

JOHN ROBSON: BRITISH COLUMBIAN

by

IVAN EARL MATTHEW ANTAK

B.A., Notre Dame University of Nelson, 1968

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

History

ACCEPTED
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DATE 14 Aug/72 DEAN

We accept this thesis as conforming to
the required standard

.....

© IVAN EARL MATTHEW ANTAK, 1972

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

June 1972

ABSTRACT

Supervisor: Professor R. H. Roy

This thesis is a biographical account of John Robson, newspaper editor and politician. While segments of Robson's life have been analyzed, no attempt has been made to examine his entire career. The result has been sometimes misleading or contradictory interpretations of the man. This study examines the complete career of John Robson rather than isolated segments; investigates certain aspects of that career not previously studied; and attempts to reach some conclusions about John Robson's ideals and accomplishments.

In researching this thesis an effort was made to use to advantage the secondary works on John Robson, but as much stress as possible was placed on original source material. The basic sources studied were his newspapers which provide a continuous chronicle of his editorial thought. There exists a fair amount of Robson correspondence, particularly for the last two years of his life, which provides further insight into the man's character and actions. The letters written to his brother Ebenezer and the Provincial Secretary's Correspondence in the Provincial Archives of British Columbia as well as the correspondence contained in the

Alexander Mackenzie Papers in the Public Archives of Canada are particularly important. Other sources include newspaper files of this period and miscellaneous documents found in the John Robson Collection, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

Politically, Robson's philosophy upon coming to British Columbia was that of an Upper Canadian reformer, an attitude which soon placed him in opposition to Governor Douglas and which generally remained with him throughout his career. He believed in the British connection and hoped to see the British North American possessions become a second Britain. As a result Robson stressed immigration, not only because he wanted to see another Britain, but also because it would lead to the development of British Columbia.

Robson's desire for immigration was only part of his larger plan for the development of British Columbia within Canada. In his view, proper preparation had to be made for the settlers. Surveys and explorations should determine what resources British Columbia contained and where settlers could take up residence. Communication should be provided for the settlers as well as a lenient land settlement policy. In addition, the human resources of the area should be developed by a competent system of non-sectarian education. These general ideas remained with Robson. Throughout his career he stressed various aspects of immigration, surveying

and exploration, communication and education, all directed towards the goal of British Columbia's growth and development.

During the early part of his career one of Robson's more important accomplishments was his influence on public opinion, which assisted in the attainment of representative institutions, responsible government and Confederation. In his positions as legislative councillor and member of the Legislative Assembly he furthered these goals. As a correspondent of Alexander Mackenzie, Robson likely contributed to that Prime Minister's interpretation of British Columbian events. As cabinet minister and Premier, Robson's education policies and immigration schemes deserve mention. Robson's proposed "railway era" for British Columbia did have creditable goals for its object. He may also be largely credited with the land reform measures put into effect during 1891 and 1892.

John Robson was both a commentator and active participant in British Columbian life for more than thirty years. While John Robson's visions did not end with the boundaries of British Columbia, his practical influence did. It was his intention to see the development of British Columbia within Canada, and he continuously worked towards that end. Within this context, perhaps Robson was attempting

to describe both himself and his philosophies when he named his newspaper, The British Columbian.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.	MINER TO EDITOR	1
CHAPTER II.	EDITOR AND COLONIAL POLITICIAN . .	21
CHAPTER III.	CONFEDERATION	62
CHAPTER IV.	THE FIRST PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE .	86
CHAPTER V.	PAYMASTER AND PURVEYOR	115
CHAPTER VI.	GOVERNMENT MEMBER, 1883-1889 . . .	128
CHAPTER VII.	PREMIER, 1889-1892	166
CHAPTER VIII.	CONCLUSION	210
BIBLIOGRAPHY	218
APPENDIX:	THE ROBSON FAMILY TREE	226

CHAPTER I

MINER TO EDITOR

(i)

