Fifteen years after the Meares Street haunting, the *Colonist* reported what seems to have been Victoria's second haunted house. The headline read: "Haunted! The Strange and Unaccountable Sounds Heard in House on Cormorant Street. The Shade of a Mortal Appears at Intervals and Suggests Existence of a Hidden Crime."⁶⁴ According to the *Colonist*, the tenement house had been troubled by strange noises at night before the landlady saw an apparition of strange man in her kitchen. She awoke a lodger who, "pale as a sheet," confessed to having seen "the figure of a man standing in the hall" near the spot where unexplained footsteps had been heard. Days later the phenomenon recurred, "but in this case," claimed the *Colonist*, "the walker was heard to stagger as though wounded or drunk. On the bedroom floor" was found "a large stain, of what may or may not, be blood." The *Colonist* wrote that "as a proof that the tenants are at least in earnest, it may be mentioned that they have given notice to leave what they may be excused for regarding as a haunted house."⁶⁵

In addition to appearing as frightening apparitions of intruders, ghosts could also work on behalf of the legal order. In Higgins' "The Haunted Man," for example, a stranger who believed himself haunted by the ghosts of a woman and a child became the object of a police investigation:

One night Detective Taylor came into my office and told me that he had watched a strangely-acting man for some weeks, off and on, and had been unable to find out the slightest thing about him. 'And yet,' said he, 'the man acts as if he had committed a murder some time in his past. In fact, he's haunted!'

'What!' asked I, 'you surely don't believe in such things as ghosts?'

'Well, no,' he replied, 'I don't; but that man thinks he is haunted, and I think he is, too. He imagines that he is followed by a child. He fancies he hears the patter, patter of little

⁶⁴ "Haunted! The Strange and Unaccountable Sounds Heard in House on Cormorant Street. The Shade of a Mortal Appears at Intervals and Suggests Existence of a Hidden Crime," *British Colonist*, 5 August 1886, 3.

⁶⁵ "Haunted!," *British Colonist*, 5 August 1886, 3.

feet on the sidewalk, and sometimes he thinks he hears the rustle of a dress as if some woman were walking by his side.⁶⁶

[The] story Taylor had told me about the man being dogged by the sound of a child's footsteps and the rustle of a woman's dress occurred to me. A creepy feeling began to run up my spine and my hair acted as if it were about to rise and lift my hat from my head. I wished myself safe in bed and made a sudden movement as if I was about to open the street door and ascend the stairs, when the lunatic, murderer, or whatever he was, laid a strong hand on my shoulder.⁶⁷

By being haunted, the stranger had attracted the attention of a police officer, who made an automatic association between hauntedness, guilt and crime. The policeman visited the haunted man at his room on Fort Street, where he saw a daguerreotype case with two photographs of a young woman and a child in it. Noting the daguerreotypist's address in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, he traced the haunted man's identity and notified his estranged wife and child of his whereabouts. Six weeks later, the time required to reach Vancouver Island via Panama and San Francisco from New York by sea, the man's wife and child arrived in Victoria. Coleman had deserted his wife and child, and had somehow come to believe them to be dead. Happily reunited, the family returned to Pennsylvania.⁶⁸ And although the tale ultimately rationalized the ghosts as hallucinations derived from a guilty conscience, the haunting nonetheless served an important sociological function as a catalyst in the reunion of an estranged family.

In *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, literary scholar Renée Bergland writes that after the eighteenth century, among "enlightened" western peoples, family ghosts declined while communal, and specifically national ghosts gained importance.⁶⁹ In Victoria, however, where public ghosts were also family ghosts (and visa versa) this dichotomy is difficult to maintain. Here, to be sure, early stories about

⁶⁶ Higgins, "The Haunted Man," in *Mystic Spring*, 333-4.

⁶⁷ Higgins, "The Haunted Man," in *Mystic Spring*, 344.

⁶⁸ Higgins, "The Haunted Man," in *Mystic Spring*, 333-4.

⁶⁹ Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 9.

ghosts and spirits were often set within the private locus of the family and its material domain, the home. Ancestral spirits conjured by their living relations, articulated and reinforced kinship ties between families and friends beyond the separation of death. Threatening families, scary ghosts trespassed on dwelling houses. And “explained” ghosts like those in “The Haunted Man,” reunited families separated by geography, and by the time required to travel across long distances. Ghosts and spirits were different kinds of emanations, of course. Most ghosts were scary. Unbidden, they haunted as frightening shades of dark-skinned criminals and intruders, or in the case of Victoria’s first white lady, as a frightening specter of an untimely death. Spirits, by contrast, were benevolent, desired and seemingly race-less or implicitly white.

Yet, reported in newspapers and incorporated into the landscape of public memory, spirits and ghosts were equally social figures, whose stories looked backward to gold rush period, which stands out in popular renderings of local history as the “moment” which transformed the “bucolic” trading post surrounded by Natives and a few hundred British colonists and settlers into a frontier city, bursting at its seams with the tens of thousands of miners who arrived seemingly overnight on ships from San Francisco, as had Higgins. Reading editions of the *British Colonist* published in the years following 1858, one gains an appreciable sense of prevailing preoccupations with legal, social, and moral regulation, which dovetailed with contemporary values of reason, order and progress. Local opinion-makers decried public “problems,” ranging from prostitution, gambling, liquor, violence, and disease, to the presence of Native and Asian peoples, transients, unmarried men, mixed-race marriages, the arrival of several hundred Black people in 1858, spirit mediums and clairvoyants, and the loosely-termed “strange

characters” (as Higgins put it) who might have been “men of importance in the Old Country,” but who “had allowed liquor, cards or some other bad habit to run away with their brains, and leave them morally and financially stranded in a community that had once conferred honors upon them.”⁷⁰ “Crime and crime stories ... can be especially revealing of the subjectivity of the law abiding population,” writes historian Tina Loo in *Making Law, Order and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871*.⁷¹ Likewise, in an increasingly scientific age, stories about ghosts and spirits can be especially revealing of the subjectivity of a “rational” population. Certainly, in Victorian Victoria, ghosts and spirits – and their percipients - comprised part of a socio-cultural logic in which hierarchies of race, class and gender textured preoccupations with reason, order and progress, and their negative others - namely crime, vice, disorder, superstition and backwardness.

But while the haunted spirit of modernity provides a broad intellectual framework for understanding discourses about ghosts and spirits in Victorian Victoria, to settle on this formula would be to overlook the material conditions which tie Victoria’s first ghosts to the construction of regional identity. The largest and wealthiest city in British Columbia by the 1880’s, Victoria was, as historian Robin Ward puts it, a “bourgeois fin-de-siecle apogee” for just a few short decades before its economic decline.⁷² The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway which elevated Vancouver to prominence as an industrial and port city after 1887 sank Victoria’s metropolitan aspirations, but laid the groundwork for its revival as tourist destination. “Where Vancouver looked to the

⁷⁰ Higgins, “The Haunted Man,” 338.

⁷¹ Tina Loo, *Making Law Order and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 135.

⁷² Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xii-xiii.

future,” writes Ward, “Victoria turned to the past.”⁷³ A city of “elderly gents and civil servants” by the turn of the century, Victoria became a favorable retirement destination for British colonial officials, who were attracted by “prospects of comfortable retirement in a clubable setting complete with English climate and Scottish coastal scenery.” By the early twentieth century, writes Ward, the British Empire had begun to show signs of decay. But Victoria found inspiration for its revival as a popular tourist destination in the “echoes of an empire that had begun to expire elsewhere.”⁷⁴ Victoria’s publicity bureau was already promoting the city as an “Outpost of Empire” by 1904, and by 1918, had taken up the slogan which encapsulates its nostalgic image - as a “little bit of Old England” - to this day.⁷⁵ The facade, which reflects a vision of Victoria as the seat of colonial high-society, would have fooled few among the city’s early residents, if indeed it fools anyone today. But while many twentieth-century observers like Ward have pointed out the constructedness of Victoria’s English artifice, historians - and academic historians in particular - have taken little if any notice of the not-so-subtle interplay between Victoria’s dominant identity-fiction and its ghostly alter-ego as an unruly and slightly eccentric frontier town. As the twentieth century rolled in, David Higgins set the tone for a century of ghost-story-telling in Victoria, invoking now iconic characters, events and themes from the city’s pioneer era. But his tales are important and importantly linked to the construction of regional identity for another reason. Nearly seventy years of age when his tales were first serialized in 1903, he reached retirement around the same time as Victoria began to promote its British image to attract tourists. In the shadows cast by

⁷³ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xiii.

⁷⁴ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xiii.

⁷⁵ Robin Ward, *Echoes of Empire: Victoria and Its Remarkable Buildings* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1996), xi-xiv.

the legacy of Victoria's metropolitan aspirations, which although in decline, remained visibly prominent in the city's imperial architecture, Higgins mobilized haunting as history's shadowy other, as a subcategory among his pioneer reminiscences, attuned specifically to occult subjects (literally, darkened matters) from Victoria's past. "Victoria," as it was rendered therein, was far from the "little bit of Old England" it would soon be known as. Neither, however, was it merely a shadowland of gothic undercurrents, drunken outlaws and eccentric misfits. What sustained, through Higgins' tales and thereafter, amid the ongoing production of histories and hauntings, was a broader interplay between opposing poles - a dynamic which derived from tensions conjured and negotiated between presence and absence, simulacrum and authenticity, reason and unreason, law and order versus crime and disorder, morality and vice, and of course, between the living and the dead, which we might otherwise construe as an opposition between present and past. Soon too, local ghosts and hauntings would invoke another dialectic - between the material surfaces of Victoria's nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century architecture and the "secrets" of the past imagined to linger therein. Perhaps Canada remained too new for ghosts in 1852, when Susannah Moodie published *Roughing it in the bush* - too youthful to have accrued the requisite perceptions of historical debt and inheritance necessary to propel hauntings. But at least on the Pacific Coast, with the passing of a generation of pioneers, early developments in the history of haunting dovetailed with the accumulation of historical associations. And while ghost tales recounted frightening, melancholy and sometimes comic scenarios in which the dead possessed the landscapes and imaginations of the living, it was of course, the living who did the work of haunting by possessing and mobilizing spirits of the dead. Part of a

broader dynamic of inheritance, belonging, and thus identity, ghosts rendered aspects of the past which were, paradoxically, as much desired as they may have been feared, present in a perpetually unfolding imaginative and material landscape of place.

CHAPTER II: HERITAGE AND HAUNTING GHOSTLY CAPITAL, 1958-2002

[T]he accumulation of changes and the passage of time create a situation fertile for haunting, in which history becomes ‘murky,’ even though it leaves suggestive traces in the present.

Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley*, 2003

[Ghosts] are generally associated with antiquity in the sense that they are almost always allied with misty, half-forgotten stories, mouldering ruins or practically any relic from a forgotten past.

Bert Binny, *Daily Colonist*, 1959

“Since ghosts are inalienably connected with age and since we are now 100 years old or more, our heritage would be lacking without them,” wrote *Victoria Colonist* contributor Bert Binny in a 1958 *Islander Magazine* series devoted to weird happenings and supernatural phenomena in and around Victoria.¹ But the city seemed “peculiarly short of legends and stories which would supply motivations for hauntings,” according to Binny, and had never had a ghost “chronicler” on par with England’s John Ingram, famous for his 1897 “Geography of Ghostland.”² Seeming to confirm Binny’s suspicion was the fact that of 375 ghosts reported by the Society for Psychical Research in Britain in 1935, 127 had been credited to Great Britain, 56 to the United States, and just 13 to Canada. Victoria, whose ghost population remained, as Binny put it, “thin and scrappy,” hadn’t even made the list.³ “Being a young, vigorous and modern country,” Canada “was singularly inappropriate as a venue for spirits and apparitions,” he concluded, quoting a 1935 news feature credited to Vancouver journalist P.W. Luke. “They would

¹ Bert Binny, “Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population: Bleeding B.C. Ghost,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 23 March 1958, 14.

² Binny, “Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population,” 14.

³ Binny, “Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population,” 14.

not take kindly to the absence of draughty corridors and damp dungeons and the substitution of steam and electric heat. Their moans, their rappings and their eerie footsteps could not begin to compete with the clanging and clanking of traffic. The general climate was all wrong.”⁴ Even in Quebec, whose “ancient traditions, static communities and flourishing superstition” were conceivably ideal terrain for ghosts and hauntings, the province did not “appear to have had a worthwhile ghost for nearly a century.”⁵ “Except for the Old Tod House, perhaps ghosts shun Victoria,” he surmised.⁶

Bert Binny’s 1958 lament that Victoria lacked ghosts was both pivotal and paradigmatic. For those who believed that age and the accumulation of historical associations ought to produce ghosts, Victoria’s apparent lack thereof seemed unbecoming of a city which had reached its one hundredth birthday. Today, by contrast, Victoria has been transformed from a city allegedly shunned by ghosts, to one described by local historian and ghost expert John Adams as “the most haunted city in British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest.”⁷ Endeavoring to explain why Victoria became so haunted during the latter half of the twentieth century, this chapter examines both the character of local hauntings and the particular storytellers responsible for mobilizing ghosts beginning during the late 1950’s, when centennial celebrations and surging nationalism propelled urban renewal and heritage conservation initiatives, fueling appetites for both local history and hauntings. Many of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings which were threatened by developers during this period – especially those valued as repositories of public memory and symbols of British colonial origins - became haunted

⁴ Binny, “Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population,” 14.

⁵ Binny, “Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population,” 14.

⁶ Binny, “Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population,” 14.

⁷ John Adams, *Ghosts & Legends of Bastion Square* (Victoria: Discover the Past, 2002), vi-vii.

in conjunction with preservation and restoration initiatives. “What sets Victoria apart from many other former colonial cities is its buildings,” writes historian Robin Ward in his 1996 *Echoes of Empire: Victoria & Its Remarkable Buildings*.⁸ Indeed, for many, it is as Ward points out, “Victoria’s nineteenth-century architecture,” which is “the most cohesive and best preserved in Canada,” that “defines the city”:

Victoria’s urban fabric – which economic decline helped preserve – has ... been embroidered enthusiastically, not to say relentlessly, as ‘a little bit of old England’ – even if no English hotel could claim that a stray cougar was once cornered in its car park, as happened at the Empress in 1992. The surface imagery of the city that was named after Queen Victoria was, and still is, a convincing illusion. There are Tudor Revival villas, cricket grounds and rose gardens. Emily Carr thought Victoria ‘the most English-tasting bit’ of the whole country. British-born residents outnumbered Canadian-born in BC until the First World War and it still shows: behind mock-Tudor facades on Fort Street, antique shops and antiquarian bookstores are littered with the bric-a-brac of the British Empire. The Parliamentary Library’s copies of the *Times* of London and the *Cariboo Observer* evoke the era when frontier gossip was laced with comment about faraway diplomacy and imperial affairs. Royal Navy captains left imperial names on local maps – Albert Head, Sax Point, Coburg Peninsula, and Gotha Point cartographically complete the royal title of Queen Victoria’s consort, Prince Albert of Sax – Coburg – Gotha. In 1862, on the day of the city’s incorporation, an editorial in the appropriately titled local newspaper, the *British Colonist*, opined that Victoria was ‘The Queen City of the Pacific possessions of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria.’⁹

In 1918, George Warren, a San Franciscan and Victoria’s publicity commissioner invented the phrase which defines Victoria’s outward image as “a little bit of old England” to this day.¹⁰ “But while the temperate climate may have reminded British settlers of home,” writes Ward, “Victoria was never as English as the ‘old England’ catchphrase implies.”¹¹ Warren saw the appeal of (re)creating Victoria as a British simulacrum and as Ward and others have pointed out, “this misleading version of Victoria’s past has been perpetuated so religiously that other voices are not easily

⁸ Robin Ward, *Echoes of Empire: Victoria & Its Remarkable Buildings* (Madeira Park, Harbour Publishing, 1996), xi.

⁹ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xi, xiv.

¹⁰ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xiv-v.

¹¹ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xiv-v.

heard.”¹² Dramatizing dichotomies between the material surfaces of old buildings and “secrets” of the past hidden therein, the preponderance of “heritage hauntings” associated with Victoria’s restored nineteenth-and early twentieth-century architecture echo this dichotomy between surface and depth, simulacrum and authenticity. Examining three such hauntings - Craigdarroch Castle, Point Ellice and Bastion Square - in conjunction with broader patterns of haunting in and around the city, we find a class of British, upper-class, quasi-ancestral pioneer ghosts whose often benevolent manifestations reinforce the celebratory, nostalgic and nationalistic thrust of much popular historical literature about early Victoria. However, among the ghosts of the white colonial “forefathers” and “foremothers,” we also find a subset of pioneers and settlers whose eccentricities and failures to conform to the standards of polite, upper crust, British colonial society dovetail with the demand for romance, scandal, mystery and sensation evident in ghost story-telling and more broadly throughout much of the popular historical literature set in Victoria. Linked to murders, melancholy, suicides, accidents, disturbed grave-sites, dispossession, impoverishment, and miscarriages of justice, these ghosts are often women (especially prostitutes and spinsters), ethnic minorities (Black people, Natives and Asians) and the poor. This brings us to Bastion Square whose reputation as the city’s most haunted domain derives from its history as the colonial gaol and hanging yard. Here, conjuring scenes from the gold-rush period in Victoria’s history, phantoms of unreason and disorder, offset by the specter of the famous Supreme Court “hanging judge” Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, haunt an architectural symbol of British law. Here we explore the nationalist implications of a haunting which

¹² Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xv.

refracts an age-old link between ghosts and justice through the particular contours of local history and memory.

Beginning during the late 1950's, and increasingly during the 1960's and 1970's, ghosts and hauntings in Victoria gained heightened attention in conjunction with a broader surge of interest in old homes and pioneers. During this period, a small number of local journalists, most of whom were also historians, began recycling local ghost-lore en-masse in magazine-style features articles. Bert Binny, for example, penned a series of feature articles on local ghosts for the *Daily Colonist* during the 1950's. In "Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population," he summarized British Columbia's scanty history of ghosts and hauntings.¹³ In "The Case of the Hoax Hunt," he revisited the nineteenth-century Meares and Cormorant Street hauntings, and in "How Do You Know You Don't See Ghosts?," he suggested that "Victoria may be teeming with ghosts who are thought to be real simply because those who see them never knew them."¹⁴ Another *Colonist* contributor, Maud Emery also wrote articles about ghosts, although her writings were not focused on Victoria in particular, but rather, recounted stories from Cortez Island, Campbell River, Ontario, northern England, Mexico and elsewhere.¹⁵ Others, including local heritage preservation champion James K. Nesbitt, who also wrote a series of columns for the *Colonist* under the title "Old Homes and Families," reported haunted houses or apparition sightings on a case-by-case basis.¹⁶ But Victoria's most prolific

¹³ Binny, "Pacific Province Lags in Spirit Population," 14.

¹⁴ Binny, "The Case of the Hoax Hunt," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 30 March 1958, 14; "How Do You Know You Don't See Ghosts?," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 27 April 1958, 11.

¹⁵ Maud Emery, "Ghosts, Ghouls, Spooks ... and spirits from hither and yon," *Daily Colonist*, 25 October 1970, Magazine Section, 4; "Ghosts: Here and There," *Daily Colonist*, 26 October 1969, Magazine Section, 12; "Truth is Stranger than Fiction," *Daily Colonist*, 16 August 1964, Magazine Section, 12.

¹⁶ Michael Kluckner, *Victoria the way it was* (North Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1986), 120.

“ghostorian” during the 1960’s and 1970’s was T.W. Paterson. A regular *Colonist* contributor, Paterson was also the author of several popular histories including *Canadian Battles and Massacres: 300 Years of Warfare and Atrocities on Canadian Soil* (1976); *Treasure: British Columbia* (1973); *Outlaws of Western Canada: A Collection of Western Canada's Most Villainous Outlaws* (1977); and *Murder: Brutal, Bizarre and Unsolved Mysteries of the Northwest* (1973).¹⁷ Once dubbed Vancouver Island’s own Ichabod Crane, Paterson told the *Kelowna Today* that he wrote history “to capture the unknown, the unsung, and the unforgettable. I write to entertain, and try to turn on the younger generation to our heritage,” he explained, attributing the growing market for Canadiana to a combination of factors, including Expo 67, “defensive national pride” derived from the threat to Canadian unity posed by the Parti Québécois, and to the work of popular historians like Pierre Burton.¹⁸ A nationalist with a taste for the mysterious and the macabre, Paterson was a historian and a collector, but not an inventor of ghost stories. For example, his “Craigflower’s Ghost,” which appeared in the *Colonist* in 1968, was nearly an exact replica of a 1938 *Victoria Daily Times* story by Reby Edmond Macdonald about the haunting of the colonial school-house-turned-museum entitled “Skeleton Under the Deadman.”¹⁹ Likewise, “Victoria’s Ghosts,” “Cormorant Street Ghost,” “About the Meares Street Ghost,” “Haunted House ... of St. Charles Street,” “Victoria’s Haunted Cottage,” “Halloween Ghosts ... For Real,” and “Twilight Zone” revisited older stories about local hauntings, many of which derived from David Higgins’

¹⁷ Don McLellan, “History – from a different perspective,” *Vancouver Sun*, 5 August 1977, 5A.

¹⁸ Paul Grant, “Truth of B.C. History Stranger Than Fiction,” *Kelowna Today*, 23 November 1977, 5.

¹⁹ For an in depth analysis of the haunting of the old Craigflower school-house, see Chapter 3. Reby Edmond Macdonald, “Skeleton Under the Deadman,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 3 September, 1938, Magazine Section, 8; T.W. Paterson, “Craigflower’s Ghost,” *Daily Colonist*, 4 February 1968, Magazine Section, 5.

collections of nineteenth-century pioneer reminiscences and tales of the occult, *The Mystic Spring* and *The Passing of a Race*.²⁰

The reasons behind Victoria's increasing receptivity to stories about ghosts and hauntings, beginning during the late 1950's, are rooted in the conditions which propelled contemporaneous attentions to local, provincial and national history and heritage. During the 1950's and 1960's, in the face of rapid changes, from the launch of regular B.C. Ferry service linking southern Vancouver Island to the lower mainland between Swartz Bay and Tsawwassen, to a series of challenges to the city's 1956 zoning bylaws brought on by the construction of high-rise office and apartment buildings, many Victorians were growing anxious about the possibility of losing the city's material heritage – the old buildings which many regarded as regional, provincial and national historical landmarks. The city responded in 1963 with its *Overall Plan for Victoria*, a program which set the tone for the next thirty years of heritage conservation initiatives. The *Overall Plan* embraced both development and conservation, and included recommendations for the restoration and revitalization of Chinatown, Bastion Square, and the Inner Harbour in addition to plans for a major downtown shopping center, a massive redirection of traffic to be achieved through the construction of a high-speed urban freeway, and high-rise apartments for the James Bay neighborhood. "The story of heritage conservation in

²⁰ Paterson, "About the Meares Street Ghost," *Victorian*, 22 November 1972, Magazine Section, 6; "Cormorant Street Ghost," *Daily Colonist*, 29 October 1967, Magazine Section, 16; "Halloween Ghosts... For Real," *Daily Colonist*, 31 October 1971, Magazine Section, 6; "Haunted House ... of St. Charles Street," *Daily Colonist*, 19 July 1975, Magazine Section, 18; "Twilight Zone," *Daily Colonist*, 8 November 1970, Magazine Section, 10; "Victoria's Ghosts," *Daily Colonist*, 15 December 1968, Magazine Section, 10; "Victoria's Haunted Cottage," *Daily Colonist*, 20 April 1975, Magazine Section, 6.

Victoria is one of gradually, neighborhood by neighborhood, taming ... parts of the plan," writes architectural historian Martin Segger.²¹

Specific urban renewal projects in downtown Victoria were also occasioned by the mid-century centennial celebrations which inspired monument building, heritage conservation projects, and a flurry of attention to history, both locally and across the nation. 1943 marked the 100 year anniversary of the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company Fort at Victoria; 1958 - the establishment of the Crown Colony of British Columbia; 1962 – the incorporation of the city of Victoria; 1966 - the unification of the colonies of B.C. and Vancouver Island; 1967 - the confederation of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec as the Dominion of Canada; 1968 - Victoria's establishment as the capital city of B.C.; 1971 - B.C.'s entry into Confederation; and 1987 – both the arrival of the first CPR passenger train from Montreal at Vancouver and the entry of the first ship (the HMS Cormorant) into the newly completed graving dock at Esquimalt.²² Victoria marked these occasions with an urban renewal plan for the aptly named Centennial Square whose modern design scheme was offset by the development of Bastion Square in Old Town Victoria as a heritage-themed pedestrian walkway and arcade.²³ But this was only the beginning. In 1972, the then Mayor Peter Pollen appointed Alderman Sam Bawlf to chair the newly formed Heritage Advisory Committee. In 1973 the Victoria Hallmark Heritage Preservations Society was founded. In 1974, Point Ellice House, home to Peter O'Reilly, the colony's first gold commissioner and his family beginning in 1868 and a private museum since 1967 was

²¹ Martin Segger and Douglas Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1996), 121.

²² Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 25; Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, xxv.

²³ Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 88.

designated a provincial historical site.²⁴ In 1975 the Wharf Street commercial frontages located in the oldest segment of Victoria's Old Town were protected under new provincial heritage protection laws; plans to restore St. Anne's Convent School were drafted; the Crystal Gardens Preservation Society began lobbying for public use of the monument; and in 1976, Fort Victoria Properties Ltd. won a Heritage Canada Foundation award for its restoration work on Market Square.²⁵ In 1977, revisions to the provincial Heritage Conservation Act furthered the city's heritage conservation agenda by enabling City Council to confer municipal heritage status on buildings, structures or land, and also to block demolition or building permits affecting buildings not designated as heritage sites but which might have historic significance. Also established in 1977, the provincial Heritage Conservation Branch was set up to facilitate conservation endeavors through financial incentives and collaborative projects.²⁶ The revitalization of Chinatown began in 1979: old buildings were cleaned, repaired and painted; ornamental trees were planted, sidewalks enhanced, mock-Oriental lamps installed, and the 'Gate of Harmonious Interest,' a decorative archway symbolizing friendship and collaboration between the Chinese and non-Chinese communities, was built.²⁷ Also in 1979, restoration work began on Craigdarroch Castle, possibly the most ostentatious and baronial architectural work *ever* built in Victoria, which according to historian Robin Ward, looks like it "leapt off the pages of a novel by Sir Walter Scott."²⁸

Like many of the nineteenth-and early twentieth-century buildings which were restored and protected as museums and historic sites in Victoria in and around (but not

²⁴ Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 140-1.

²⁵ Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 121-2.

²⁶ Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 122.

²⁷ Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 109-10.

²⁸ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, 261.

exclusively during) the 1970's, Craigdarroch Castle proved a fertile setting for ghosts. Built as a gift from coal baron Robert Dunsmuir to his wife Joan, the castle, which was completed in 1889, was large, expensive to maintain, and changed hands several times after Joan died in 1908.²⁹ After World War I, it served as a veterans' hospital. Then, the Victoria College moved in, followed by the school board in 1946 and the Victoria Conservatory of Music in 1967. Threatened by developers who wanted to build high-rise apartments in its place, the castle was also, by this point, badly in need of repairs. Credited by the *Times Colonist* as the first Victorian to lobby for the preservation of heritage houses, newspaperman and historian James K. Nesbitt formed the castle preservation and restoration society to lobby for its protection in 1959.³⁰ He also devoted several *Islander Magazine* features to the landmark, including a 1972 article entitled "Castle of Mystery":

No building in Greater Victoria is more cloaked in mystery than Craigdarroch Castle. It's a mystery why there was practically no newspaper mention of the castle while it was being built in the late 1880's. The press paid much attention to other big homes of the day, and none were as grand and spectacular as Craigdarroch. I have a theory about this. Robert Dunsmuir, who ordered Craigdarroch, was always having troubles with his miners in Nanaimo. He was good to them so long as they toed his line, but let them try to organize and out they went. Therefore, to keep peace as far as possible, I would think Dunsmuir asked the newspapers not to mention the Castle, so that his workers would not be further inflamed ... Who were the workmen? Nobody knows. Were they local? I would think so. The architects were from Portland, the artists who hand-painted the ceiling with birds and bees, cupids and flowers, were from San Francisco. The sandstone is local, but from whence came the magnificent stained glass? From England, from Pittsburgh? That question will never definitely be answered ... There is almost as much mystery about the Castle and the property after Mrs. Dunsmuir's death in 1908 as there is about the construction. There was a three-day auction at Craigdarroch in 1909 and everything was sold, including the gas chandeliers which had been electrified. Mrs. Dunsmuir could not have been too happy about her last years at Craigdarroch. She moved in as a widow and her large family was spread far and wide ...³¹

²⁹ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, 261.

³⁰ Kluckner, *Victoria the way it was*, 120.

³¹ British Columbia Archives, Vertical Files, James K. Nesbitt, "Columnist James K. Nesbitt dies," *Vancouver Sun*, unidentified newspaper clipping; "Historic Victoria loses its champion," *Times Colonist*, unidentified newspaper clipping; "Columnist James K. Nesbitt dies," *Vancouver Sun*, unidentified newspaper clipping; James K. Nesbitt, "Castle of Mystery," *Daily Colonist*, 3 September 1972, Magazine Section, 10; Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 147-8.

In 1972 when James Nesbitt wrote “Castle of Mystery,” no apparition sightings or reports of psychic manifestations at Craigdarroch had yet been publicly reported. In fact, according to Jo-Anne Christensen, whose 1996 *Ghost Stories of British Columbia* includes what may have been the earliest written account of the haunting, Craigdarroch’s ghosts were first noticed in 1979 by laborers hired to restore the castle. “Even as the restoration began,” wrote Christensen, “it became obvious that the psychic imprints left by Craigdarroch’s many tenants would not be so easily erased.”³² Given his role in the preservation and restoration of the Castle, his record of writing about other hauntings, and his explicit portrayal of the landmark as mysterious and haunting, if not yet haunted, Nesbitt’s failure to report the haunting of Craigdarroch seems, itself, mysterious. Nevertheless, his “Castle of Mystery” attests to how, as time simultaneously obscured and left behind traces of the past at places valued as repositories of public memory and symbols of community origins, those landmarks began to seem ghostly.

Like Craigdarroch Castle - Point Ellice House, Helmcken House, the Empress Hotel, Bastion Square, the Maritime Museum, Royal Roads Military College, Old Morris Tobacconists, the “Olde England” Inn, Ross Bay Cemetery, Beacon Hill Park, parts of Chinatown, Rogers Chocolates, the Royal and MacPherson Theatres, and John Tod House, are all heritage landmarks with at least one resident ghost. And many of ghost stories set at these landmarks derived from or correspond to their histories of restoration and preservation. Robert Belyk’s story of the haunting of the Royal Theatre, for example, begins by recounting that the theatre, which was originally constructed as a vaudeville house in 1913, was by 1967 losing revenues to smaller suburban movie

³² Jo-Anne Christensen, *Ghost Stories of British Columbia* (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1996), 109; Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria’s Architecture*, 121.

houses. Saved from impending demolition in 1973, the theatre came under the management of Victoria's other major live venue, the McPherson Theatre, in 1982. Describing his first night alone in the Royal, Assistant Technical Director Blair Morris, quoted by Belyk, remembered how one night, upon returning to the stage to turn on the house lights, he experienced what felt like someone jabbing a hunting knife down his back. When he shared his story, Morris learned that others had had similar experiences. "There was nothing to see," according to Tom Heemskerk, also an Assistant Technical Director, "but you had the feeling you were very, very unwelcome."³³

Establishing chronologies of haunting is a haphazard task, impaired by the vagueness and changeability of ghosts themselves, but even moreso by the inevitable and immeasurable delays which separate occurrences of hauntings and their literary renderings. That said, with a few exceptions, most of the ghost stories associated with Victoria's prominent heritage landmarks were not reported in print until or after 1989, when *A Gathering of Ghosts: Hauntings and Exorcisms from the Casebook of Robin Skelton and Jean Kozokari* was published. Set mainly during the 1960's and 1970's, *A Gathering of Ghosts* was based on Skelton's and Kozokari's experiences as ghost-busters and consultant witches, and it was the first collection of stories about local ghosts and hauntings set in Victoria since David Higgins' 1905 *The Passing of a Race*. Founding father of the University of Victoria's Department of Creative Writing, poet and witch, Skelton was a prolific author who wrote or edited more than seventy books of poetry, fiction, biography, drama, translation and on occult topics before his death in 1997. Jean Kozokari was a well known local psychic whose talents were often employed in police

³³ Robert Belyk, *Ghosts II: More True Tales from British Columbia* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 1997), 55-6.

investigations. Kozokari also claimed to have traced her ancestral roots in the practice of witchcraft as far back as the fifteenth century, and it was after meeting her that Skelton was initiated as a witch and began developing his skills as a ghost-hunter. When *A Gathering of Ghosts* was published, Skelton had already written three books on witchcraft: *Spellcraft* (1978), *Talismanic Magic* (1985), and *The Practice of Witchcraft Today* (1988).³⁴

Unlike the majority of the literature about ghosts and hauntings in Victoria, most of which has been authored by a succession of journalists and popular historians, *A Gathering of Ghosts* was written from a Wiccan perspective by professed believers in the occult. Nevertheless, in their endeavors to explain psychic and supernatural occurrences, Skelton and Kozokari tapped into local history and lore in a manner which situates their stories within a longer tradition of story telling about Victoria's ghosts. Incorporating well known stories such as David Higgins' "The Mystic Spring" into a contemporary geography of haunting, *A Gathering of Ghosts* intermingled a cast of well known and anonymous people and places from Victoria's past in stories which emphasized links between psychic disturbances in the present and the legacies of traumatic events in the past. In "The House on the Hill," for example, a couple suffering anxiety, depression, and increasingly ill health called upon Kozokari to investigate their Saanich home. Its walls seemed tilted and the floors animated, causing a sensation of vertigo when one walked. Cold spots and depressions made one want to cry; furniture rearranged itself; brass fixtures corroded inexplicably; rats which had invaded the house had, after being poisoned, crawled into the walls to die, permeating the house with the stink of their

³⁴ Robin Skelton and Jean Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts: Hauntings and Exorcisms from the Personal Casebook of Robin Skelton and Jean Kozokari* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), vii.

rotting corpses; and a room in the basement gave off such an intense feeling of fear and foreboding that Kozokari couldn't enter it.³⁵ After an extensive investigation including multiple séances, Kozokari attributed the haunting to a combination of geographic predilection, and to a series of ghosts and memory imprints derived from varied pasts associated with both the house and its inhabitants. The ghost of a lonely old woman haunted the living room. A memory imprint had been left in a basement room by the trauma and later sexual fantasies of a young boy who had been locked up by his unkind father. The lady of the house had a personal daemon – the spirit of a homosexual sailor who had died in a tragic accident during the Second World War. And the ghost of British Columbia's notorious "hanging judge" Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie – the first owner of the property - roamed the house freely, producing visions of contorted necks and hangings for the participants in the séances which Kozokari had hoped would help to rid the house of its troubles. Skelton also proposed that the land was predisposed to psychic disturbance and that ley lines – "lines of electromagnetic force on the earth's surface that, in combination, create the earth's own magnetic field" and which are "not only receptive to ghosts, but are productive of all kinds of psychic and spiritual phenomena" - were behind the haunting.³⁶ Radioactivity might also have created "the vortex in the house on the hill," wrote Skelton, hypothesizing that Begbie's late-life illness from cancer may have been caused by the radioactivity of decayed granite on the property. "As an old man, in pain, and contemplating his own death, [Begbie] may well have left a memory imprint upon the place," imagined Skelton, envisioning the retired judge "surveying his past as he must have done on those lonely wanderings as he sat in

³⁵ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 17-21.

³⁶ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 17-38, 35-6.

solitude,” remembering “those executions he ordered and attended.”³⁷ In the end, Kozokari’s attempts to rid the house of its psychic disturbances failed, and in 1989 the house allegedly remained “a center of pain and depression, a gathering place for unhappiness.”³⁸

A Gathering of Ghosts also contained early versions of the hauntings of Point Ellice and Bastion Square, two of Victoria’s best known “heritage hauntings.” One of several prominent residences built near the banks of the Selkirk segment of the Gorge waterway during the 1860’s, what is now known as Point Ellice House was purchased by Gold Commissioner Peter O’Reilly in 1868 where he and his wife Caroline Agnes Trutch, sister to B.C.’s first Lieutenant Governor, Sir Joseph Trutch, raised four children – Frank, Mary Augusta, Kathleen and Jack O’Reilly.³⁹ At some point during the 1960’s, the house which had remained in the hands of the O’Reilly family, was nearly sold to a nearby industrial development complex. If sold, the house would have been demolished, but instead, Inez O’Reilly, wife of Peter O’Reilly’s grandson John stepped in and began an intensive and expensive project to restore the period house which the couple opened as private museum in 1967.⁴⁰ Right away, according to Skelton, ghosts made their presence known:

One of the first visitors was an elderly woman with her four-year-old granddaughter. Once inside the door, the child threw a hysterical fit. The grandmother took her outside and scolded Inez, saying, ‘You should warn people that the house is haunted. We should sue you. It’s very dangerous.’ Inez had a sign painted reading ‘This House Is Haunted,’ but members of local civic groups complained the sign was unseemly. Inez had the sign repainted to read ‘This house is haunted by the ghosts of the past,’ and hoped in this way she could satisfy everyone.⁴¹

³⁷ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 35-6.

³⁸ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 36.

³⁹ Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria’s Architecture*, 140-1.