According to himself, John Robson was "born at Perth on the 14th March, 1824, and was baptized by the Rev. Wm. Bell, the only Presbyterian clergyman there at that time." His father, also John Robson, emigrated to Canada from Roxburghshire, Scotland, in 1816. He secured land at lot 14 in the 1st Concession of the township of Drummond in the Rideau Military settlements, near the newly established town of Perth, Upper Canada. In 1821 he married Euphemia Thompson, a widow, born Euphemia Richardson, also a native of Roxburghshire, who had arrived in Canada with her husband a few years after John Robson's arrival. Her husband, James Thompson, died soon after he arrived in Canada, leaving his widow with two small children who John Robson would take as his own. To the union of John and Euphemia Robson were born eleven other children. The second eldest child of this family, presumably named after his father, was John Robson.¹

¹Letter, John Robson to Reverend Ross, February 19, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, Public Archives of British Columbia. (Hereafter cited as PABC.) Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. There seems to be some discrepancy

Some time after 1829 the Robson family moved to another piece of land in the township of North Elmsley, about three miles south of Perth by road. Here the father cleared the land and planted wheat. It was also here that the younger John had an accident that left him with a distinguishing mark permanently affecting his appearance. Apparently a somewhat adventuresome youth, John attempted to catch one of the family's horses by the tail. The result was that the boy was kicked to the ground, his cheek gashed and the bridge of his nose smashed. A doctor repaired the damage and no serious injury resulted, but, as his brother explains, the accident "gave him [John] for the remainder of his life a somewhat aquiline nose such as was possessed by no other member of the family, thus adding to the dignity of his appearances."²

as to Robson's birthdate. Robson himself says it was March 14, and it was this date that was accepted in his lifetime. His brother, Ebenezer, gives John's birthdate as March 15, (Diary for 1857-58), a date further substantiated in a letter from Reverend Ross to Robson which claims that March 15 is the date given in the baptismal records of the Perth Presbyterian Church. (Reverend Ross to John Robson, March 4, 1892, John Robson Collection, PABC.) For Robson's place of birth, note what appears to be a compounded error in The Daily Telegram (Vancouver), June 30, 1892, p. 1; F. W. Howay and E. O. S. Scholefield, British Columbia: From the Earliest Times to the Present (Vancouver: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914), Vol. III, p. 999; S. W. Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1969), p. 77; and most other short biographies of Robson. This should read Perth, Lanark County.

²Ebenezer Robson, "My Story". Ebenezer recounts another episode about John in Sarnia. Accompanied by two of his sisters, he almost drowned when their boat capsized.

The parents of John Robson were members of the Scottish Presbyterian Church, strict in their religious observances, and strict in their children's religious instruction. Years later John would remember that not only had he "been obliged to attend the Sabbath school, but had in the family to repeat verses and say the Catechism, and if he were not able to repeat the lesson he had had to go to bed without his supper." Such religious training affected the younger John for the remainder of his life.³

The religious activity of his father was also the cause of the Robson family moving from Perth to Sarnia, Upper Canada. The settlement at Sarnia had been established by Malcolm Cameron, who was persuading friends in Perth to join him. It was probably in the fall of 1839 that Cameron, a religious man and early temperance advocate, invited John Robson senior to go to Sarnia in order to assist him in organizing total abstinence societies there. Cameron eventually persuaded Robson to remain in Sarnia and to bring out his family, aiding him in obtaining the lease of the land on Point Edward, an area north of Sarnia at the foot of Lake Huron.⁴

³The Daily British Colonist (Victoria), May 1, 1890, p. 2. (Various alterations in name. Hereafter cited as Colonist).

⁴Victor Lauriston, Lambton's Hundred Years 1849-1949 (Sarnia, Ont.: Haines Frontier Printing Co., n.d.), p. 91; and Ebenezer Robson, "My Story". At Point Edward the

The movements of John Robson junior after the family moved to Sarnia in 1840 are somewhat vague. He may have been in Sarnia as late as 1847 for he organized some of the Robson children into a private school at about that time. Soon after this he travelled to Perth where he was engaged for a short period as a clerk in a Mr. Robert's store. Following this he moved to Montreal, remaining there for several years as a store clerk,⁵ before returning to Hamilton, Upper Canada where he stayed for a year. While in Hamilton, Robson obtained the job of agent for the Provincialist, a Hamilton newspaper, where he may have gained some journalistic experience that he would later use in British Columbia. Abandoning this pursuit he opened a shop in Brantford but

activity of the Robson family consisted in mixed farming and the caring for livestock with vegetables and meat being sold to surrounding settlements. The land was not particularly suited for agriculture and John Robson senior tried to augment his income in several ways. In 1850 he went south of Sarnia to an area known as Bear Creek where he built a saw and grist mill. This business ended in failure and by 1854 he returned to Sarnia where he was placed in charge of the Sarnia jail. (Ebenezer Robson, "My Story", and George Robson, "History of the Robson Family", MS, PABC.) He may have held the position of gaoler until his death on April 14, 1879. (Colonist, May 1, 1879, p. 3.) Euphemia Robson died in 1864. (Ebenezer Robson, Diary, Saturday, November 12, 1864, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.)

⁵Ebenezer Robson, "My Story", and George Robson, "History". During the months of June and July 1848 there is an advertisement in The Bathurst Courier (Perth) for the "St. Lawrence Mutual Insurance Company" and "Farmer's Fire Insurance". The agent for the Perth area was a John Robson. (The Bathurst Courier, June 9, 1848, p. 3.) George Robson claims that John was in Montreal for six years. John himself claims it was eight years. (Colonist, October 25, 1887, p. 1).

stayed only a few months before moving to London where, entering into partnership with his brother Robert, he established a dry-goods store.⁶ During his stay in London, which lasted perhaps a year, John married in April 1854 Susan Longworth,⁷ daughter of Captain John Longworth, a leading resident of Goderich, Upper Canada. Hoping for improved business the two brothers moved their enterprise to Bayfield. They were to remain here until 1859 when John decided to immigrate to British Columbia. ? of 35

At the time of his arrival in British Columbia John Robson had just passed the half-way mark in his life. Unfortunately because of a lack of any concrete evidence it is

⁶George Robson, "History". John Robson claimed in The British Columbian (New Westminster), March 2, 1865, p. 2, that his newspaper experience "was acquired in a city very much larger than Victoria and Vancouver put together." If the term "agent" is used by George Robson in the same sense as later used by John in his paper, the job of agent entailed some work in reporting events. See The British Columbian, March 7, 1861, p. 3, "one agent writing from above intimates" (Hereafter cited as Columbian.)

⁷J. B. Kerr, Biographical Dictionary of Well-known British Columbians (Vancouver, B.C.: Kerr & Begg, 1890), p. 278. Most sources offer 1854 as the year but list no month. Captain John Longworth was a veteran of Waterloo and an official of the Canada Company which helped colonize part of western Ontario. See Colonist, February 15, 1883, p. 2. See also Kathleen Macfarlane Lizars and Robina Lizars, In the Days of the Canada Company: The Story of the Settlement of the Huron Tract and a View of the Social Life of the Period, 1825-1850 (Toronto: William Briggs, 1896), p. 113. Kathleen M. Lizars was a granddaughter of Captain John Longworth and consequently a niece of Susan, Mrs. John Robson. She was private secretary to Robson during his last year in office as Premier and accompanied him on his ill-fated trip to London. Her name is erroneously spelt "Lazars" in some news reports of that time.

only possible to speculate as to the forces that shaped Robson's philosophies, political or otherwise, during this period. It is likely that he was educated in the Perth school system,⁸ as well as receiving some education, particularly religious education, at home. The fact that he did receive a generally adequate education may be seen from the fact that he was selected to teach the younger Robson children in Sarnia and later in the caliber of his editorials in The British Columbian.

Politically, Robson's late teens and his twenties correspond exactly with that period in Canadian history when the struggle to take political power away from the governor and place it in the hands of the people's representatives with responsible government was being waged. In both the areas around Perth and Sarnia, where Robson grew up, the dominant politics was that of Reform.⁹ In Sarnia, Malcolm Cameron, who had persuaded John Robson senior to settle there, was the leading Reform politician. There is reason to believe that the Robson family, including the young John Robson, in common with this community of Presbyterian Scots,

⁸Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. III, p. 999, and Colonist, June 30, 1892, p. 8.