⁴⁰ BCA, Vertical Files, Point Ellice House, *Historic Parks & Sites Div. Notes on Point Ellice House Restoration*, 22 October 1973, 12; Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria’s Architecture*, 140-1; Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 124-5.

⁴¹ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 106.

More than one ghost haunted Point Ellice. *A Gathering of Ghosts* describes, for example, a “handsome young man in old-fashioned dress” whose ghost was reported to sit on a bench in the garden, a phantom crowd of around twenty ghosts seen standing around a fire in the place where a stove had once stood, and the “wholesome female energies” of “Grandmother” Caroline O’Reilly and her daughter Kathleen.⁴² Although Kathleen had had many suitors during her youth, she had never married, and after the family fortune disappeared around the time of the First World War, she is said to have lived unhappily and impoverished in the O’Reilly home until her death in 1945. “This period of dreariness, hopelessness, and unhappiness may have been the incubation period for later hauntings,” wrote Skelton of this final chapter in Kathleen’s life.⁴³

Despite her convictions that ghosts should be set free and that it is unhealthy for the living to reside among presences of the dead, Kozokari felt that Kathleen O’Reilly – “who during her life could never bring herself to leave her home” - deserved to remain in Point Ellice House for as long as she needed to. Moreover, Kozokari deemed Grandmother Caroline’s “enterprising” ghost a benevolent, protective spirit. Describing her decision to save the house from its impending sale and demolition, Inez O’Reilly told Kozokari that one day, while alone in the drawing room, she had felt the arms of what she knew was Grandmother Caroline around her. “A tremendous desire to save the house from destruction came over me,” Inez told Kozokari, who felt that although Caroline’s ghost disapproved of the museum, she didn’t want the house to be sold, and was willing to help keep it in the O’Reilly family.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, financial difficulties plagued John

⁴² Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 106.

⁴³ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 106.

⁴⁴ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 105.

and Inez, who had funded the restoration project independently. In 1973, Inez told the *Victoria Times* that the museum was losing thousands of dollars each year and that the federal and provincial governments and the Canada Council had all refused them subsidies. Inez also blamed the provincially owned Royal Blue Lines bus tour company for not including Point Ellice House on their tours, a move which she felt would help reduce the difficulty of attracting visitors to the location which was by then an industrial sector and not otherwise an especially attractive tourist destination.⁴⁵ “As the years passed,” wrote Skelton, “it became clear that even Grandmother Caroline would be unable to keep the house in the family,” and in 1974 Point Ellice House was sold to the Provincial Government.⁴⁶

In addition to the O’Reilly family home, the Point Ellice haunting extends to the nearby Selkirk waterway where one of the worst streetcar accidents in North American history took place in 1896. On the 26th of May amid celebrations marking Queen Victoria’s birthday, the bridge collapsed, sending a streetcar into the water below and killing 55 men, women and children. “The intensity of the emotions of shock and grief must have affected the whole area around,” wrote Skelton of the accident which took place within a stone’s throw of Point Ellice house, “and it seems likely that the red light that moves along the bank of the gorge on the side opposite Point Ellice House may well be the spectral lantern of someone still searching for a loved one.”⁴⁷ Although the ghost lights traversing the Gorge register a degree of horror and oblivion which far exceeds anything associated with the O’Reilly family home, the two components of the Point

⁴⁵ BCA, Vertical Files, Point Ellice House, *Historic Parks & Sites Div. Notes on Point Ellice House Restoration*, 22 October 1973, 12.

⁴⁶ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 107.

⁴⁷ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 109-110.

Ellice haunting have parallel implications. A fatal streetcar accident, a resident spinster, the last nineteenth-century home standing in an area otherwise given over to industrial development – the entire dynamic of the Point Ellice hauntings operates between poles of ruination and salvation. At the O'Reilly residence, where change – in the form of industrial development – threatened to erode what little material evidence remained of the old Selkirk's history as a coveted residential neighborhood, ghosts of one of Victoria's celebrated pioneer families served their family's restoration agenda. Suffused with nostalgia for nineteenth-century white privilege, Grandmother Caroline O'Reilly's matriarchal spirit and spinster Kathleen's pathetic, melancholy ghost, like the ghost lights, staged multiple variations on a similar theme – human fear and horror in the face of death and oblivion.

But the ghosts of Point Ellice house, and in particular Grandmother O'Reilly, are also examples of a broader subset of spirits among Victoria's ghosts. Looking in detail at the hauntings of Craigdarroch Castle, Point Ellice and Bastion Square, in addition to broader patterns of haunting in and around the city, we find a class of seemingly benign and sometimes even benevolent, upper-crust, British quasi-ancestral pioneer ghosts – colonial “forefathers” and “foremothers” whose manifestations reinforce the celebratory, nostalgic and nationalistic thrust of much popular historical literature about Victorian Victoria. Including the spirits of British Columbia Supreme Court Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie, Caroline and Katherine O'Reilly, *British Colonist* founder Amor de Cosmos, renowned artist and author Emily Carr, coal baron Robert Dunsmuir's wife Joan, celebrated architect Francis Rattenbury, Hudson's Bay Company trader John Tod and several others, these are white ghosts - the spirits of celebrated and typically upper-class

British settlers and pioneers from the colonial period of Victoria's history. "She was an original pioneer," writes Jo-Anne Christensen of Craigdarroch Castle's pre-eminent ghost – the spirit of Joan Dunsmuir. "Little wonder that once she got her castle, she was reluctant to leave it."⁴⁸

Yet these and many other quasi-ancestral spirits associated with heritage sites in and around Victoria reflect a politics of memory which is not entirely consistent with the celebratory, imperialist and nationalist mythos of the landmarks they haunt. Dramatizing dichotomies between the material surfaces of old buildings and the mysterious secrets hidden within, they register the elasticity of haunting as an alternative kind of history-telling, which simultaneously sustains and counterpoints received understandings of past and place. Hauntings set at the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century residences of upper-crust Victorians like the O'Reilly's, for example, look backward to and commemorate architectural symbols of imperial and colonial origins, yet simultaneously speak to a sense of past and place in decline. Moreover, among the ghosts of early white pioneers and settlers, we find a subset of eccentric characters, whose failures to conform to the standards of polite, upper crust, British colonial society dovetail nicely with the demand for romance, scandal, mystery and sensation evident both in ghost story-telling and more broadly in popular local histories. T.W. Paterson's *Capital Characters: A Celebration of Victoria Eccentrics*, for example, pays tribute to Victoria's nonconformist and eccentric characters and character. Victoria "served as a stage for so many exotic characters" writes Paterson. "They may have been the flotsam and jetsam of straight-laced British society," but "most of us have a sneaking admiration for those who are out of step. Perhaps it's because we envy their 'courage' in defying the conventions and

⁴⁸ Christensen, *Ghost Stories of British Columbia*, 109.

traditions that regulate our own lives.”⁴⁹ Paterson’s book enumerates countless notables from Victorian Victoria, including Kathleen O’Reilly, noted for never having married despite having countless suitors in her youth; “Jimmy Chickens,” an eccentric with a noted taste for whisky, who lived just off the Oak Bay shore on Mary Tod Island (also known as Jimmy Chicken Island) when he wasn’t locked up in the city or provincial jails; David Higgins, the “practitioner of prose” who was there “pen in hand, to jot down for posterity the small and large events which made life anything but dull in those fabulous, long-ago days when lust for gold altered the course of history”; Madame Bendixen, “the coarse and almost repellent” proprietor of the St. George Hotel, as “fiery and loud as she was stout;” and the incurably lazy thief, beggar, drunk and bootlegger John Butts, allegedly called “a greater scourge than cholera or smallpox” by a contemporary, but nevertheless crowned “Victoria’s most outstanding character” by Paterson.⁵⁰

Exposing buried “secrets” in Victoria’s past, local hauntings are likewise drawn to scandal and sensation. Stories about the ghost of Hudson’s Bay Company trader John Tod, for example, dwell at length on the trader’s stubborn character, his disavowal of his parents’ Presbyterian faith, his participation in spiritualist séances, and his unconventional marital history which included several “country marriages” to First Nations women and a short-lived union with a Welsh woman who went mad and was returned to England to be institutionalized.⁵¹ Likewise, Jo-Anne Christensen’s story about the ghost of the famous architect Francis Rattenbury tells of how, after designing British Columbia’s Provincial Parliament Buildings, the Empress Hotel, Government

⁴⁹ Paterson, *Capital Characters: A Celebration of Victorian Eccentrics* (Duncan: Fir Grove Publishing, 1998), viii.

⁵⁰ Paterson, *Capital Characters*, 4, 56, 67, 91, 92.

⁵¹ Christensen, *Ghost Stories of British Columbia*, 94; Paterson, “Halloween Ghosts...For Real,” *Daily Colonist*, 31 October 1971, Magazine Section, 6.

House, the Crystal Garden and many other celebrated nineteenth-century landmarks, Rattenbury moved back to England where his wife's lover and chauffeur bludgeoned him to death. Although his body was buried near Bournemouth, writes Christensen, he chose, in death, to return to the city where he had been happy in life.⁵² Similarly, in his retelling of a classic Victorian haunting about Langley Alley's lady in white, local historian and ghost expert John Adams segues into a story about Ben Griffin, owner of the Boomerang Saloon and husband of Adelaide Griffin, the woman believed to be the identity of the white lady. After his wife's death, Griffin, together with Mayor James Fell, David Higgins, and other prominent Victoria residents, used the Boomerang Inn to hold spiritualist séances.⁵³ John Butt, "one-time town crier and general ne'er-do-well and scoundrel"; William Smith, the founder of the *Colonist* who changed his name to Amor de Cosmos (Lover of the Universe); Emily Carr and Judge Begbie are also among the array of colorful yet hardly frightening characters who either turn up as ghosts or tangentially in stories about ghosts in Adams' *Ghosts & Legends of Bastion Square*.⁵⁴

The most frightening among Victoria's ghosts, however, derive from murders, disturbed burial sites, suicides, and miscarriages of justice. Overwhelmingly identified as marginalized and criminalized classes of people, the poor, women (especially prostitutes and spinsters), and ethnic minorities (Natives, Black people and the Chinese), predominate among these ghosts. Strangled by her estranged, hard-drinking husband in 1936, for example, a young nurse named Doris Gravelin appears in a spectral wedding gown near the shoreline at the Victoria Golf Course.⁵⁵ Beacon Hill Park is haunted by

⁵² Christensen, *Ghost Stories of British Columbia*, 90.

⁵³ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 24-25.

⁵⁴ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 26, 28, 72.

⁵⁵ Robert C. Belyk, *Ghosts: True Tales of Eerie Encounters* (Victoria: Horsdal & Schubart, 1990), 117-126.

the ghosts of an unidentified homeless man who drowned in a duck pond and a murdered woman whose body was left in the bushes to decompose.⁵⁶ Irving House is haunted by the ghosts of a suicided German janitor who hung himself in the basement and a young girl who accidentally hung herself on a rope swing.⁵⁷ Work Point Barracks is haunted by the ghost of Captain Peter Elliston, murdered by a drunk and insubordinate soldier in 1892.⁵⁸ The ghost of an elderly Chinese man appears on a stretch of highway known as China Flats which links Victoria to the southwestern Vancouver Island community of Sooke. According to legend, the impoverished rural farmer was hit by oncoming traffic during the 1940's while attempting to flag a ride to find a doctor for his ailing wife.⁵⁹ Aboriginal ghosts and spirits haunt a former Songhees First Nations village site in Cadboro Bay, an ancient burial site in Beacon Hill Park, Hudson's Bay Company trader John Tod's nineteenth-century home in Oak Bay, and the old Craigflower school – a colonial school-house turned museum, built atop an ancestral Kosampson Native village.⁶⁰ And in a chapter entitled "Look Out for the Vampire," *A Gathering of Ghosts* tells of a beautiful Maclure house on St. David Street in Oak Bay, where a vampire-like ghost identified as the spirit of a Barkerville dancehall girl named "Mae" had possessed a mutual acquaintance of Skelton's and Kozokari's – a young woman named "Sandra." Skelton described Sandra as "a beauty with dark hair, a Mickey Mouse T-Shirt, and a charming little-girl voice that I had heard only in Ontario at fine upper-class schools like

⁵⁶ Belyk, *Ghosts*, 100; The City of Victoria, "Beacon Hill Park," n.d. <

http://www.city.victoria.bc.ca/visitors/leisure_parksbcn.shtml > (10 January 2005).

⁵⁷ Danda Humphreys, *Favourite Ghost Stories From the Tours of the Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria* (Victoria: Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria, 1997), 12.

⁵⁸ Humphreys, *Favourite Ghost Stories*, 20.

⁵⁹ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 45.

⁶⁰ See Chapter III for a detailed analysis of Aboriginal ghosts and hauntings in Victoria.

Loretta Abbey or at tea dances at the Granite Club.”⁶¹ By contrast, “Mae,” who had been brought south from Barkerville to wed a Victoria widower during the early 1900’s, had been ostracized from polite society, and when her new husband died, she remained in the house where she lived alone, developed Addison’s Disease and became increasingly eccentric. “Through Sandra,” wrote Skelton, “Mae had [had] the house, the social position, important friends, three beautiful children, indeed everything that she had been denied when she lived on St. David Street herself.”⁶²

Conceiving of ghosts as political emanations seems to contradict the commonly held assumption that ghosts are private and/or psychological phenomenon, writes Renée Bergland in *The National Uncanny*. Indeed, as Bergland argues, pointing out the roots of modern subjectivity in the Enlightenment, modern consciousness internalizes political entities just as it internalizes spectral entities.⁶³ In abstraction, we can conceive of identity as a house, and by extension, shared senses of identity as public structures, symbolized, for example, by national monuments or heritage sites – places where public memory is inscribed or “embodied” in the physical geography. And like houses, public identities have boundaries, which like doors and walls, set insiders apart from outsiders. The inhabitants may change; there may be foreclosures, and houses sometimes fall into disrepair. Nonetheless, there are always insiders and outsiders. The trouble with ghosts is that they operate within and unsettle boundaries - epistemological and ontological boundaries between presence and absence, past and present, and of course, between life and death, to be sure, but also between social and cultural insiders and outsiders.

⁶¹ Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 49.

⁶² Skelton and Kozokari, *A Gathering of Ghosts*, 54-55, 49-58.

⁶³ Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 9.

American literature is filled with specters of women, workers, slaves, and Native Americans, observes Bergland. Why might this be? Consider the long association between ghosts and issues of public justice. According to Keith Thomas, before the Enlightenment, European ghosts appeared most often to expose murders and vandalized gravesites, or to enforce the wishes of the dead, especially in relation to wills and the distribution of property.⁶⁴ To this, Bergland adds that nineteenth-century European ghosts were closely related to oppression and to the implications of denying or repressing the memory of public injustices:

In 1848, Karl Marx began *The Communist Manifesto* with the declaration, ‘A specter is haunting Europe.’ This European ghost, the specter of Communism, is clearly a political entity, a disembodied figure that represents political and economic power relations within a context of emergent nationalism. In the mid-nineteenth century, Europe was haunted by the specter of Communism, a ghost who probably appeared in the form of an oppressed worker. At the same time, America was haunted by the ghosts of African American slaves and Indians as well as disfranchised women and struggling workers. The people who were described and imagined as ghosts were those whose existence challenged developing structures of political and economic power.⁶⁵

“Ghosts are the things that we try to bury, but that refuse to stay buried,” writes Bergland. “They are our fears and horrors, disembodied, but made inescapable by their very bodilessness.”⁶⁶ They are negative “others,” unsuccessfully repressed or occluded from social and political life, whose “return” as disembodied emanations signals both their power, as supernatural transgressors, and their powerlessness, since they are imagined to inhabit the landscape, not as citizens and subjects, but as absences. And so, moving from the abstract contours of Victoria’s ghosts to Bastion Square, the city’s most haunted locale, we turn now to the regional contours of, to borrow a phrase from Bergland’s monumental study of American hauntings, the national uncanny.

⁶⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 597, 602.

⁶⁵ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 7.

⁶⁶ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 5.

Owner and operator of Discover the Past, a family-run business which offers history programs, lectures, ghost tours and guided walks, local historian and longtime Victoria resident John Adams has done more to popularize Victoria's ghosts, and especially the haunting of Bastion Square, than any other single actor. Adams, who has degrees in History and Museum studies, has written and lectured extensively about Victoria's history, and he began collecting local ghost-tales during the 1980's while giving Halloween walking tours through Ross Bay Cemetery.⁶⁷ In 2000, he began leading ghostly walks through Victoria's Old-Town and Chinatown neighborhoods, and after retiring from the provincial B.C. Government, where he worked for 25 years as a museums advisor, archivist and Heritage Branch researcher, he turned his lifelong passion for history and his part-time hobby (researching ghosts) into a fulltime business.⁶⁸ According to Adams, Bastion Square is the *most* haunted place in Victoria:

The Garrick's Head Pub and every building that borders the picturesque old precinct and its courtyards, the narrow alleyways that lead away from them and even the trees that cast shadows across their paving stones on a stormy, moonlit night abound with stories of ghosts, poltergeists, and paranormal activity.⁶⁹

Now a refurbished heritage-themed open-air arcade surrounded by offices, restaurants and the British Columbia Maritime Museum, Bastion Square's reputation as Victoria's original police barracks and gaol is legendary. At least eleven public hangings took place there during the 1860's and 1870's, and according to Adams, among the condemned, those whose bodies went unclaimed by family or friends were buried in unmarked pits in the jail-yard. Legend has it, writes Adams in his *Ghosts & Legends of Bastion Square*, that when the gaol was demolished in 1885, "whatever remained of the murderers was unceremoniously scooped away and mixed in and around the stone

⁶⁷ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, vii.

⁶⁸ Darron Kloster, "Adams turns history into fulltime business," *Times Colonist*, 3 July 2004, B2.

⁶⁹ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 10.

foundations of the new courthouse, and rests there still – but not peacefully.”⁷⁰ People working near Helmcken Alley (on the south side of the square) “are used to the wide-eyed, trembling passers-by who run into their shops demanding to know if the alley is haunted.” They hear the phantom sounds of rattling chains and heavy footsteps, whose haunting echoes have been explained as the ghosts of the chain gang or the fire brigade.⁷¹ Nearby, ghostly ladies are said to haunt Burnes House, located at 516 Bastion Square and mythologized as a former “high-class hostelry” turned brothel when sinking revenues due to the smallpox epidemic of 1892 drove proprietor Tommy Burnes to rent rooms by the hour to “ladies who counted some of the province’s legal dignitaries among their clientele.”⁷² Backing onto Burnes House near Commercial Alley, Tommy Burnes’ American Hotel is haunted by the ghost of Ah Chung, a Chinese teenager who worked at the hotel in 1889, the year he committed suicide after being incarcerated for decapitating a beautiful prostitute named Yow Kum.⁷³ Just north at 1140 Government Street, a ghost named “Brady” haunts the Bedford Regency Hotel. Ominously named the “Hibben-Bone Block” after its owners Thomas Hibben and William Bone, the hotel was designed in 1912 by Victoria’s fabled “haunted architect,” Thomas Hooper, whose buildings are all said to be haunted. During the 1950’s the hotel housed a down-market beer parlour where “Brady,” a regular at the bar, is said to have been stabbed in the ribs.⁷⁴ Another regular at said pub, “Lady Churchill,” whose ghost presents as the smell of cheap perfume and who is said to be the spirit of a drug addict who died of an overdose in the hotel where she lived (and who is also apparently Brady’s ghostly companion), haunts

⁷⁰ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 16.