⁹P. G. Cornell, "The Alignment of Political Groups in the United Province of Canada, 1854-1864," Canadian Historical Review, Vol. XXX (March, 1949), pp. 22-46; and Lauriston, Lambton's Hundred Years, p. 92.

and in friendship with Malcolm Cameron, would conform to the Reformer mould.¹⁰

Although he would probably have been too young to be much influenced by the Rebellion of 1837, Robson was sixteen when the Act of Union was passed. Were he interested in politics he would have been a witness to the events during Governors Sydenham, Bagot and Metcalfe's terms of office. During his stay in Montreal Robson was present at the climax of the struggle for responsible government: the week long riot brought about by the signing of the Rebellion Losses Bill, the pelting of Lord Elgin with stones, and the burning of the Parliament buildings. During the 1850's Robson would have also noted the struggle between the various Reform factions in Sarnia, the one group led by Malcolm Cameron, and the other by George Brown and Alexander Mackenzie.

Robson decided to depart for British Columbia by the end of January 1859.¹¹ Leaving his wife and two children with his father-in-law in Goderich and dissolving his partnership with his brother at the end of March he left New York in the first week of April, travelling in the company of

¹⁰Cameron also assisted the elder John Robson in obtaining the job of gaoler in Sarnia. Robert, John Robson junior's brother, acted as a tutor for Cameron's family before entering into Cameron's business. He later joined in partnership with John.

¹¹Ebenezer Robson, Dairy, Monday, March 31, 1859, MS, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. "Rec'd letter from Bro. John dated Jan. 21st.--he proposes coming out to B.C."

Charles George Major, a former apprentice in the Robson store in Bayfield, and several other companions. They eventually reached Esquimalt on June 18, 1859.¹²

It is impossible to determine the precise reasoning behind Robson's decision to come to British Columbia. The decision must have required some thought for by 1859 Robson had a wife and two small children to support. John's younger brother, Ebenezer, a Methodist missionary, had already been in British Columbia for five months before John's arrival, and it is possible, although doubtful, that Ebenezer influenced John's decision.¹³ It is also possible that one reason for his decision was that the business of John and his brother Robert was running into some financial difficulty, especially when it is noted that a year after John left Bayfield, Robert died, \$5,000 in debt.¹⁴ It is more

¹²Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. III, pp. 156-60; and The Gazette (Victoria), June 21, 1859, p. 3. As their ship, the steamer Forwood, entered Esquimalt harbour it suffered damage from the accidental igniting of a can of powder. In a letter dated June 18, 1859 the passengers commended the captain on his "manly and officer-like bearing on the occasion". Among those that signed the letter were "J. Robson" and "Charles Majoir [sic]". See also Colonist, June 20, 1859, p. 2. For a description of the voyage from New York to Victoria see the Evening Sun (Vancouver), "Trip to B.C. From New York 67 Years Ago Had All Hardships And Excitement of Modern War", February 2, 1926.

¹³Ebenezer makes no mention in his diaries of either talking or writing to John about coming to British Columbia.

¹⁴George Robson, "History".

reasonable to assume that the decision of John Robson to come to British Columbia was based on the same reason that brought many other men to the area. That is, to gain their fortune by making a gold discovery, collecting their wealth, and then returning home. Robson likely persuaded himself that it was easier to make his fortune in the gold fields than behind the counter of a dry-goods store.

The region that John Robson now entered was in the midst of a giant influx of population brought about by the discovery of gold on the Fraser River. Throughout this gold rush period the Governor of the area, James Douglas, had been forced, because of rapidly changing events, to take the initiative in governing British Columbia and rule largely by decree. Conditioned as Robson was by his reform background and being a witness to the struggle for responsible government, he became an opponent of Governor Douglas. He saw the Governor as a man who not only ruled by proclamation and failed to give credence to the principle of responsible government, but who also appeared to be influenced in his decisions by his past associations with the Hudson's Bay Company.

Later, when Robson began to enter into the political life of the colony he compared the situation in British Columbia with that of Upper Canada during the time of Sir Francis Bond Head and compared his own political struggle with that of the Canadian Reformers. He even drew a parallel

between the two situations as far as to suggest that as the Canadian reform struggle had resulted in rebellion because the governor refused to recognize the people's demands, so might that result happen in British Columbia. Whether Robson sincerely believed this or was only "sabre-rattling" is only conjecture. It may also be very much conjecture as to how much Robson was influenced intellectually by Upper Canadian thought but it is possible to pick out many threads in his thinking that if followed would lead back to the Upper Canadian intellectual fabric.

(ii)

Robson did not immediately involve himself in politics. His main motive in coming to British Columbia had been to find gold and after spending over a week in Victoria obtaining supplies he arrived at Hope on the evening of June 30, 1859. A week later, together with C. G. Major and Henry Hyde, Robson left Hope to commence work on Hill's Bar, a sandy stretch of land from which a considerable amount of gold had been taken. He was still there at the end of July but by September he was disillusioned about his prospects and was considering abandoning the profession of gold miner.¹⁵

¹⁵Ebenezer Robson, Diary, Thursday, June 30, 1859, Tuesday, July 5, 1859, and Saturday, July 30, 1859, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. A letter written by C. G. Major dated September 20, 1859, reveals the disillusionment felt

By the end of November Robson probably left the area around Hope¹⁶ and went to the newly established capital of British Columbia at New Westminster. Christmas day 1859 finds Robson there dining with the Reverend Edward White, a Methodist missionary.¹⁷

Throughout 1860 Robson remained in the vicinity of New Westminster, engaged in splitting shingles and cutting cordwood. He took some interest in the political side of life in the new settlement as a member of the British Columbian Grand jury which recommended in its report various

by Robson and his friends:

"If there are any making arrangements to come to this place, let them take a fool's advice and stay at home. . . . Since we have been on the River we have worked from half-past two or three o'clock in the morning till nine and ten o'clock at night . . . and lived on beans. If that is not working, I don't know what it is. . . . And what is this all for? For gold of course; but when you wash up at night you may realize 50 cents, perhaps \$1. . . . There are just three in our party now, H. H. [Henry Hyde], J. R. [John Robson], and myself. . . ."

W. K. Lamb, "Letter from Charles Major, dated Fort Hope, September 20, 1859." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, No. 3, (July, 1941), p. 230.

¹⁶Ebenezer Robson, Dairy, Monday, November 21, 1859. Ebenezer mentions writing a letter to John at this time, something he need not have done if John was still at Hill's Bar or in the vicinity of Hope where Ebenezer was. Some biographies such as Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. III, p. 999, and others mention that Robson travelled to the Cariboo at this time. This would appear unlikely. It is possible that he travelled to the Cariboo in the next year, although what sources are available indicate that he remained in New Westminster and vicinity.

¹⁷Edward White, Diary, Christmas, December 25, 1859, MS, PABC.

reforms that Robson would later champion in his position as newspaper editor.¹⁸

Although not a strict adherent of Methodism Robson became a useful member of the New Westminster Methodist congregation, assisting in the construction of a church and becoming a steward in late August.¹⁹ Towards the end of July 1860 he accompanied the Reverend White to Nanaimo to visit John's brother Ebenezer.²⁰ In late 1860 Robson obtained several contracts from the New Westminster Municipal Council to construct two streets and to clear private lots that had not been cleared consequent upon being ordered to do so by the Council.²¹ He again attended Christmas dinner at the White's,²² but it was about this time that Robson cut

¹⁸The New Westminster Times (Victoria), February 25, 1860, p. 2. Published at this time in Victoria, the paper moved to New Westminster later in the year.

¹⁹Edward White, Diary, Wednesday, January 4, 1860; Thursday, January 5, 1860, and Thursday, August 30, 1860.

²⁰Ebenezer Robson, Diary, Friday, July 27, 1860, and Edward White, Diary, Wednesday, July 25, and Friday, July 27, 1860.