⁷¹ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 28.

⁷² Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 41.

⁷³ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 45.

⁷⁴ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 62.

Camille's Restaurant in Bastion Square, where patrons seem alternatively disturbed and delighted by the combined aromas of her cheap perfume and Brady's cigar smoke.⁷⁵

Nearby, a "Man in Gray" thought to be the spirit of a former manager who hung himself from the balcony haunts the McPherson Theatre.⁷⁶

Offsetting these and other ghosts said to haunt places in and around Bastion Square is the phantom presence of the "hanging judge" himself - Chief Justice Matthew Baillie Begbie. An icon of law and order in colonial-era British Columbia, Begbie's ghost appears as the apparition of "a tall man, dressed in a black, flowing robe" with "a neatly trimmed moustache and a Van Dyke beard" seen "gliding down the staircase" of the Maritime Museum of British Columbia. Home to the provincial Supreme Court of British Columbia until 1962, the museum is notorious for sending chills down the spines of employees. Photocopiers, adding machines and computers turn themselves on mysteriously, performing seemingly purposeless tasks; buzzers summon clerks to empty offices; the telephone systems lights up for phantom calls; and merchandise inexplicably strewn about in the gift shop has led some to hypothesize that the building is home to poltergeists.⁷⁷

Begbie's stature in British Columbian and even Canadian history is legendary. Arriving in B.C. in 1858 after being appointed by Queen Victoria "to be a judge in our colony of British Columbia," he became Chief Justice, first of the mainland colony, then of the United Colony of British Columbia, and in 1871, of the province of British Columbia. "In the popular and memorable image of Begbie," writes historian Robin Ward, "he rides into isolated lawless gold rush shantytowns accompanied by his Indian

⁷⁵ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 62-4.

⁷⁶ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 69.

⁷⁷ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 16-17.

servant and a constable to hold rudimentary but effective court, formally robed and bewigged for the occasion.”⁷⁸ Writes Ward of Begbie’s “direct” manner of dispensing justice:

His direct approach – ‘Aye, we’ll give ye a fair trial – and then we’ll hang ye,’ to coin a Scottish expression – brought him the morbid moniker ‘the hanging judge.’ At his first murder trial in 1859 at New Westminster, a jury of American miners convicted one of their compatriots of manslaughter. The accused, who had shot a man in a barroom brawl, expected to get off with a plea of self-defence – as he probably would have done in the US. Begbie told the prisoner, ‘Your crime is diabolical murder, you deserve to be hanged.’ Turning on the jury, he delivered a typical Begbie broadside. ‘Gentlemen... it would give me great pleasure to see you hanged, each and every one of you, for declaring a murderer guilty only of manslaughter.’ When another prisoner came before him and ventured that jail would be inconvenient, Begbie replied, ‘That is why I send you there.’⁷⁹

Mythologized as a ruthless arbiter of “frontier justice,” the so-called “hanging judge” was an early architect of B.C.’s legal order, interpreting and enforcing British law under circumstances which can only be described as arduous.⁸⁰ “Small wonder that early in 1859 among the first brick structures to be erected was the grim-looking Police Barracks and jail that resembled a miniature crenellated fortress,” writes Adams, who describes the impact of the 1858 Fraser River gold-rush on Victoria as the sudden and permanent disruption of a “tranquil scene”:

Victoria was assailed by an indescribable array of Polish Jews, Italian fishermen, French cooks, jobbers, speculators of every kind, land agents, auctioneers, hangers on at auctions, bummers, bankrupts, brokers of every description ... To the above lists may be added a fair seasoning of gamblers, swindlers, thieves, drunkards, and jailbirds, let loose by the Governor of California for the benefit of mankind, besides the halt, lame, blind and mad. In short, the outscourings of ... the world.⁸¹

Looking backward to the gold-rush as the event which brought (from California) to British Columbia the elements of lawlessness and disorder which necessitated Begbie’s regulatory presence, the haunting of Bastion Square taps into a strain of anti-

⁷⁸ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, 112.

⁷⁹ Ward, *Echoes of Empire*, 112.

⁸⁰ David R. Williams, “*The Man For A New Country*”: Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie (Sidney: Gray’s Publishing Ltd., 1977), vii-viii.

⁸¹ Alfred Waddington, *The Fraser Mines Vindicated* (Victoria: n.p., 1858), 17-18, quoted in Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, 14.

Americanism and situates a local politics of memory within a broader nationalist mythos. Law, order and authority are central to Canadian identity, writes historian Tina Loo, and Canadians have often understood themselves and their society in relation to the United States:

Canada, the popular argument goes, was and continues to be the most lawful and orderly inhabitant of the continent. Canadians committed fewer crimes, did not engage in the same active policy of cultural genocide towards the indigenous population, and were generally more accepting of state authority than were their neighbours immediately to the south. The differences between Canada and the United States in this respect are perhaps best summed up and represented in the contrasting images of law and order north and south of the forty-ninth parallel: The Canadian Mountie and the American gunfighter.⁸²

With its theatrical cast of phantom drunks, jailbait, prostitutes, and gamblers, not to mention the return of a judge as a ghost – a most extreme manifestation of unreason and disorder – the haunting of Bastion Square echoes James Nesbitt’s 1977 observation that Victoria was never a “Bit of Olde England.” Rather, as Nesbitt put it, quoting provincial archivist Willard Ireland, it was “a little bit of Old San Francisco.”⁸³ Encrypted within this dialectal opposition between the British and American influences, however, one finds a much graver implication of the Canadian legal system in the creation of a hierarchical, elitist, racist, sexist and classed society. “Experts feel that the hanging of an innocent person can be the cause of hauntings,” writes Danda Humphreys of the Victoria Old Cemeteries Society. According to Humphreys, a psychic invited to tour the Maritime Museum identified its ghosts as the spirits of two convicts who were

⁸² Loo explains that the two most commonly invoked reasons given for the orderliness of Canada (or its reputation as such) are its political culture and the conditions under which it was settled. Unlike the United States, Canadian political culture, which according to Loo has been identified as “loyalist,” “liberal,” “liberal with a tory touch” or “court” lent itself to a distrust of republicanism and a preference for central over decentralized government. Moreover, because the country was mainly settled after the establishment of the Hudson’s Bay Company, the North West Mounted Police and the Canadian Pacific Railway, there was little need for the kind of vigilantism and localism which flourished in the United States, at times in opposition to central governing authorities. Tina Loo, *Making Law Order and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 4-5.

⁸³ James K. Nesbitt, “What Ever Happened To ... asks James Nesbitt,” *Daily Colonist*, 23 October 1977, 6-7.

tried and hanged during the early colonial order, one alleged to have been a Native boy convicted of stabbing a black man.⁸⁴ “Some observers believe a miscarriage of justice had occurred,” writes Humphreys, “or at least that the Indian boy was not responsible for his actions since unscrupulous whiskey sellers had led to his downfall.”⁸⁵

Like the ghosts of Bastion Square, Victoria’s abundant Old Town and heritage hauntings conjure images of a past and place which was neither as “English” as the city’s imperial architecture seems to suggest, nor as orderly, rational, or progressive as nineteenth-century city builders hoped it would become. This was already a prevailing motif in Victoria’s first collection of published ghost-tales, David Higgins’ 1904-1905 *The Mystic Spring* and *The Passing of a Race*. But decades later, when mid-century development threatened Victoria’s celebrated architecture and appetites for ghosts surged in conjunction with preservation initiatives, haunting served a newer purpose, one which invoked Victoria’s alter-ego as an unruly frontier port, as ghostly manifestations lurking within and unsettling the city’s defining nineteenth-and early twentieth-century architecture. As if ghosts of the past had literally possessed certain among Victoria’s old buildings so as to preserve them - and Victoria’s image - as imperial effigies, Old Town “heritage hauntings” both derived from and capitalized on a kind of cultural melancholia in which the loss or decline of the material legacy of the city’s British imperial past posed a much deeper threat to its overarching image and identity. In the Queen City, even the (by now) somewhat overwrought assertion that Victoria was and is something other than a “little bit of Old England” depends, as a foil, upon the city’s urban imperial facade.

⁸⁴ Humphreys, *Favourite Ghost Stories*, 34.

⁸⁵ Humphreys, *Favourite Ghost Stories*, 34.

CHAPTER III: POSSESSING EDEN “INDIAN GHOSTS” AND THE SUPER-NATURAL

Nothing now remains of Fort Victoria nor, it would seem, of the Natives whom Douglas encountered when he landed in 1843. There are totem poles aplenty in the city today but they were not carved by the local Songhees Indians: the poles are mainly replicas based on styles that were created farther up the coast. The local Indians did leave their language on some street names and natural features, but they otherwise seems a phantom presence in a land that was once their own.

Robin Ward, *Echoes of Empire: Victoria & Its Remarkable Buildings*, 1996

The hotel I am staying in (not the Empress) is situated on Laurel Point. It sits on an Indian burial ground. Life-sized carvings representing great orators and warriors, erected by the Songhee Nation, once stood guard over the dead at Laurel Point. But the burial sheds and the carvings are gone now, and a hotel with a wonderful breakfast buffet stands there instead. The history of Victoria is the transmutation of burial shed into hotel lobby. The city has been likened to a mausoleum, a ‘graveyard of ambition,’ but it is more subtle than that. The existence of Victoria is a denial of mortality; an imperial past has been invented and enshrined, the clock has been stopped. The layers of shellac and lacquer do not cover the essence; they are the essence. *Splendor Sine Occasu*.

Will Ferguson, *Maclean's Magazine*, 2003

This chapter traces the history and uses of Native ghosts and spirits in Victoria chronologically through the twentieth century, and geographically according to the particular landscapes where they have been said to haunt. Beginning with David Higgins’ 1904 fairytale “The Mystic Spring,” we examine how a site of first contact - also a vacated ancestral Native village site - became the setting for a prophetic tale about an alleged Native legend and its entry into the lives of white pioneers. Here, we examine the colonialist paradigm embedded within the aesthetic category known as the “uncanny,” the myth of the vanishing Indian, and the popularity of Native myths and legends in nineteenth-and early twentieth-century white writings. Then, tracing the history and uses of the legend as its geographic setting through the twentieth century, we

follow the life of the tale as it became caught up in a land battle between conservationists, developers and local residents, and developed into a *bona fide* ghost story. Next, we examine the relationship between Aboriginal ghosts, colonialism, and the geography of public memory at three heritage sites: the old Craigflower school-house and museum, John-Tod house and Beacon Hill Park. At the old Craigflower school-house - one of the oldest colonial school-houses in western Canada - we see how preoccupations with colonial origins produced stories about Indian ghosts as well as those of white pioneers and settlers, especially in places where the presence of Native archaeological remains provided suggestive reminders of the land's history of Indigenous occupancy. At John Tod House, also one of western Canada's oldest colonial buildings, we encounter the specter of mixed-race relations between early colonists and Native women, a specter which haunts public memory in the form of a dark-skinned female phantom whose apparition, appearing in chains, has most often been identified as Sophia Lolo, Hudson's Bay Company trader John Tod's Native wife. Then, moving to Beacon Hill Park, one of Victoria's largest and most beloved public parks, we unravel the nationalist implications of the ancient Aboriginal spirits alleged to haunt the park in search of burial cairns removed by park staff during the 1980's. This brings us to literary scholar Renée Bergland's study of the figure of the Indian ghost in American letters, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, in which she argues that literary representations of Native American ghosts are tied into the phantasmic dynamics of American national subjectivity. Here we see how, like their American counterparts, local Aboriginal ghosts reinforce the transformation of physical landscapes into national possessions. Conversely, however, we find that Bergland's argument that the ghosting of

Aboriginal peoples functions as a discursive technique of Indian removal is premised on an observation which only partially holds true in relation to Victoria. Compared to the preponderance of Native American ghosts which Bergland finds in American literature, in Victoria, apart from a few place-specific ghost stories, local literature is almost entirely bereft of Aboriginal ghosts. This brings us to the difference between the classic American frontier drama, whose central conflict unfolds between gunfighters and Indians, versus popular historical fiction set in British Columbia, which has tended to foreground wilderness and criminals as the dark forces which oppose civilization, among whom Natives are present yet far from central. This brings us to the myth of British colonial benevolence – the tendency among Canadians to emphasize the paternal and non-violent character of British colonial rule, especially in comparison to the bloody nature of the Indian Removal period in American history. Finally, we consider how the paucity of Aboriginal ghosts in Victoria ties into local historical consciousness in a place where, unlike most of British Columbia, the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples was underwritten by treaties whose legal status has been upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada.

THE MYSTIC SPRING

Mystic: river and village in New London County, Connecticut, and river in Massachusetts. From the Indian *missi*, “great,” and *tuk*, “tidal river;” hence, “the great river.”

Henry Gannett, *The Origin of Certain Place Names in the United States*

In his 1904 collection of pioneer reminiscences and tales of the occult, *The Mystic Spring and other Tales of Western Life*, David Higgins included a story about a fabled spring located near Cadboro Bay, where a Songhees Native settlement had existed until

shortly after the establishment of the nearby Hudson's Bay Company Fort at Victoria in 1843.¹ "Many, many years ago," began the tale, when Hudson's Bay Company trader James Douglas arrived at Vancouver Island in the brigantine *Cadboro*, "a small but valiant tribe of Indians" inhabited the shores of Cadboro Bay.² The story went on to describe how Douglas had been well received by the Natives and beguiled by the picturesque beauty of the bay, flanked by white sandy beaches and "gigantic oaks" whose "vernal crowns" almost "brushed the clouds."³ There, next to a grand and ancient maple tree, lay a cold-water spring which was, according to a so-called "pretty Indian legend," inhabited by a supernatural water spirit. According to the legend, when the moon was full, if a woman looked into the spring, it would reflect the image of the man who loved her. If she was childless, it would bring her fertility. Likewise, if a man looked into the spring, he would see the woman who loved and would marry him. But the legend also contained a warning. The tree which grew next to the spring was its guardian spirit, and if it were cut down, the spring would disappear.⁴

Although Higgins attributed the legend to local Native lore, the tale-within-the-tale, which served as a narrative device in the same fashion as the classic framing stories which often appear within European fairy-tales, incurred its central debt to Baron Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine*, a nineteenth-century German rendering of European mermaid lore.⁵ Thus commingling what he identified as a Native legend with

¹ Wilson Duff, "The Fort Victoria Treaties," *BC Studies* 3 (Fall 1969): 4-6, 43, 48; David William Higgins, "The Mystic Spring," in *The Mystic Spring and Other Tales of Western Life* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), 9-21; Grant Keddie, *Songhees Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as Seen by Outsiders, 1790-1912* (Victoria: Royal BC Museum, 2003), 7.

² Higgins, "The Mystic Spring," in *Mystic Spring*, 9-10.

³ Higgins, "The Mystic Spring," in *Mystic Spring*, 11-12.

⁴ Higgins, "The Mystic Spring," in *Mystic Spring*, 12.

⁵ In "The Mystic Spring," Higgins and his companions christen said spring Undine "after Lafontaine's famous water sprite," baiting readers with a reference more accurately attributable to Baron Friedrich de la

a well known European fairytale, Higgins made an implicit analogy between superstitions associated with “Old-World” European folk beliefs and so-called “primitives” and “savages” of the “New World.” Similarly, by christening the tree which grew next to the Mystic Spring “Father Time,” he tied the disappearance of the fabled spring (which according to the tale dried up sometime during the 1880’s after a woodsman cut down the maple) to a prominent symbol of modernity associated with clocked and calendared time.⁶ Casting the disappearance of the spring as a metaphor for the transformation from natural paradise to civilized dominion of the place which James Douglas had in 1843 described as “a perfect ‘Eden’ in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the North,”

Motte Fouqué’s *Undine*. The move was far from unique. “The acceptance and rapid growth of fairyland as a fit subject matter for literature, painting, and the stage from the 1820s to the 1840s and its survival until at least the First World War is one of the most remarkable phenomena of 19th-century culture,” writes Michael Booth in *Victorian Spectacular Theatre, 1850-1910*. The Brothers Grimm’s *German Popular Stories* and *The Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Anderson* were, for example, published in England in 1823 and 1846. Thomas Keightley’s *Fairy Mythology* was published in London in 1870 and Thomas Crofton Croker’s *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* in 1828. Nineteenth-century English magazines published poems and folktales by German romantics including Goethe, Tieck, and Novalis, and Baron Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s *Undine* inspired E.T.A. Hoffmann’s opera *Undine, Zauberopera in drei Akten* (1812-14), Jean Giraudoux’s *Ondine* (1938), Hans Werner Henze’s ballet *Undine* (1956), and Ingeborg Bachmann’s “Undine geht” (1961). Based on mermaid tales and Paracelsus’ treatise on nymphs, the Undine plot invoked nature spirits and boundary violation taboos between earth, air, fire and water elements. In Fouqué’s version, Undine, a troublesome water-sprite raised by humble fisher-folk weds a Knight named Huldbrand to gain a soul, a human attribute lacked by elemental spirits and linked to the capacity to experience both joy and suffering. The marriage sets in motion a tragic chain of events which force Undine to murder the Knight before returning to the realm of her water-kin, leaving behind “a bright silvery brook” which “gushed out of the turf and flowed round the Knight’s tomb, till it had almost wholly encircled it,” emptying into a shady pool, which villagers believed to be “the poor forsaken Undine, who [continued] thus to twine her arms around her beloved lord.” Like the fickle water nymph in Fouqué’s *Undine*, the nature-spirit associated with the Mystic Spring evoked a dualistic image of the natural world animated by numinous and feminine powers, linked on the one hand to fertility, romantic love, and marriage, and on the other, to horror, hysteria, melancholy and death. This dualistic vision of the feminine paralleled the tale’s much broader use of paradoxes and opposites, including rationalist versus supernatural explanations for the “mystic” spring itself. See Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 36, 35-37; Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, *Undine: A Romance - Translated From the German*, trans. George Sloane (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1818); Higgins, “The Mystic Spring,” in *The Mystic Spring*, 13; Helen Small, *Love’s Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity 1800-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 8, 12; Jack Zipes, ed., *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), “U”.