²¹At the Municipal Council meeting of November 26, 1860 Robson was awarded contracts for constructing Begbie St. for \$48 and Douglas St. for \$375. He also obtained contracts for clearing 15 lots for the total price of \$67. (The New Westminster Times [New Westminster], December 1, 1860, p. 2, and December 8, 1860, p. 2.) The expenditure of the New Westminster Council for the year ending August 15, 1861 notes that Robson was paid £33 12 0 for clearing and grading Begbie St. and £79 0 0 for grading Douglas St. (Columbian, January 2, 1862, p. 2.)

²²Edward White, Diary, Tuesday, December 25, 1860.

his left foot when his axe slipped as he was cutting some overhead brush. The result was that he was unable to work for six weeks. While he was recuperating, several New Westminster citizens asked him to assume the editorship of their newly purchased newspaper.²³

The precise circumstances under which Robson became editor are a little vague but it seems likely that they were influenced by the political situation in New Westminster. The settlement on the Fraser was first surveyed and the clearing of the land started in 1859, but it was not long before the new capital of British Columbia recognized an economic rival in the town of Victoria. The residents of New Westminster soon demonstrated a hostility towards Victoria as well as towards Governor Douglas, who, they claimed, was advancing the interests of Victoria in opposition to those of New Westminster.

New Westminster thus became the center of political agitation against Governor Douglas on the mainland. As it was the capital, the city also tended to look upon itself as the spokesman for the entire colony. To seek redress for their complaints, the New Westminster residents resorted to the presentation of petitions to the Imperial authorities. This course of action improved the situation somewhat, but

²³The Daily Telegram (Vancouver), June 30, 1892, p. 1.

failed to correct the majority of their grievances.²⁴

Then, at the end of 1860, Leonard McClure, editor of the New Westminster Times and president of the city's Municipal Council, suggested the formation of a convention of delegates from the various districts of British Columbia. The general concensus seemed to be that a convention should be called, but disagreement resulted over the organization and purpose of the convention.²⁵ The result was that two opposing factions appeared, the Government or English ticket led by McClure, and the Reform Party led by such New Westminster citizens as J. A. R. Homer and William Clarkson. In the election for delegates to the convention each faction put up its own slate of candidates. Robson supported the Reformers who were not willing to leave the larger issues of a resident Governor and representative government in order to concentrate on the colonists' more practical grievances as McClure wished. In addition, the Reformers were opposed to working with the Governor by using the convention as a form of Legislative Assembly to present resolutions on which the Governor might act. Instead the Reformers desired that the

²⁴For a more detailed discussion of the abuses as well as the political action followed by the colonists see Margaret Lillooet McDonald, "New Westminster, 1859-1871" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1947).

²⁵The New Westminster Times, December 30, 1860, p. 2, and January 5, 1861, p. 2.

convention be constituted as a body in opposition to Governor Douglas and his policies.

When the English ticket was defeated, a disappointed McClure satirized the elected Reform delegates as the "Semiahmoo elected delegates", a reference to the contention that they were elected by the non-English members of the community.

Sir, - The Semiahmoo elected delegates of New Westminster to the Convention which was to have been but which they destroyed, have begun to give us a specimen of that transcendent ability which everyone was expecting. They have got a secretary to do what was found impossible for the 'delegates' to perform--write a legible hand. So far they have achieved a decided success. They have met secretly and silently in a room 8 by 10, and practised oratory to two office stools and a broken chair. On each of these occasions they have reiterated an oath . . . that . . . --they the foreign ambassadors from Semiahmoo--were determined by fierce invective, threatening denunciation, and if necessary, although the cure would be an extreme one, subserbing [sic] four bits each week to start a paper for the destruction of the fell tyrant, the Governor of British Columbia. . . .²⁶

Evidently the Reform faction took the "extreme cure", for in the next issue of the New Westminster Times a notice was given that the paper had been sold.²⁷

John Robson was the secretary to the elected New Westminster delegates²⁸ and was asked to become the paper's

²⁶Ibid., January 26, 1861, p. 2.

²⁷Ibid., February 2, 1861, p. 2.

²⁸The New Westminster Times, February 20, 1861, p. 2. In his account of the first British Columbia Convention after he had sold out his business in New Westminster and moved back to Victoria, McClure notes that "The pro tem Secretary of the Convention having more onerous duties to fulfill in the editorial chair of the 'people's paper' [The British Columbian] could not continue his services in that capacity. . . ."

editor. A stipulation being granted that the printing plant be placed at his disposal for one year with no charge, Robson accepted the position,²⁹ and on Wednesday, February 13, 1861 the first issue of The British Columbian appeared.³⁰ With its appearance, the basis for John Robson's political career in British Columbia was laid.

As editor Robson wasted no time in plainly stating the policies that he would promote in his paper. His first issue contained an editorial entitled "Our Platform" in which he outlined the general editorial policy of the paper as well as his own political philosophy.

The cardinal measures which we shall advocate are a RESIDENT GOVERNOR, and RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT, or in other words, REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS. . . . We shall advocate such changes in the tariff as will tend to encourage Commerce, Ship-building, and trade generally - the immediate improvement of the navigation of the Fraser River - the early survey of the public lands, and the adoption of an enlightened and liberal land system calculated to keep out the speculator and encourage the actual settler - a system by which miners can, through representatives chosen by themselves, make their own laws, and regulate their own affairs - direct steam and other communication with foreign ports - a moderate tax upon Chinese - an export duty upon gold dust - the abolition of all tonnage dues, mule taxes, and road tolls except upon such roads as are completed and in good condition.

²⁹Columbian, May 21, 1864, p. 1.

³⁰Compare James Gordon Reid, "John Robson and the British Columbian" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1950), p. 42, where it is stated that the first paper came out on a Thursday. Until April 1862 the paper was published once a week on Thursday, excepting the first issue which was published on Wednesday.

We shall oppose a union with Vancouver Island, at least until such a union can be consummated with mutual satisfaction. . . .

We shall advocate an inter-denominational system of education upon a broad and liberal basis. . . .

We shall publish nothing that will not tend towards the accomplishment of the great object we have in view, viz., Responsible Government, liberal institutions, the redress of all our grievances, and the moral and intellectual improvement of all the people.³¹

Many of these measures Robson would continue to promote throughout his career.

Robson also threw his support behind the British Columbia Convention which met on February 15 in New Westminster. The convention, composed of delegates from Hope, Douglas and New Westminster, lasted for almost a week and formulated another petition outlining the residents' grievances.

In the first issues of The British Columbian the novice editor seemed to be feeling his way. He refrained from any personal attacks on the Governor and his officials, attacking instead the government's policies. When Douglas refused to recognize the Convention as representing the people of British Columbia, Robson discontinued this approach. Taking direct verbal aim at Douglas, the editor attacked the Governor as the true source of the colonists' grievances.

³¹Columbian, February 13, 1861, p. 2.

There is no use mincing matters. We may just as well speak out boldly what we believe and what any one acquainted with the case believes, that so vast are his [Douglas'] pecuniary interests in Victoria, that he will make use of the almost unlimited power he possesses for the purpose of forcing up that town at our expense.

The partiality of the Governor's policy in regard to the two Colonies is too palpable to be over-looked even by the most casual observer.³²

In a later editorial, Robson asserted that the whole situation with regard to responsible government might be simply stated:

Now the question is simply this: Is British Columbia to be deprived of popular institutions until such a time as our Czar [Douglas] sees fit in his wisdom, to say that we are prepared for them? . . . Is the loyal and truly British population of this colony to be insulted, and goaded on to desperation and rebellion--yes, gentle reader, we repeat it, rebellion:--simply because it is gratifying to the feeling of our Governor to occupy the position of a despot, and because it is to his pecuniary interest, and that of the people of Victoria that we should be kept in our present helpless state? Is his Excellency to be allowed to deceive the Home Government, by his long and eloquent dispatches, full as they are of misrepresentations and evasions?³³

Although Robson occasionally gave Douglas credit for some measure, such as revisions in the Land Act, he continued his barrage of criticisms and political polemic. When criticized for his attacks on the Queen's representative, Robson defended himself by maintaining that he respected Governor Douglas morally and socially, and that he certainly respected

³²Ibid., March 7, 1861, p. 2.