⁶ William Marshall’s 1535 *Goodly Prymer in Englyshe*, for example, contains a woodcut entitled *Truth, the Daughter of Time*, in which Time is portrayed with wings and smiles at his naked daughter, Truth, who exists in a cave or a well. One of the captions reads “Tyme revelth all thynges.” Samuel L. Macey, *Patriarchs of Time: Dualism in Saturn-Cronus, Father Time, the Watchmaker God, and Father Christmas* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 52, 64.

Higgins eulogized Native peoples and the forests they lived in as relics of a vanishing past.⁷

Native American myths and legends - and their perceived parallels in European folk and fairy lore - attracted widespread interest among nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North American writers.⁸ The success of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) had helped to fuel the popularity of Native subjects among Canadian writers, and as Leslie Monkman observes in his study of depictions of Native peoples in English-Canadian literary history, there was a marked proliferation of Native myths and legends in North American writing during the nineteenth century, a trend which overlapped with and drew inspiration from the contexts of a much broader fascination with the "red man" emerging around the same time.⁹ The American Ethnological Society, for example, was founded in 1842, and Lewis Henry Morgan's *League of the Iroquois* established new imperatives for anthropological work on Native peoples in 1851. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* was published in 1855. North of the border, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company published a version of Longfellow's poem entitled *Hiawatha or Nanabozho: An Ojibway Indian Play* in 1901. Both E.H. Dewart's *Selections from Canadian Poets* and W.D. Lighthall's 1889 *Songs of the Great Dominion* included the poem "Taapookaa: A Huron Legend." Charles

⁷ James Douglas to James Hargrave, 5 February 1843, cited in John Lutz, "Preparing Eden: Aboriginal Land Use and European Settlement," Unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association, 1995 in Janis Ringuette, "Beacon Hill Park History 1842-2004," 2004
<<http://www.islandnet.com/beaconhillpark/contents/chapter1.htm>> (10 September 2004).

⁸ Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 11.

⁹ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans; a Narrative of 1757* (London: John Miller, 1826); Leslie Monkman, "Indian Myths and Legends," *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 127-65. See also Ray Palmer Baker, "John Richardson and the Historical Romance," in *A History of English-Canadian Literature to the Confederation: Its Relation to the Literature of Great Britain and the United States* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1920), 125-40.

Leland's *The Algonquin Legends of New England or Myths and Folklore of the Micmac Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Tribes* was published in 1884 and Silas Tertius Rand's *Legends of the Micmac* in 1894. Wilfred Campbell's "Legend of Restless River" and "The Legend of Dead Man's Lake" similarly drew upon Chippewa legends, and Graeme Mercer Adam and Ethelwyn Wetherald's *An Algonquin Maiden* appeared in 1887.¹⁰

Closely related to the manner in which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century white writers romanticized nature spirits and supernatural beings known from Native myths and legends was a contemporaneous habit in historical literature, and particularly in the popular genre of the historical romance, to depict Native peoples themselves as ghostly and even supernatural creatures, whether as "vanishing" Americans or Canadians, or - and especially in American literature - as phantoms. While not exactly a ghost-tale, Higgins' "The Mystic Spring" was nonetheless a "ghostly" tale which mired Native peoples in supernatural possibility, depicting them as phantom-like relics of a past doomed to vanish, figurines inseparable from a "wilderness" well on its way to being cultivated in the likeness of a romantic British garden.¹¹ "When European Americans speak of Native Americans, they always use the language of ghostliness," observes Renée Bergland in her study *Indian ghosts in American literature, The National Uncanny*: "They call Indians demons, apparitions, shapes, specters, phantoms or ghosts. They insist that Indians are able to appear and disappear suddenly and mysteriously, and also that they are ultimately doomed to vanish. Most often, they describe Indians as absent or

¹⁰ Monkman, "Indian Myths and Legends," 127-65.

¹¹ For example, describing the effects of the whisky trade on local Natives in one of his pioneer reminiscences, "The Passing of a Race," Higgins described how "the Indians were being cleared off the face of the earth." Higgins, "The Passing of a Race," in *The Passing of a Race and More Tales of Western Life* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1905), 2.

dead.”¹² Derived, in part, from a belief that Native peoples and their ways of living were disappearing, literary renderings of ghostly Aboriginals and of Indian ghosts were, at the same time, informed by a cultural and literary tradition with deep intellectual and cultural roots in the Enlightenment. Specifically, the aesthetic category which Freud described in his 1919 essay entitled “The Uncanny” as “that class of the frightening” experienced “in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” derived from a colonialist paradigm which, as Bergland observes, “opposes civilization to the dark and mysterious world of the irrational and the savage.”¹³ For Freud, modern civilization meant the “social system of the white peoples of Europe and America” whose childhood phases were widely believed to be the psychological equivalent of “the adulthoods of savage races.”¹⁴ The feeling of “dread and creeping horror” associated with the uncanny, he explained, “occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem to be confirmed.”¹⁵ Quite literally,” writes Bergland of the Eurocentric and racist implications of Freud’s conclusions, “the uncanny is the unsettled, the not-yet-colonized, the unsuccessfully colonized or the decolonized.”¹⁶

In 1904, Higgins cast Indians as mediators between white men and nature – repositories of knowledge about a super-*natural* world long lost to “civilized” Europeans except in fairy lore and folk superstition. First retelling the alleged Indian legend, and

¹² Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 1.

¹³ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 10-11; Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *Psychological writings and letters: Sigmund Freud*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (New York: Continuum, 1995), 120-151, 150.

¹⁴ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 10-11.

¹⁵ Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *Psychological writings*, 126.

¹⁶ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 10-12.

then describing its entry into white Victorian life, the tale positioned Natives as anachronistic guides to a “New World” already well on its way to replicating the old. And while the tale mired its depictions of Native peoples in supernatural possibility, casting them as ghostly representatives of the past, its central character was, in fact, the “Mystic” Spring – a metaphor for the modern world, perhaps, but also a particular landscape, both material and mythic, which if it had not always been enchanted and enchanting, certainly became so. During the 1930’s, for example, in the midst of a North America-wide trend which historian Ian McKay has characterized as “cashing in on antiquity,” William Inglis, a longtime Victoria resident and the then owner of land said to be fed by the legendary spring, built a pool, “a little modernized with a rock rim, farther back from Cadboro Bay, and named it “Ye Olde Mystic Springs.”¹⁷ Decorated with a Native ceremonial mask and a water wheel powered by the Mystic, or as it was first known to white settlers, MacKay Creek, Inglis ran it as a tourist attraction from 1938 until the mid 1950’s.¹⁸ In 1956, the *Daily Colonist* reported that “hundreds of people visit the spring and dozens have been going for years, some every week to fill jars with the healing waters for their own use, for ailing children, or other relatives.”¹⁹ Inglis told the *Colonist* that he had been drinking the water from the Mystic Spring for years, and attributed his ability to “bend a seven-inch spike with his hands and also drive one through a two-inch plank with one blow of his fist” to the spring’s fortifying waters.²⁰

¹⁷ Ian McKay, “History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964,” *Acadiensis* XXII, 2 (Spring 1993): 102-138; Ronald Ross Nelson, “The Presentation of Landscape: Rhetorical Conventions and the Promotion of Tourism in British Columbia, 1900-1990” (Ph.D diss., University of British Columbia, 1995), 238.

¹⁸ Ursula Jupp, *Cadboro: A Ship, A Bay, A Sea-Monster 1842-1958* (Victoria: The Estate of Ursula Jupp, 1988), 53; Grant Keddie, “The Confusing Legend of the “Mystic Spring” (Victoria: Keddie, 1993), n.p..

¹⁹ Robert H. Nichols, “What did they see? Magic Spring of Cadboro Bay,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 July 1956, Magazine Section, 4.

²⁰ Nichols, “What did they see?,” 4.

And while the Victoria Chamber of Commerce had tried and failed to locate the “original” spring in 1922, Inglis claimed it had always existed on his property, and that it had, in fact, been he who had cut down old maple tree said to be its guardian spirit and which Higgins had named “Father Time.”²¹

A similarly inspired plan took shape during the 1940’s, when local barrister Ernest L. Tait planned to invest \$250,000 in the construction of a year-round tourist resort on 20 acres of property formerly owned by the Franco-Canadian Dominion Company, stretching from the shores of Cadboro Bay and northwards from Hibbens Close near the north gates of the exclusive Uplands suburb. Accompanied by a photograph of said slope overlooking the bay, with a caption identifying the “old Indian Mystic Spring from which [a] two-acre lake [would] be formed,” the *Victoria Times* reported Tait’s plans to build 50 new bungalows, terraced gardens, a two-acre lake which would be stocked with trout for sports fishing, and a museum which would house Native archaeological remains found on the site, including skulls “showing signs of violent death,” skeletons, arrow heads, axe heads, and other tools.²²

Appearing in local newspapers, popular histories, place-name guides, and eventually, in collections of regional ghost-lore, Higgins’ legend of the Mystic Spring has provided material for a multitude of local storytellers through the twentieth century. “There is color and romance in the past of beautiful Cadboro Bay,” wrote the *Vancouver Province* in 1949. “In many places, just beneath the soil, or secured in the sepulchers of piled stone are found skeletal remains, and in this fact, it is suggested, may exist the

²¹ Nichols, “What did they see?,” 4.

²² “250,000 Cadboro Bay Resort Planned,” *Victoria Times*, 3 August 1946, 10.

solution of the strange tale told by Mr. Higgins.”²³ “Gone, but not forgotten,” echoed the *Daily Colonist* of Cadboro Bay’s “Mystic Spring” in 1968. “Once it was the talk of the Pacific Northwest; Indians worshipped it, settlers journeyed miles to drink its cold, ‘healing’ waters, lovers dreamed on its shady banks. Now only the legend of horror and death remains.”²⁴ The tale also appears in local historian Danda Humphreys’ *Favourite Ghost Stories From the Tours of The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria*, and in Dorothy Abraham’s popular history of Victoria, *Romantic Vancouver Island: Victoria Yesterday and Today*.²⁵ More recently, during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, when bids to develop the lands in and around the Mystic Spring riparian area fueled a highly publicized conflict between real estate developers, conservationists, public administrators and residential property owners, the tale was taken up by local residents and conservationists in their endeavors to halt plans to build multi-unit housing in the greenbelt which stood in the midst of their residential suburb. Nostalgic accounts which associated the legend with childhood beliefs, like *Times-Colonist* writer Brian Belton’s reminiscence about playing cowboys and Indians near the spring, or George Sranko’s 1992 letter to the editor, expressed a vision of the landscape which recast enchantment in language associated with the ideas of deep ecology, nature conservancy, and natural healing. “When I was a kid,” wrote Belton, “we knew the area as Mystic Springs”:

We used to converge on it on dry weekends with our Davy Crocket rifles and coonskin hats and play cowboys and Indians and hide ‘n’ seek ... The Indians said one of these pools had magical powers; that an Indian maiden, if she chose the right moment during the spring solstice when the moon was bright, would see the reflection of the man who

²³ B.A. McKelvie, “Cadboro Bay’s Mystic Spring is Gushing Again,” *Vancouver Province*, 29 January 1949, Magazine Section, 8.

²⁴ T.W. Paterson, “Gone, But Not Forgotten: Cadboro Bay’s Mystic Spring,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 10 May 1968, Magazine Section, 10.

²⁵ Dorothy Abraham, *Romantic Vancouver Island: Victoria Yesterday and Today* 6th Edition (Victoria: Acme-Buckle Printing Co., Ltd., 1968), 81; Danda Humphreys, *Favourite Ghost Stories From the Tours of The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria* (Victoria: Old Cemeteries Society, 1997), 30.

would be her lover ... Pretty apocryphal stuff. But when we were kids it seemed plausible ... Even now it's easy to imagine this being the place the first people who lived in Cadboro Bay chose for their spiritual retreats. The place where they could get in touch with nature and the gods of their spirit world ... we came upon one of the Vale's sturdy, old Douglas firs marked with a big red X. Marked for destruction ... the man who owned the Vale, a man who bought up parcels of land around Victoria for future profit, wanted to cut the tree down and turn the Vale into a subdivision.²⁶

“Mystic Vale is a magical place in the heart of Cadboro Bay, with a hidden creek trickling below outstretched maples and old-growth Douglas fir,” wrote Sranko:

Many times I have run or walked along the trail winding through Mystic Vale and felt my soul nourished in this flourishing oasis of life and calm. I have always marveled that I could get away so far, so quickly. Mystic Vale could become another subdivision with asphalt and sidewalks and wall-to-wall houses perched on manicured hillsides. Or it could remain a mystical place in the heart of Cadboro Bay, offering nourishment to our souls.²⁷

Similarly, Dr. Martin Collins called the Mystic Vale “a metaphor for healing” in an article entitled “Everyday Wellness, Victoria’s Hidden Mystic Vale” published in *Well: A Magazine for Wellness*. Quoting Dean Ornish and John Dryden, Collins contrasted the seductive “blandishments of urban life ... houses, cars, TV shows and things” with the “magic of high level wellness” within easy reach in the Vale.²⁸ Mystic Vale had been one of the few remaining forested areas in the urban vicinity when local developers Sherwood Oaks and Bay Meadows Estates Ltd. applied to rezone the land for the construction of multi-unit housing in 1987. Prior plans to build condominiums and apartments dated back to the 1960s, but developers had consistently failed to obtain the necessary municipal approval.²⁹ Once again, community opposition would forestall plans to subdivide the ravine, and five years later, a further bid, this time to construct 29 upscale homes in the glade, prompted a community uproar and a frenzy of media attention culminating in 1993 when the University of Victoria joined forces with

²⁶ Brian Belton, “Kevin cares about Mystic Vale’s future,” *Victoria Times-Colonist*, 14 March 1993, M3.

²⁷ George Sranko, “Plea for Vale,” *Times Colonist*, 14 October 1992, A3.

²⁸ Martin Collins, “Everyday Wellness, Victoria’s Hidden Mystic Vale,” *Well: A Magazine for Wellness* 1, 1 (Spring 1999), n.p. <http://speakwell.com/well/1999_spring/> (20 May 2004).

²⁹ “Increased density for Mystic Vale proposed,” *Gordon Head News*, 19 August 1987, 7.

provincial and municipal levels of government to create the Mystic Vale Ecological Protection Area.³⁰ According to an inventory conducted by the Department of Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria, the protected area, which contained mature second-growth forest, supported over “75 species of trees, shrubs, herbaceous flowering plants and ferns ... as well as countless lichen and fungi species” and wildlife including “deer, raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, bats, owls, eagles, woodpeckers and a variety of songbirds.”³¹ “We all know that universities through the centuries have been charged with the duty of protecting and preserving knowledge, in libraries and museums and in the brains of those who enter them,” remarked University of Victoria President David Strong upon the creation of what would serve as a “living laboratory” as well as a nature sanctuary and public parkland. “It is a rare opportunity when the university can protect nature and the very land itself.”³²

Beginning as an elegy for disappearing Indians, disappearing forests, a dried up cold-water spring, and the disenchantment of the modern world, the evolution of Higgins’ legend of the Mystic Spring into a late twentieth-century environmental jeremiad seems, in hindsight, almost inevitable. Describing changing perceptions of nature in the modern world, landscape geographer Yi-Fu Tuan makes the observation in his *Landscapes of Fear* that the “demonic power utterly beyond human protection and care” once signified by “wilderness,” now paradoxically provokes anxiety through its fragility as opposed to its power. “If the educated people of the Western world can still be said to fear nature,” writes Tuan, “it is the paradoxical fear that plants and animals, even rivers and lakes, may

³⁰ University of Victoria Special Collections, Mystic Spring File, University of Victoria Media Release, “University of Victoria acquires control of Mystic Vale property,” 10 August 1993, n.p..

³¹ “University of Victoria acquires control of Mystic Vale property,” 10 August 1993, n.p..

³² Carla Wilson, “\$2.7 Million Saves Mystic Vale As Eco Protection Area,” *Times Colonist*, 11 August 1993, B1.

die through human abuse.”³³ However, around the same time as ecologists, law makers, and developers were contesting the future of the Mystic Vale, its associated legend took another turn.

In their 1989 collection of local hauntings, *A Gathering of Ghosts: Hauntings and Exorcisms from the Personal Casebook of Robin Skelton and Jean Kozokari*, Robin Skelton and Jean Kozokari told of two women living on land containing the waters of the Mystic Spring who had suffered serious depressions. One was a professional entertainer who was reported to have seen the spirit of her late mother in a mirror, and the other, who eventually committed suicide, was the wife of a Russian Orthodox priest who ministered to a small parish across the highway from the Mystic Spring, whose overflow had seeped into their garden.³⁴ Calling this a “power spot” which belonged to “the spiritual world of the native people,” Skelton advised against building or living on land sacred to people of “other strong races or religions”:

One might say that the earth has a memory bank. It stores energies and emotions, and people who build on rich-remembered earth often find themselves burdened with images and traumas of the past. Sometimes a particular place rich in memory is recognized as being a place of strange power, and legends and stories grow up around it, the stories being less accurate accounts of history than ways of stating that the place should be treated with caution. Superstitions grow up around such places; these almost always express something of man’s longing for certain powers that are classed as supernatural. Thus a well or a tree is credited with healing properties, a pool is said to grant precognition to those who look into it, and there are places one must not go at night or when the moon is full for fear of disaster or even death. One place of Vancouver Island that has this kind of reputation is Mystic Spring in the Cadboro Bay area of Victoria.³⁵

In contrast to most versions of the legend of the Mystic Spring which described the landscape as enchanted and enchanting, Skelton and Kozokari described it as haunted.

³³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 211-2.

³⁴ Robin Skelton and Jean Kozokari, “The Indian Inheritance,” in *A Gathering of Ghosts: Hauntings and Exorcisms from the Personal Casebook of Robin Skelton and Jean Kozokari* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), 81-4.

³⁵ Skelton and Kozokari, “The Indian Inheritance,” 81-84.

Yet with one exception, the legend failed to produce any actual apparitions. The exception was Ursula Jupp's popular history, *From Cordwood to Campus in Gordon Head, 1852-1959*. Attributed to Jack Irvine, a longtime resident of Cadboro Bay who claimed to have learned it from Benjamine Evans, an early owner of the property which contained the fabled Spring, Jupp's so-called early and "oft told" version of the tale told of the ghost of a Native girl whose lover had been killed in an Indian battle. According to Jupp, one night when the moon was full, after glimpsing her dead lover's face in the water, the bereaved girl had drowned herself in the pool.³⁶ Like Higgins' and Skelton/Kozokari's versions of the legend, Jupp's was rooted in a politics of memory in which Native peoples were imagined to inhabit the region, not as citizens and subjects, but as ghostly emanations or as ghosts. But no-one attributed the haunting to the fact that local Natives had been displaced from the land which contained the waters of the Mystic Spring, land which had served as a traditional Songhees village site until soon after the arrival of the British. Rather, by adapting European and American tales to the local setting (by associating the legend of the Mystic Spring with Native lore), and by virtue of being haunted (and also enchanted) by emanations contained within and sometimes attributed to the physical geography itself, immigrants situated themselves within a narrative which, using Aboriginality to substitute for their own short history in the region, articulated a kind of imaginary lineage between ghostly Native "ancestors" and the region's twentieth-century (and mainly white) inhabitants. As for the living Songhees people whose ancestors had lived in the region for millennia, they inhabited neither the land nor its associated legend.

³⁶ Ursula Jupp, *From Cordwood to Campus in Gordon Head, 1852-1959* (Victoria: Ursula Jupp, 1975), 27.

THE OLD CRAIGFLOWER SCHOOL-HOUSE

Victoria's first (proper) "Indian ghost" made its debut in a 1938 *Victoria Times* article entitled "Skeleton Under the Deadman: Another B.C. Archives Adventure."³⁷ Set over two nights during 1918, the haunting of the old Craigflower school-house began when repairmen digging in the schoolyard to secure a winch inadvertently dug up some bones. Identifying them as Indian, the school's resident caretaker, Hugh Palliser, packed them in a box and stored them in the lean-to woodshed adjoining his kitchen, imagining that his daughter, a student of anatomy, might enjoy reconstructing the skeleton. That evening, as the caretaker and his family prepared for bed, the lean-to door to the woodshed unlatched itself and swung open, sending a draft of cold air into the school-house kitchen. Palliser searched the woodshed, but apart from the skull, which seemed to grin eerily at him, found nothing amiss. Saying nothing of his suspicions, the caretaker sent his family to bed. But the following night, when the latch on the woodshed door unlocked itself again, he dug a hole somewhere "beneath the ancient gnarled maples of the old schoolyard" and reburied the "accursed skeleton."³⁸

Appearing at a time when North American society was being rapidly transformed by industrialization, urbanization and immigration, "Skeleton under the Deadman" derived from a North America-wide search for order and tradition.³⁹ History was one means by which a newly rising middle class responded to conditions of change and insecurity, and the establishment of B.C.'s earliest community museums during this

³⁷ Reby Edmond Macdonald, "Skeleton Under the Deadman," *Victoria Daily Times*, 3 September 1938, Magazine Section, 8.

³⁸ Macdonald, "Skeleton Under the Deadman," 8.

³⁹ The BC Historical Society started a campaign to save the school house in 1925. Two years later, the Native Sons and Daughters of BC leased it to preserve it as an historic monument. In 1931 it was dedicated as a museum and in 1968 it was recognized as a national heritage site. Martin Segger and Douglas Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1996), 273-4.

period reflected a much broader impulse to preserve and perpetuate the history of the region's nineteenth-century Anglo-American pioneers and settlers.⁴⁰ Pioneer societies had promoted local history writing in Victoria and elsewhere across the province from the middle of the nineteenth century, but many of B.C.'s earliest community-based museums and heritage sites, including the one established at Craigflower School in 1931, were linked to a new organization called the Native Sons and Daughters of British Columbia.⁴¹ The organization's name reflected a broader movement afoot in the province during the first half of the twentieth century to identify persons of European ancestry, born in British Columbia, as "Natives."⁴² Believing that Aboriginal peoples possessed no history of their own, but were, rather, the descendents of a prehistoric culture "whose only legacy was the production of relics to be salvaged for museums," the Native Sons and Daughters' 1923 constitution is a testament to its broader agenda:

To perpetuate the memories of 'The Pioneers'; to perpetuate the names and deeds of the discoverers and pioneers of the Province of British Columbia; to collect the data and history of this province and preserve and perpetuate it; to establish museums for the purpose of preserving and exhibiting ... all manner of things pertaining to this province and its early inhabitants.⁴³

In addition to its status as the oldest standing colonial-era schoolhouse in Western Canada, the old Craigflower school was known as a place where bones, arrowheads and other Native archaeological artifacts might be found. A celebrated symbol of colonial origins built atop what seemed to be an Indian burial ground, the landscape – which was also an ancestral village site of the Kosampson First Nations peoples – possessed exactly

⁴⁰ Chad Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History: Historical Writing and Institutions, 1784-1958" (Ph.D diss., York University, 1995), 193; See also, H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967).

⁴¹ Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History," 195-200.

⁴² Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History," 201, 206

⁴³ Native Sons of B.C., *Constitution* (1923), 12, quoted in Reimer, "The Making of British Columbia History," 198; 201-206.

the right ingredients for an eerie tale about an Indian ghost. First, the suggestive presence of human remains speaks to a traditional link between ghosts and cemeteries. As Keith Thomas has written of ghosts in early modern England, beyond sanctioning “moral standards, sustaining good social relations and disturbing the sleep of the guilty,” their primary task “was to ensure reverence for the dead and to deter those who sought to molest their bones or frustrate their dying wishes.”⁴⁴ Second, the Craigflower museum was a latent symbol of repressed history and thus a propitious setting for a spooky story about an Indian ghost. Celebrating British Columbia’s white, European pioneers and settlers, the landmark obscured, even as it obtained qualities of mysteriousness and intrigue from its status as an ancestral Aboriginal village. Today, most of what counts as “knowledge” about the region’s pre and early colonial-era Aboriginal occupancy comes from archaeological remains and early records and accounts authored by white writers – accounts which, in light of recent attentions to the constructed nature of historical writing, pose significant interpretive challenges for scholars sensitive to what historian Adelle Perry has called the “fiction of a confident colonizing project where settler dominance is presumed to be normal and inevitable.”⁴⁵ Referring to settler colonies in general and British Columbia in particular, the fiction which Perry identifies is the “seemingly discrete character” of Aboriginal dispossession and colonial settlement, which “masks the fact that dispossession and resettlement were and are deeply and irreparably intertwined, and indeed they derive their social power from that

⁴⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 602.

⁴⁵ Adelle Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 19.

connection.”⁴⁶ Relegated to the shadows of history, yet mysteriously evoked by bones and other archaeological remains, the histories of Aboriginal peoples inhabit a mysterious, ghostly dimension of public memory.

The prominence of ancient Aboriginal burial grounds and grave-sites in stories about Native ghosts also points to how spectralization may, as Renée Bergland has argued, function as a discursive technique of Indian removal, one which symbolizes an ambivalent transformation of physical landscapes into national possessions:

The discursive removal of Indians from American physical territory and the Americanization of the imaginative territory into which Indians are removed are two good explanations for the ideological power of the figure of the Indian ghost. The image also draws power from the sense of *fait accompli* (the Indians are already gone), and from reinforcing the intractable otherness of Indians (they are so other that they are otherworldly).

On the other hand, the ghosting of Indians presents us with a host of doubts about America and American ideology. The entire dynamic of ghosts and hauntings, as we understand it today, is a dynamic of unsuccessful repression. Ghosts are the things we try to bury, but that refuse to stay buried. They are our fears and horrors, disembodied, but made inescapable by their very bodilessness ... When Indians are understood as ghosts, they are also understood as powerful figures beyond American control.⁴⁷

In “Skeleton Under the Deadman,” a ghost erupts from a disturbed burial site to threaten white people living on its ancestral land. Despite being described as a “down-to-earth Yorkshireman” and “certainly not the kind of individual to give way to wild flights of fancy,” the caretaker is rattled by the spooky manifestations. We know this because he reburies the bones, thereby acknowledging the presence, and indeed, power of the ghost. The implications are grave. By calling into question the rationalism of a white person living on its ancestral land, the Indian ghost, by extension, raises a political question about the ideologies of the white civilization it haunts. Additionally, by establishing the land’s status as a Native cemetery, and by demonstrating that white rationalists may

⁴⁶ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 19.

⁴⁷ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 5.

become haunted, the story implies that Indian ghosts might return to haunt the school-house in the future. However, although the ghost has been established as a powerful manifestation capable of instilling fear and provoking action on the part of its percipients, its exorcism transforms the horror of a haunting into the pleasure of a conquest, one which dramatizes a racial bifurcation of time and space. Buried, as it were, beneath the ground, aspects of the past associated with First Nations peoples are rendered part of the natural landscape. Housed above ground in a museum, the memory of white pioneers and settlers, by contrast, is associated with “living” history. Within the logic of the tale, this is the proper order of things.

Amid centennial celebrations, surging nationalism, and a growing heritage conservation movement, the tale of the Craigflower haunting appeared in a local newspaper for a second time in February 1968, just one year prior to the school-house’s recognition as a national historic site.⁴⁸ Penned by T.W. Paterson, a local journalist and historian responsible for keeping a number of Victoria’s ghosts and hauntings alive in the minds of locals during the 1960’s and 1970’s, the story - this time entitled simply “Craigflower’s Ghost” - began by extolling the school’s “honored niche in British Columbian history,” and observed that its thick file in the provincial archives boasted “dozens of yellowing newspaper clippings” recalling its centennial birthday and “its early teachers and students.”⁴⁹ Mobilized in conjunction with a broader appetite for stories about old homes and pioneers, Paterson’s version of the Craigflower ghost-tale also recalled “that long-ago day” when the farmhouse Manor’s “sturdy doors were constantly

⁴⁸ T.W. Paterson, “Craigflower’s Ghost,” *Daily Colonist*, 4 February 1968, Magazine Section, 5.

⁴⁹ Paterson, “Craigflower’s Ghost,” 5.

barred against hostile Indians.”⁵⁰ The “hostile” Indians in question, however, were not the “mild and inoffensive” Songhees peoples whose ancestral lands had been settled by British colonists. “Trouble with the Indians was always uppermost in the minds of white people,” wrote *Colonist* journalist Douglas Leechman in a 1962 article about the Craigflower settlement entitled “Indian Shutters,” an article which illustrates the difference between white perceptions of the local Songhees versus the Cowichan or Haida peoples, who came from further away:

Less than three months before McKenzie’s arrival, Peter Brown, a shepherd, had been murdered by two Indians who were subsequently caught, tried and hanged. Then again, four months after his arrival, several hundred Indians from Alaska, peeved about some negotiations with the white man, had landed in Cadboro Bay where there had once been a large Indian village, and had raided the farm there. Even as late as 1856 there was general fear of an Indian attack. It was not the local Songhees people they were worried about. These Indians were mild and inoffensive, curious about the white people and their strange doings and quite ready to work for them. It was the raiding Haidahs from the Queen Charlotte Islands, the warlike Cowichans from up Island, and other even more remote tribes whose members came to visit the growing village of Victoria in ever-increasing numbers that gave trouble.⁵¹

Unconcerned with distinctions between different groups of First Nations peoples, Paterson and MacDonald described their ghost simply – it was Indian. Yet both its relatively subtle manifestations and the ease with which it was exorcised by the school-house caretaker echoed a broader perception of the Songhees as, in Douglas Leechman’s words, a “mild and inoffensive” people.⁵²

JOHN TOD HOUSE

Much like the Craigflower ghost-tale, popular accounts of Oak Bay’s famously haunted Tod-house, a 150 year-old suburban residence occupied by Hudson’s Bay Company trader John Tod and his family during the latter half of the nineteenth century,

⁵⁰ Paterson, “Craigflower’s Ghost,” 5.

⁵¹ Douglas Leechman, “Indian Shutters,” *Daily Colonist*, 28 October 1962, 3

⁵² Leechman, “Indian Shutters,” *Daily Colonist*, 28 October 1962, 3.

also revolved around the mysterious origins of a skeleton, this time alleged to have been discovered by workmen digging in the front yard. Whether the discovery and subsequent reburial of the bones either fueled or, as many claimed, laid the Tod-house ghost to rest, questions about how the skeleton had come to be buried on the property inspired a breadth of conjecture, and the story gained nation-wide notoriety between 1947 and 1950, as the site of what remains one of Greater Victoria's most heavily reported hauntings ever. *Victoria Daily Times* and *News-Herald* journalists J.K. Nesbitt and Humphrey Davy broke the story in January 1947, ostensibly following a New Year's Eve party held at the house during which a biscuit box swinging violently for no apparent reason upset some guests. "Unbelievers may well say that on New Year's Eve, anybody is liable to see things swing," jibed Davy.⁵³ But the growing list of strange events associated with the suburban Oak Bay cottage was apparently no secret to neighbors, and while its owner, the retired Lt. Col T.C. Evans, a self-professed materialist, scoffed at stories that the house was haunted when he bought it in 1944, he and his wife were forthcoming with local journalists about the eerie noises that often disturbed their sleep – the sound of footsteps about the house, a howling cat, and a cellar door prone to creaking open and slamming shut by itself. Hats, they reported, would be mysteriously flung from their hooks onto the floor; a rocking chair in the Colonel's room was prone to rocking at will; and on one occasion, a bedroom window had mysteriously popped out of its sockets to land, frame intact, on the Evans' front lawn. The room to which the window had belonged – the guest bedroom – was, they claimed, particularly eerie, and had a solid reputation for speeding the departures of jittery house-guests. "Whatever may be the

⁵³ Humphrey Davy, "Eerie Happenings in 'Haunted' Oak Bay Residence Intrigue Owner and Guests," *Victoria Daily Times*, 18 January 1947, Magazine Section, 5; J.K. Nesbitt, "Victoria 'Ghost House' Antics Excite Interest of Psychic Experts," *News Herald*, 25 January 1947, 6.

explanation for these eerie manifestations, the secret of the old house... lies in the grave with John Todd [*sic*], one of the most colorful pioneers in this country," wrote Davy in 1947.⁵⁴ "A tall, gaunt Scotsman with blazing eyes and a mouth like a half-moon," Tod's "legacy of fear" has "haunted the lives of all those who have since lived in his rambling, 100-year old house," concurred *News-Herald* staff writer Ron Baird.⁵⁵

But while early versions of the tale identified Tod himself as the most likely source of the trouble, popular knowledge of the Scotch trader's private life soon led local journalists to suggest that Tod's ghost had company. Dwelling at length on trader's so-called "eccentricities," from his stubborn personality to his disavowal of his parents' Presbyterian faith, not to mention his participation in Spiritualist séances, it wasn't long before journalists had reached into Tod's relatively unconventional marital history for clues to the identity of the second ghost. In 1950, for example, the *Vancouver Sun* reported that two RCAF men hosted by the Evans some time near the end of the Second World War had divulged details about the frightening night they had spent in the house, during which the sound of rattling chains and an apparition of "an Indian woman, fettered hand and foot," had badly disturbed their sleep.⁵⁶ Moreover, the bones which had been discovered several feet under in the front yard of the house were now said to have belonged to an Asian or Native woman.⁵⁷ Occasionally linked to rumors about Tod's alleged involvement in smuggling Chinese immigrants through a secret tunnel which led into his home, or to an Indian battle fought on the land some time before the

⁵⁴ Davy, "Eerie Happenings," Magazine Section, 5.

⁵⁵ Ron Baird, "Trader Tod Leaves Legacy of Fear: Haunted House Stirred By Strange Events," *News-Herald*, 13 February 1950, 17.

⁵⁶ "Century-Old Ghost Haunts Ex-Tod House at Oak Bay," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 1950, 9.

⁵⁷ Baird, "Trader Tod Leaves Legacy of Fear," 18; Robert Belyk, *Ghosts: True Tales of Eerie Encounters* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 1990), 45-7; Nesbitt, "Victoria 'Ghost-House' Antics Excite Interest of Psychic Experts," 6.

establishment of Tod's farm, most versions of the tale identified the skeleton as one of the Scottish trader's alleged seven wives – "a native woman who was rumored to have gone insane, causing Tod to confine her to the house."⁵⁸ Commingling attributes which suggested two of Tod's wives – an emotionally unstable Welsh woman named Eliza Waugh who had been returned to England to be institutionalized after going mad, and Sophia Lolo, the Shuswap First Nations woman with whom Tod kept house in Oak Bay until his death in 1882, the identity of the ghost has remained open to considerable speculation.⁵⁹ In a 1984 *Islander Magazine* Halloween feature, for example, Valerie Green suggested that ghost may have been Tod's Native housekeeper. According to Green, Tod had left the woman alone in the house while he traveled to Scotland to retrieve one of his wives. Fearing desertion, the housekeeper went mad with grief and mysteriously disappeared.⁶⁰

In part, the phantom of the dark-skinned madwoman in chains, who might be Tod's wife, servant, or an illegal immigrant, serves as a ghostly symbol of the marginalized positions occupied by women, Aboriginals, Asians and immigrants in Canadian history and life. Overshadowing the more specific characteristics ascribed to her, her servitude is her most prominent feature. "Denied economic and political selfhood in life, women have been eclipsed historically, rendered obscure in ways that easily translate into ghostliness," writes Judith Richardson of how gendered societal

⁵⁸ Jo-Anne Christensen, *Ghost Stories of British Columbia* (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1996), 94; Paterson, "Halloween Ghosts...For Real," *Daily Colonist*, 31 October 1971, Magazine Section, 6.

⁵⁹ Belyk, *John Tod: Rebel in the Ranks* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 1995), xii,1; Segger and Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*, 177-9; Stuart Stark, *Oak Bay's Heritage Buildings: More than just Bricks and Boards* (Oak Bay: Corporation of the District of Oak Bay, 1986), 3-5.

⁶⁰ Valerie Green, "Tod House: A Ghost Story for Halloween," *Islander Magazine*, 28 October 1984, 8.

structures may fuel ghost stories.⁶¹ This fact is compounded in relation to Aboriginal women, who rarely appear in local historical literature, even as ghosts. Indeed, emblematic of the broader absence of Native women from B.C.'s historical record, little is known of Sophia Tod's life. Never named by Tod in his correspondences with peers, despite frequent mention of their children, a photograph taken around 1863 is the chief evidence of her life in Victoria. For historian Sylvia Van Kirk, the portrait suggests Tod's "ambivalence about the constraints of Victoria dress and customs," and coheres with local legends about her difficult adjustment to life in Victoria. Lacking established social ties to other women in the community, from whom she would have been doubly isolated by the Tod property's distance from the Fort, she was further responsible for raising the couple's many children without the support of extended family.⁶² Invisible, isolated, burdened, melancholy, the image of Sophia Tod which lingers is quintessentially ghostly.

The ghost also raises the specter of Victoria's "family secret" – the mixed race marriages and racial hybridity of the city's founding families. John Tod's marriage to Sophia Lolo, daughter of the influential chief Jean-Baptiste Lolo and his Shuswap wife, exemplifies what was a common pattern of marriage between white male settlers and traders and First Nations women in nineteenth-century British Columbia. The prevalence of such marriages dismayed British imperial observers who viewed Native women as the "dark and dangerous" antithesis of Western ideals of femininity, and whose supposed sexual licentiousness was imagined to pose a dangerous threat to white men, whose place

⁶¹ Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 120.

⁶² Sylvia Van Kirk, "Colonized Lives: The Native Wives and Daughters of Five Founding Families of Victoria," in *Pacific Empires: Essays in Honour of Glyndwr Williams*, eds. Alan Frost and Jane Samson (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999), 216.

as the “responsible gender” and “civilized race” were believed to be essential to the colony’s success.⁶³ Identified as Tod’s Aboriginal wife, the ghost is the Native mother of some of Victoria’s early colonial-era children and seems, thus, a kind of national phantom matriarch. But her identity is tenuous, shifting uneasily between wife, Native housekeeper and immigrant-in-bondage. Eliding her percipients and documentarians in a way which, even after her ghost is exorcised, prevents her assimilation into the history of the landscape, her story continues to provoke. Who is she? Why does she appear in such terrifying form? Judith Richardson is right when she writes that “the unresolved past haunts by virtue of its unresolvability.”⁶⁴ Obsessing over the identity of the ghost, accounts of the Tod-house haunting evince an inability to come to terms with her unknowability – the unrecoverable loss of information, the unbridgeable historical distance she sustains. In this way, despite her enchained status which suggests anything but agency, she is not entirely bidden. Malleable, open to interpretation, she is possessed. Inviting desire, delivering maledictions, she is a possessor. Occupying absence, foregrounding historical vagueness, she is both fueled by ambiguity and (dis)embodies it.

BEACON HILL

Although Beacon Hill Park is described by the City of Victoria as “the crowning jewel” in its parks system, and “an oasis of both natural and landscaped beauty,” local legend warns that the park may be a sinister place by night.⁶⁵ In 1986, a park maintenance crew looking to facilitate lawn-mowing removed some Aboriginal burial cairns from the park’s southeastern slopes, and according to local historian and ghost-

⁶³ Perry, “‘The Prevailing Vice’: Mixed-Race Relationships,” in *On the Edge of Empire*, 48-78.

⁶⁴ Richardson, *Possessions*, 122.

⁶⁵ Belyk, *Ghosts*, 100; City of Victoria, “Beacon Hill Park,” n.d. < http://www.city.victoria.bc.ca/residents/prksrc_prks_bcnhll.shtml > (10 January 2005).

expert Robert Belyk, “ghost researchers” have hypothesized that the removal of the grave-markers disturbed the spirits of the dead, who now search for their cairns after sunset.⁶⁶ Continuing a long tradition of story-telling associated with Beacon Hill, the haunting echoes a lamentation over the destruction of ancient Native grave-sites which dates from the nineteenth-century writings of early settler and “archaeological enthusiast” James Deans. Dismayed by both the disregard of those who failed to restore excavated cairns, and the disinterest he perceived on the part of his fellow Victorians in the landscape’s significance as an “Indian cemetery,” Deans proposed that a sign be installed to mark the remains of the “unknown, long-forgotten race,” solicited subscriptions to fund the endeavor, and even composed an inscription for the hoped-for sign: “These rude but simple mounds were erected by an unknown people whose place of abode was on the fortified point below. At death their bodies were carried to the top of the hill, and these cairns erected as memorials over their remains, as is to be seen all around.”⁶⁷

Deans’ text also contained an “Indian legend” entitled “Being a Tale of the Terrible Sill-Kous, in Its Connection With Mee-Acan, or Beacon Hill,” which he claimed to have collected from local Natives. The story identified the burial cairns located on the slopes of the park overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca as the grave-sites of those killed in war or perished from a sickness known as the “Terrible Sill-kous,” caused, according to the legend, by abnormally cold weather. Deans described the symptoms of the disease, which included muscle soreness, facial and neck swelling, eyes that felt as though they would drop out, sore throat, lack of appetite, dysentery, and for 90 per cent of the population, death. He hypothesized that the “Sill-kous” was the same illness as

⁶⁶ Belyk, *Ghosts*, 100.

⁶⁷ British Columbia Archives, Vertical Files, Beacon Hill Park, “Extracts from James Deans’ “Traditional History of Vancouver Island,” unidentified newspaper clipping.

one described by the Toltec historian Ixt-libe-ochill as the cause of much suffering among the Aztecs of the eleventh, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶⁸ “Doubtless the people whose ashes repose beneath these rude, but simple, cairns were the forefathers of the present aboriginies,” wrote Deans. “That they were so, there is, I think, ample proof. But if a different and long-forgotten race, as some people maintain, it is now hard to decide.”⁶⁹

Reworked in 1954 as “The Ghostly Legend of the Sill-kous at Beacon Hill,” local journalist and historian R.H. Nichols identified the story as “the legend the Old Ones told of the great sickness that befell the villagers many centuries ago,” and lamenting the disappearance of the burial cairns once observable in the park, wrote that “time has erased all that might remind us of another race who built their villages where Victoria stands today.”⁷⁰ Three decades later, stories about the disturbed spirits whose grave-sites had been defiled would continue to distance the park’s ghostly manifestations from nineteenth-and twentieth-century First Nations peoples by reminding readers that “Even

⁶⁸ In a manner akin to eighteenth-and nineteenth-century American story-telling about the ‘moundbuilders’ – an imaginary vanished race, possibly even white, which many believed to be the source of burial mounds located throughout the Mississippi Valley (and elsewhere), “The Ghostly Legend of the Sill-kous at Beacon Hill,” like the more recent accounts of Indian ghosts haunting the park, had to do with *ancient* aboriginals, whose deaths were imagined to have well preceded the arrival of Europeans. “The mystery of their origins enticed both amateurs and scientists” writes Royal British Columbia Museum anthropologist and curator Grant Keddie, describing the reactions of early European settlers, to whom the burial mounds seemed to resemble cairns they had seen in the British Isles. Grant Keddie, “Fortified Defensive Sites and Burial Cairns of the Songhees Indians,” *The Midden* XVI, 4 (October 1984): 7-9. Historian Brian Dippie’s reflections on the question of Indian origins in eighteenth and nineteenth-century America are also to the point here. According to Dippie, during the eighteenth-and nineteenth centuries, America’s quest for a distinctive national identity was intimately linked to the question of Indian origins. In search of an indigeneity whose roots in a recovered “New World Antiquity” might transcend the nation’s youth and endow it with a grand and expansive history, white Americans constructed the image of the Indian as an emblem of the nation’s past. The myth of the ‘moundbuilders’ flourished during this time and for many it served “as justification for displacing the Indians, since they had displaced an earlier people.” Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 16-18.

⁶⁹ BCA, Vertical Files, Beacon Hill Park, “Extracts from James Deans’ “Traditional History of Vancouver Island,” unidentified newspaper clipping.

⁷⁰ R.H. Nichols, “The Ghostly Legend of the Sill-kous at Beacon Hill,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 May 1954, 24. See also “‘Mee-a-can’ Still There,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 23 May 1962, 32.

before the coming of Europeans, the island people who lived in the two communities near the area were subject to disease, which killed many villagers.”⁷¹ Indeed, what stands out about the Beacon Hill haunting is the ghostly lineage it articulates when the dead return as ghosts to assign blame and guilt for the neglect of responsibilities traditionally associated with familial kinship or religious bonds. Especially at gravesites, where familial ancestry intersects with public history and memory, community interactions with the dead are mediated by and inscribed in landscape. Absolving European-Canadians of responsibility for the deaths of the Natives buried in the hillside, while assigning them the duty of grave-site maintenance and commemoration, these ghosts link the landscape’s latter-day caretakers and inhabitants to its ancient Aboriginal occupants, avoiding mention of the living Songhees First Nation peoples who are descended from those buried in the park, and whose recent ancestors relied on the landscape there for agricultural production, fishing, defense, and recreation until they were displaced by the British around 1850.⁷² The ghosts of Beacon Hill are national ghosts, and although their manifestations are described as frightening, they articulate imaginary lines of kinship

⁷¹ Belyk, “The Ghosts of Beacon Hill Park,” in *Ghosts*, 100.

⁷² Named by the British for the beacons which marked the nearby and dangerous Brotchie Ledge, Beacon Hill Park’s creation fulfilled the requirements of the Wakefield System – Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s theory of colonization which James Douglas was instructed to apply to the settlement and development of southern Vancouver Island. Described by historian Richard Mackie as “a colonial theory premised on high land prices, a land-based exclusionary franchise, and the hope of an ordered and hierarchical society,” the object of the Wakefield System, as James Douglas was instructed in 1849, was to “transfer to the new country whatever is most valuable and most approved in the institutions of the old, so that Society may, as far as possible, consist of the same classes, united together by the same ties” to prevent “the ingress of squatters, paupers and land Speculators.” Public land reserves were an important component of the system which specified that for every eight miles of private land, one square mile was to be designated for public use. By 1850, the *Lekwammen* had lost possession of nearly all their ancestral lands on southern Vancouver Island, including the area comprising Beacon Hill Park, which they had used for netting ducks, harvesting fish and clams, for recreation, as a defensive lookout, and for agriculture. The open meadows filled with wildflowers which so attracted the early British settlers contained Blue Camas, a flowering plant cultivated by the *Lekwammen* for their edible bulbs which served as a staple root vegetable and as a valued trading commodity. Richard Mackie, “The Colonization of Vancouver Island, 1849-1858,” *BC Studies*, 96 (Winter 1992-3): 3; Ringuette, “Beacon Hill Park History 1842-2004,” n.p..

which point to their desirability. The ghosts of Beacon Hill have been interpreted as signs of the community's failure to adequately commemorate its dead, but while they elicit lamentations over the erasure of visible signs of the landscape's Indigenous heritage, this ghostly lamentation also contains within it an implicit reinforcement of the erasure it points to. These ghosts have not been exorcised, perhaps because although the cairns which were removed in 1986 have been reconstructed, they remain obscured, unapparent to the untrained eye, boulders on a hillside overlooking the sea. As park historian Janice Ringuette recently observed, "few Victorians and even fewer visitors are aware of the burial cairns."⁷³

POSSESSIONS, DISPOSSESSIONS

The land is haunted because it was stolen, writes literary scholar Renée Bergland of the preponderance of ghostly Indians and Indian ghosts who have haunted American landscapes and imaginations for more than three centuries.⁷⁴ From the seventeenth-century Puritan writers who saw Native Americans as "demonic manifestations," through Enlightenment-era descriptions of Indians as "symbols of darkness and irrationality," to the "vanishing Americans" and Indian ghosts who frequented nineteenth-century histories and historical romances, in the spectral tropes which permeate the language of the United States constitution, and persisting in twentieth-century horror fiction such as Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* or Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*, Bergland finds that motifs of possession and dispossession permeate American literary depictions of Native peoples.⁷⁵ Haunted by an originary sin of colonial dispossession, the American national imagination is, she writes, caught in the vice of an

⁷³ Ringuette, "Beacon Hill Park History 1842-2004," n.p..

⁷⁴ Bergland *National Uncanny*, 1-4.

⁷⁵ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 1.

obsession with a defiled grave.⁷⁶ But unlike other oft-spectralized American subjects - African Americans, women, and the poor, whose ghosts, she argues, are emblems of white guilt and negative sources of European-American identity – Bergland argues that Native American ghosts function as what Werner Sollers has called “presumptive reconstructions of American kinship” which imaginatively transcend the historicity of the nation by providing a “fictive ethnicity” with the power to Americanize anyone.⁷⁷

In Victoria, the geography of Aboriginal hauntings suggests that here too, the figure of the Indian ghost derives from dispossession of Aboriginals from their ancestral lands, and from the corollary effacement of First Nations peoples and cultures from the local geography of public history and memory. Walking around Cadboro Bay today, one is hard-pressed to find signs that the now high-priced residential suburb was formerly an ancestral Songhees village site. Likewise, apart from a few plaques and totem poles which commemorate its Indigenous heritage, Beacon Hill Park is a manicured effigy to the romantic aesthetics of nineteenth-century British colonial landscaping. And the old Craigflower school-house, which was built for the education of Hudson’s Bay Company employees’ children in conjunction with the Craigflower farm, one of the original colonial farms on Vancouver Island, was of course constructed atop an ancestral Kosampson Native village site.

Yet stories about Aboriginal ghosts and hauntings associated with places in and around Victoria have tended to sidestep the issue of Aboriginal dispossession. Rather, identifying their ghosts as spirits of ancient Aboriginals, they seem propelled by a diffuse sense of curiosity about the land’s history prior to the arrival of Europeans. Observing

⁷⁶ Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 22.

⁷⁷ Werner Sollers, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 124-5, cited in Bergland, *National Uncanny*, 19.

the preponderance of hauntings associated with Bastion Square in the heart of the city's urban heritage district - an area so badly plagued by ghosts and spirits that "even the trees that cast shadows across their paving stones on a stormy moonlit night abound with stories of ghosts, poltergeists and paranormal activity," local historian and ghost expert John Adams underscores this point. "If there are myths about the land near *Kuo-sing-el-as*," he writes, "they have been lost in the mists of time, providing the need for archival research, supplemented by messages from the world of spirits – and perhaps a dash of imagination – to complete the story."⁷⁸

Further complicating the applicability of Bergland's analysis of American Indian ghosts to the local setting is the fact that within the broader spectrum of ghosts and hauntings associated with places in and around Victoria, Aboriginal ghosts are rare. Neither do they exert much presence in British Columbian fiction, especially compared to the preponderance of Indian ghosts in American literature. Why might this be? Why *aren't* Victorians haunted by more ghosts and spirits of displaced Songhees? To begin with, in British Columbia, popular historical writing has tended to dwell less upon Natives as central oppositional characters than on criminality and/or wilderness as the forces threatening civilization and the established order. Comparing Canadian versus American frontier myths in her study of public history in B.C., historian Elizabeth Furniss has written that while the "master narrative" of "regeneration through violence" characterizes the overarching motif present in the American frontier myth, in Canada, "conquest through benevolence" is a dominant narrative archetype. The Canadian counterpart to the "Indian fighter" who figures as the stereotypical hero in American frontier histories is the Mountie. Instead of hostile tribes of Indians, the "dark forces of

⁷⁸ John Adams, *Ghosts & Legends of Bastion Square* (Victoria: Discover the Past, 2002), 11.

lawlessness and immorality against which the heroic protagonists must struggle for the advance of ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’” are “lawless, renegade criminals, both Native and non-Native.”⁷⁹ Further, the corollary to the myth of Canadian benevolence toward Native peoples has been, as Furniss points out, a long-term “silence regarding the realities of Canada’s own repression of Native peoples and a cloaking of forms of domination and power as paternalistic expressions of good will.”⁸⁰ Daniel Francis makes a similar argument in *The Imaginary Indian*, calling out that particularly Canadian ruse - the insistence that “they, unlike their American neighbors, did not believe that “the only good Indian was a dead Indian.”⁸¹ In fact, writes Francis, for Canadians, “the most important thing to know about Indians in the century before World War II was that they were disappearing ... When Canadians said ‘Indian,’ they meant doomed,” and few thought to intervene in what was ultimately viewed to be inevitable extinction.⁸² “Canadians believed firmly in progress,” writes Francis, “and progress demanded that the inferior civilization of the Indian had to give way to superior, White civilization.”⁸³

Chad Reimer’s Ph. D dissertation on the history of B.C. historiography also sheds some light on the apparent paucity of Indian ghosts and hauntings in Victoria. Compared to the early histories written in eastern Canada and the United States during a time when Renaissance Europe had just emerged from the Middle Ages, history writing in B.C. took its first steps after the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.⁸⁴ A belief in the inevitable triumph of civilization over savagery and reason over unreason characterized

⁷⁹ Furniss, “Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier: The Landscape of Public History in Rural British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 115/116 (Autumn/Winter, 1997/98): 22.

⁸⁰ Furniss, “Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier,” 23.

⁸¹ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Press, 1992), 59.

⁸² Francis, *Imaginary Indian*, 57.

⁸³ Francis, *Imaginary Indian*, 58-9.

⁸⁴ Reimer, “The Making of British Columbia History,” 15-16.

Enlightenment-era histories, and as Reimer points out, early writers in the British Pacific Northwest “sought to bring the region within the empire of ‘civilization’.”⁸⁵ In addition, British authors overwhelmingly perceived the Native peoples of the Pacific Northwest to be non-threatening, at least in terms of physical violence; they believed that most of the blood shed between Natives and European-Americans in the United States had been caused by European-American provocation.⁸⁶ The widespread and enduring myth of benevolence evident throughout much British Columbian historiography, literature and popular writing derived from this perceived contrast between American genocidal policies toward Natives versus the paternalism of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the British colonial authorities.⁸⁷

On Vancouver Island, understanding public attitudes toward the dispossession of Native peoples from their ancestral lands is further complicated by the legacy of the Fort Victoria Treaties. Between 1849 and 1854, Hudson’s Bay Company Chief Factor and, after 1851, Governor James Douglas negotiated fourteen treaties, or as he called them “purchases” or “deeds of conveyance” with local Natives. The treaties extinguished Native title to the land, in return for lump sum payments and guarantees preserving traditional fishing and hunting rights. But the treaty-making process stopped before deals could be negotiated throughout the rest of the province, and today, land claims are the single largest legal issue facing British Columbia.⁸⁸ This is not the case in Victoria, however, where the legality of the Fort Victoria Treaties has been upheld by the Supreme

⁸⁵ Reimer, “The Making of British Columbia History,” 5-16.

⁸⁶ Reimer, “The Making of British Columbia History,” 44.

⁸⁷ Reimer, “The Making of British Columbia History,” 44.

⁸⁸ Duff, “The Fort Victoria Treaties,” 5-7.

Court of Canada.⁸⁹ What I am suggesting, is that in Victoria, because the legal system has sanctioned the dispossession of Native peoples from most of their ancestral lands, a broader Canadian tendency to evade issues to do with the dispossession and repression of Native peoples may be amplified.

In conclusion, what does it mean to attribute (as John Adams does in his *Ghosts and Legends of Bastion Square*) the extraordinarily haunted character of a place, haunted by a preponderance of *white* ghosts, to the spirits of “ancient” Aboriginals?⁹⁰ The answer begins with the imaginative racialization of time and space which spans the history of story-telling about Aboriginal ghosts and hauntings in Victoria. Therein, landscape is not only associated with Native bones and artifacts (land=gravesite), but becomes, itself, a spatialized symbol of a “pre-historic” and thus “timeless” past (clocked and calendared time and history arrives with Europeans). Moreover, by animating the ghosts of white pioneers and settlers, and by articulating imagined ties between a seemingly timeless landscape and its haunted contemporary inhabitants, Native spirits not only confer a sense of ancient roots upon a youthful nation, but plant those roots firmly in place. And ultimately, this dynamic of imaginary kinship articulated when Indian ghosts haunt colonized lands, speaks to a diffuse immigrant desire – not just to possess, but to belong – to belong *to* and in place.

⁸⁹ Court of Appeal, *Regina v. Clifford White and David Bob*, *Reasons for Judgment of the Honourable Mr. Justice Norris*, 15 December 1964, 35, 40, in Duff, “Fort Victoria Treaties,” 7.

⁹⁰ Adams, *Ghosts & Legends*, vi.

**CHAPTER IV:
GHOSTLY POSSESSIONS IN RECENT LITERATURE
CONCLUSIONS, CONTINUATIONS**

Pointing to some of the broader significances of the relationship between ghosts and historical consciousness, two contemporary works of juvenile fiction set in Victoria, Kit Pearson's *Awake and Dreaming* and Penny Chamberlain's *The Olden Days Locket* provide a fitting opening to my conclusion because they illustrate how new ghosts and hauntings evolve, even as they draw upon past traditions. Both novels follow the transformations of young girls, who retreat from difficult lives in twentieth-century Victoria into inner imaginative worlds in which they encounter or are possessed by ghosts from the past. These are benevolent ghosts who through explicit instruction or spirit possession teach the living who have become akin to ghosts themselves to own and use their imaginations to alter their relationship with the past, envision positive futures for themselves, and thus resist their own spectralization. Following in the stead of postmodern works of literature such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* which use ghosts and hauntings to reclaim and foreground displaced histories of marginalized peoples for present purposes, *The Olden Days Locket* and *Awake and Dreaming* use haunting as a device through which to imagine the lives of women and the poor in nineteenth-century Victoria. Like Native peoples and the Chinese, the property-less and working classes have traditionally inhabited marginalized spaces in Victoria's historical record, not just because of the preoccupations of earlier generations of nationalist historians with the achievements of "founding fathers," but also because, without the paper trails typically engendered by property ownership and social status, the details of their lives resist

orthodox historical research efforts. In the Afterword to *The Olden Days Locket*, for example, Penny Chamberlain points out that while the O'Reilly family who lived in Point Ellice House (where most of her novel takes place) from 1867 – 1975 “kept everything during that time – everything from recipes, receipts and seed catalogues to clothing, furniture and artwork,” little is known of the servants who lived and worked there beyond their names and what they were paid.¹

In addition to using haunting as a narrative device through which to construct plausible, yet fictive visions of past times, both novels also use their characters' relationships with the past to engage analogous historiographical issues which bear upon both haunting and historical writing. Specifically, through the particular possibilities afforded by the notion of “possession,” each engages the issue of transference between the past and its historical representation. By “transference,” I am following historian and philosopher Dominick LaCapra's “modified psychoanalytic sense of a repetition-displacement of the past into the present as it necessarily bears upon the future.” LaCapra's straightforward explanation of transference as it relates to historical consciousness is worth reiterating here, because it sets up the issues to do with possession I wish to explore:

‘Transference’ is bound up with a notion of time not as simple continuity or discontinuity but as repetition with variation or change – at times traumatically disruptive change. Transference causes fear of possession by the past and loss of control over it and oneself. It simultaneously brings the temptation to assert full control over the ‘object’ of study through ideologically suspect procedures that may be related to the phenomenon Freud discussed as ‘narcissism.’ Narcissism is a one-sided but alluring response to the anxiety of transference. It involves the impossible, imaginary attempt to totally integrate the self; it is active in the speculative effort to elaborate a fully unified perspective, and its self-regarding ‘purity’ entails the exorcistic scapegoating of the “other” that is always to some extent within. As Freud indicated, the desirable but elusive objective of an exchange with an ‘other’ is to work through transference displacement in a manner that does not blindly replicate debilitating aspects of the past. Transference implies that the considerations at issue in the object of study are always repeated with variations – or find

¹ Penny Chamberlain, *The Olden Days Locket* (Winlaw: Sono Nis Press, 2002), 197-8.

their displaced analogues – in one’s account of it, and transference is as much denied by an assertion of total difference of the past as by its total identification with one’s own ‘self’ or ‘culture.’ The difficulty is to develop an exchange with the ‘other’ that is both sensitive to transference displacement and open to the challenge of the other’s ‘voice.’²

In *The Olden Days Locket* we meet twelve year old Jess, who is alternatively teased and ignored by her schoolmates who find her strange for preferring books and history to sports and fashion. Jess accepts a summer volunteer position at Point Ellice House heritage site where she is possessed by the ghost of a thirteen year old orphaned servant girl in the O’Reilly household named Rose. Transported backward in time to the year 1896, Jess finds herself trapped inside Rose’s body, where she gains firsthand experience of the economic hardships faced by the poor, as well as the indignity of social exclusion in a rigidly class divided society. When Rose’s father is killed in the Point Ellice Bridge accident, her aunt steps in to provide for the girl, but with meager savings and only a housekeeper’s wages to sustain them, they are compelled to give up their home and take refuge in the O’Reilly’s servant quarters. Moving back and forth in time between the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *The Olden Days Locket* underscores the relationship between social marginalization and ghostliness which bridges the century separating Jess from Rose, blurring boundaries between past and present, and inviting the reader to ponder just who has possessed whom. Not only is it uncertain whether Jess has possessed Rose or the other way around, but there is a third ghost to contend with, the phantom of a woman in black seen carrying a lantern along the Selkirk waterway near the site of the Point Ellice Bridge, whose collapse brings about the death of Rose’s father and ruptures the young girl’s life. Rose’s aunt suspects that her niece, who sleepwalks, is the mistaken identity of this “ghost,” and while she is not far off the mark, Rose, who decides

² Dominic LaCapra, “Is Everyone A *Mentalité* Case? Transference and the ‘Culture’ Concept,” *History and Theory* 23, 3 (October 1984): 296.

to go straight to the source, introduces herself to the specter and learns that she too has mistaken the living for the dead. The phantom hag turns out to be a melancholy but very much alive elderly woman named Ida Cameron, and she rewards Rose for befriending her by offering the young girl and her aunt a better future in her home, where she has a piano that Rose, who aspires to become a concert pianist, might play, as well as a sewing machine that Rose's aunt may use to launch her own dream of becoming a seamstress. Later, and as a result of the research efforts of budding historian Jess, we learn that Mrs. Cameron willed her home to Rose, who eventually married, raised a family, and sustained a career as a pianist. Through kindness and compassion, Ida teaches Rose, who teaches Jess, that poverty of spirit is as hazardous as material impoverishment and that in this regard the wealthy may be as needy as the poor. Furthermore, by marking and bridging the individual, sociological, and historical distances which isolate the three women, each becomes a positive agent in the life of another, and the result is a chain of exorcisms in which one ghost after another regains hope, envisions a future and asserts a place in the life of the community. The tale ends as Jess, returned to the twentieth century, reaches out to make a friend among the living.

Similarly a tale of a ghost's awakening to life, *Awake and Dreaming* casts nine year old Theo as the sensitive and intelligent daughter of a young, impoverished and self-absorbed single mother who desperately craves love, yet is emotionally ill-equipped to care for herself, let alone provide for her daughter. Like Jess in *The Olden Days Locket*, a combination of outer circumstance and inward retreat has rendered Theo a ghost in her own life. Taunted by the wealthier children with whom she attends school (who call her names like licehead), she makes herself invisible and rebuffs potential friendships with

those whose kindness she perceives to be patronizing, disappearing into books and fantasies about magic and belonging to a perfect family with parents and siblings who love her unconditionally. After Theo's mother abandons her to the care of an aunt in Victoria, the girl encounters a ghost of a dead children's fiction writer named Cecily, who recognizes a future writer in Theo and instructs the young girl on the benefits as well as the limitations of imagination. Encouraging Jess to embrace her imagination, but to recognize that her fantasy of a perfect family is an impossible illusion, and even detrimental if it prevents her from facing up to reality and becoming an agent in her own life, the ghost then thanks Theo for listening to her and announces its imminent departure. Awakened, Theo stands up to her mother, whom she persuades to remain in Victoria where together, they begin the difficult work of building a better future for themselves.

Both *The Olden Days Locket* and *Awake and Dreaming* stage a web of correlated and entangled exchanges between self and other in which multiple selves and others intrude upon and unsettle one other. Both possessed and a possessor, Jess in *The Olden Days Locket*, is drawn into or possessed by a story which she does not consciously recognize as one of her own making when she finds herself inside Rose's body. Nor is it, at least to begin with. Evidently identifying with Rose, who is so uncannily similar to Jess in age, character and circumstance that we might well be led to the conclusion that they are pieces of one fractured self, Jess becomes invested in Rose's future and pieces together her history in a narrative whose plot follows Rose's transformation from a shadow of a self into an empowered individual. By possessing Rose in this fashion and becoming invested in the other's future, Jess breaks the spell which has rendered her a ghost in her own life and acquires a sense of her own self in the present. However,

despite the parallels between Rose and Jess, the century of history which stands between the two renders the closure or unification of their selves incomplete, and the two eventually go their separate ways, living out distinct yet not unrelated futures.

Similarly, in *Awake and Dreaming*, Theo learns that her dream of belonging to the seemingly perfect Kaldar family household in Victoria - a dream which seems so real that when she arrives in Victoria she experiences uncanny feelings of *déjà vu* - was a dream of the phantom Cecily's design. But while a possession of sorts lands Theo inside Cecily's final tale, it is the living, and not the dead who must carry the plot into the future, and Cecily's exit marks Theo's repossession of herself, which she must author by living in the present. Cecily, like Theo, lives in her imagination, but the two are less closely paired as two halves of a fragmented self than Jess and Rose seem in *The Olden Days Locket*, appearing instead in the roles of teacher and pupil. Furthermore, while *Awake and Dreaming* engages and sustains a tension between imagination and realism not unlike that in Chamberlain's novel, the latter foregrounds a much greater preoccupation with historiographical issues than *Awake and Dreaming*. This is especially evident in the parallel which *The Olden Days Locket* sets up between, on the one hand, the transformation in which Jess/Rose acquire an increasing sense of self awareness and agency, and on the other, the exchange in which historical distance comes to replace ghostly proximity or possession in relation to the past. Although it is through a kind of narcissistic identification with the past that Jess first gains access to Rose, her reliance upon orthodox historical research to discover what became of Rose alerts us to the web of individual, sociological and temporal dynamics between self and other which the novel engages under the broad rubric of "possession." With Jess's emergent sense of

empowerment and self-possession comes her recognition of the otherness of the past, a requisite for her to exert control over it by constructing a historical narrative. However, as we discover when Jess hunts down clues to the location of Rose's missing locket, lost during the Point Ellice Bridge accident and subsequently stolen by an upper-class and snobbish girl who lived in Jess's run-down heritage home in 1896, Jess's control over the past is far from total. Not only was the very object of pursuit (the locket) determined in the past and communicated to Jess by the dead, but in order to locate the locket in her own time, Jess is compelled to listen closely to the "voices" of the dead for clues to its location, which is cryptically mapped in a diary which has survived from the nineteenth century. Moreover, the fact that Jess is assisted by the dead diarist's living descendents in finding the locket underscores the horizontal as well as historical multi-vocality of her own subject position in relation to the past. The historical narrative(s) which result are neither enclosed private imaginings, nor clairvoyant divinations, but rather, inhabit a complex intersubjective exchange between Jess, Rose, and the other living, dead and ghostly individuals who comprise the community.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, refusing to resolve these tensions between distance and proximity, analysis and imagination, spectral and historical temporalities, and of course, selves and others, both *The Olden Days Locket* and *Awake and Dreaming* are themselves, as texts, as fractured and ambivalent as the conflicting messages they sustain. "Only imagination will save people from their narrow, cramped expectations of life," asserts the ghost of Cecily in *Awake and Dreaming*, telling Theo that while adults control her outer life, her inner life is hers to own.³ Cecily also tells Theo that her

³ Kit Pearson, *Awake and Dreaming* (Toronto: Puffin, 1996), 231.

childhood struggles will serve her in the future, providing richer materials for stories than the lives of those not similarly forced to look adversity in the face. “Writers are both awake and dreaming,” proclaims the ghost, “and if your life gets really difficult... there are two things you can do. You can force yourself to see people at a distance, like someone in a story. Then they’ll lose their power over you. Or you can make up something better and escape to it.”⁴ Yet while Cecily encourages Theo to sustain and use her imagination, she simultaneously emphasizes the importance of balancing imagination with realistic appraisals of the material world, a position which the book further underscores by repeatedly teasing out the economic and cultural expectations which divide working-class Theo and her mother from the middle-class home owners like the Kalders.

More explicitly concerned with historical consciousness, *The Olden Days Locket* uses haunting as means of imagining obscured and thus, quite literally, occulted subjects in the historical record, but like *Awake and Dreaming*, is reluctant to idealize haunting as a replacement or substitute for history and its empirical premise. In fact, Chamberlain’s characters learn to question ghosts of the past as much she uses them to gain access to hidden and darkened matters. Furthermore the book disrupts the very opposition between spectral and historical temporalities which, for some scholars, place ghosts outside of the modernist telos of past, present, and future. It does this by foregrounding the social and economic conditions which contour both the received histories and ghosts associated with Point Ellice House. Telling us, on the one hand, that public memory is haunted by secrets from the past, the novel simultaneously shows us that ghosts may themselves be historicized. But rather than prescribing history as either the definitive agent of or

⁴ Pearson, *Awake and Dreaming*, 231.

antidote to haunting, the book points to how each may both satisfy and confound the needs of the living.

Although *Awake and Dreaming* and *The Olden Days Locket* suggest that individual hauntings may be resolved, and illustrate just how this might occur, they are, like all of Victoria's ghosts, part of an ongoing politics of past and place, which is also a politics of inheritance, of debt and of belonging, all of which are ultimately rooted in the making of regional identity. The dilemma, writes Judith Richardson in her study of ghosts and hauntings in the Hudson River Valley, "is the enduring dilemma of judging whose place this is, whose ghosts should haunt, after repeated mythification and restless change have thrown history into shadow."⁵ The earliest among Victoria's ghosts and hauntings were less about the obscurity of the past in the shadows of history, however, but rather, unfolding in a place only recently colonized and settled by white people, registered prevailing fears and anxieties to do with crime, the presence of unfamiliar strangers and dark-skinned "others," superstition, vice, and social disorder. The spiritualist movement provided both an intellectual and aesthetic vocabulary and a cast of local characters, both living and dead, for these early imaginings, including spirit mediums and clairvoyants, travelling magicians and vaudeville performers, séance participants and of course, spirit manifestations. And unlike ghosts, who were typically depicted as frightening or melancholy, and certainly unbidden, the emanations conjured in séances were usually family spirits - the deceased or otherwise estranged kith and kin of their percipients. However, whether ghosts or spirits, these protean intimations of the local supernatural, which were first reported in the *British Colonist*, are best known from

⁵ Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson River Valley* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 203.

pioneer journalist and politician David Higgins' early twentieth-century tales of the occult. A local historian with a taste for the mysterious and the macabre, Higgins mobilized occult subjects as a vehicle for a kind of alternative history-telling attuned to romantic, tragic and of course shadowy matters. Looking backward to the gold-rush period for both ghosts and history, but also forward, imagining that scientific advancements might one day offer rational explanations for mysteries of so-called "spiritualist" manifestations, and also predicting a time when future students would find, in his tales, clues to the character of peoples who had, during his lifetime, inhabited the Pacific coast, Higgins' overarching subject, in both his occult and reminiscent tales, was the local character of the place itself.

Nearing his seventieth birthday when the first of his collected reminiscences, *The Mystic Spring and Other Tales of Western Life* was published in 1904, Higgins' turn to the past marked more than his own retirement from an active public life in journalism and politics. Commemorating the passing of Victoria's first generations of pioneers, Higgins' historical and literary endeavors coincided with the beginnings of a broader cultural nostalgia. By the late 1880's, the metropolitan aspirations of the city which had once fancied itself the seat of colonial high society had begun to wane as the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad elevated Vancouver to prominence as an industrial hub and the largest and most important port on the Pacific coast. And by the early twentieth century, Victoria - which had become a retirement destination for British colonials - began to fancy itself an attractive tourist destination. By 1904, the Queen City was promoting itself as an Outpost of Empire and by 1918, as a little bit of Old England. But while the seeds of the recent ascendancy of ghosts in the provincial capital were planted nearly a

century ago, when Victoria began to look backward for cultural and economic capital, it wasn't until the late 1950's, when centennial celebrations and cultural nationalism fueled urban renewal, heritage conservation endeavors and a corollary surge in local history-telling, that ghosts began their rise to prominence as part of a broader surge in interest in stories about old homes and pioneers. Especially after the 1970's and 1980's, when many of the city's nineteenth-and early twentieth-century buildings were threatened by developers – especially those valued as repositories of public memory and symbols of British colonial origins - Victoria really began to haunt.

But if the Queen City seemed possessed by the past, and increasingly also by ghosts, it was always the living who did the work of both history and haunting. The past - and perceptions of it - served the present, and likewise, ghosts served the living. Why did Victoria prove so fertile a setting for ghosts? The answer encompasses both the material conditions which propelled preoccupations with the past, and the particular character of the ghosts and hauntings which surfaced. Historian Robin Ward, whose study of Victoria's nineteenth-and early twentieth-century architecture *Echoes of Empire: Victoria & Its Remarkable Buildings* captures the flavor as well as the historical reasons for the British cultural nostalgia embroidered in Victoria's famous and defining old buildings, is only one among many contemporary observers attuned to the constructed quality of Victoria's outward image and identity, and the significance of the particular ways in which the past has been shaped, represented, and used therein. What Ward and other observers have tended to both reify and overlook, however, is the parallel construction of the city's shadowy alter-ego as an unruly frontier port town, less orderly, civilized, proper, and certainly less British than its Queen City persona suggests. Each

mask serves as a foil for the other, and it is precisely this interplay between surface and depth, authenticity and simulacrum, and between architectural surfaces and “secrets” contained therein which propels the most popular among Victoria’s ghosts and hauntings. At historic landmarks like Point Ellice House and Craigdarroch Castle, all through the Old Town district where “heritage hauntings” abound, and further afield in a multitude of places in and around the city, Victoria’s ghosts derive from and capitalize on a kind of cultural melancholia which both celebrates and laments what Ward appropriately calls the echoes of empire. The iconic specters of Supreme Court “hanging judge” Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, Hudson’s Bay Company trader John Tod and his Native wife Sophia Lolo, the eccentric architect Francis Rattenbury, high society British Colonials Caroline and Kathleen O’Reilly, Bastion Square’s unruly smoking and drinking ghosts, the phantom sounds of the chain gang in Langley Alley, the decapitated prostitute Yip Tang and her scorned admirer and murderer Ah Chung, the strangled Doris Gravelin in her spectral wedding gown, ghosts and spirits of ancient Aboriginals who haunt landmarks symbolizing colonial origins built atop their ancestral village sites and burial grounds, and the myriad of otherworldly others who turn up in tales of ghosts and legends associated with places in and around Victoria are all mythologized public ancestors. No ordinary ancestors, their strange presences operate as symbols of obscured pasts, unfinished business, feared and forgotten but also desired things. Appearing most prominently to command respect for the dead, demanding reverence for grave-sites and attention to old homes as commemorative monuments, their shadowy substances are part of the life of public memory. But they are also tied, by virtue of haunting particular landscapes as well as imaginations, to the construction of regional identity. Victoria’s

ghosts both perpetuate and depend upon as a foil the imperial facade inscribed in its urban geography, even as they counter that Victoria was a little more lively, a little less proper and certainly less British than its image as a little bit of Old England might otherwise suggest.

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