³³Ibid., April 4, 1861, p. 2.

the Crown, but as long as Douglas remained sole ruler and promoted policies detrimental to the colony, The British Columbian would continue attacking him.³⁴

Robson's editorials appeared in every issue. In general, their style might be divided into two broad groupings. Some appeared to bear the mark of some thought and work, as if the writer had taken time to write them and possibly rework them into adequate compositions. The majority of his editorials, however, appear to be spontaneous affairs, written as the direct progression of thought on paper. This did not mean that they were unconnected, but they did tend to become verbose, and sometimes, if written in a blast of emotion, could lift Robson to flights of rhetoric.³⁵

Strong as the vindictiveness in Robson's editorials might be, it was characteristic of newspapers of this time. In a period when news of the outside world only arrived sporadically as a ship arrived in port, the editorials were one of the main sections of the paper. Granted that the paper had other uses and contained various information,

³⁴Ibid., September 5, 1861, p. 2, and September 13, 1862, p. 2.

³⁵Robson often used words that made readers reach for dictionaries. Examples would be "burk", "tergiver-sation", and "transmogri-fied". He referred to celebrations given to Governor Douglas as "spasmodic parting ebullition". (Columbian, March 19, 1864, p. 2).

Robson's editorials were read by the populace³⁶ and would serve as an important influence on public opinion in British Columbia.

³⁶This included those who might not be expected to read his paper. This was demonstrated by a light-hearted letter from a Fredrica Amanda, who complained that Robson labelled Yale society as "gay" compared to New Westminster society. She disagreed with Robson's political editorials, but she agreed with the proposal that Colonel Moody of the Royal Engineers become Governor of British Columbia so that there might be balls and receptions that the ladies could attend. She continues:

You may not be aware that we all read your paper, though we pretend not to countenance such a vulgar rag, as our circle call it. We don't patronize it, to be sure, so far as paying you anything for it is concerned, but we all watch for it anxiously, and read it nevertheless on the sly. It does seem mean to do so, but nobody knows, or would ever suspect us, the way we affect to speak of it. (Columbian, June 3, 1863, p. 3.)

CHAPTER II

EDITOR AND COLONIAL POLITICIAN

(i)

As The British Columbian was only published once a week during 1861, Robson had ample time to prepare his editorials and to travel inland as he did in September to report on the second meeting of the British Columbia Convention held at Hope.¹ The result of the convention was again manifested in a petition that contained the usual complaints of the colonists, such as the non-residence of the Governor in the mainland colony and the discriminatory tariff regulations. This petition was also presented to Governor Douglas who again forwarded it to the Colonial Office together with his opinions.²

There had now been several petitions presented to the

¹Columbian, September 19, 1861, p. 3. Robson was not a delegate to either meeting of the British Columbia Convention. Compare Olive Fairholm, "John Robson and Confederation", in British Columbia and Confederation, ed. by W. G. Shelton (Victoria: Morriss Printing Company Ltd., for the University of Victoria, 1967), p. 105.

²Letter, Governor Douglas to the Duke of Newcastle, Colonial Secretary, October 8, 1861, Great Britain, Public Record Office: Colonial Office 60: British Columbia Correspondence, 1859-1871 (London, microfilm, University of Victoria Library), C.O.60/11, p. 36. (Hereafter cited by number only.) For the original memorial see C.O.60/11, p. 50.

Governor, with the last three in May 1860 and in February and September of 1861, but none had been answered by the Imperial authorities. Robson expressed disgust at the lack of Imperial response. Still, the editor maintained that the agitation for the remedying of the colonists' grievances must continue.³ The inhabitants of New Westminster agreed with him for in July of 1862 the city's Municipal Council called a meeting to reiterate their discontent with the conditions in the colony. At this meeting it was evident that John Robson had begun to play a larger role in the colony's reform movement as he was appointed to a committee to draft a memorial which was presented to another general meeting three days later and then sent to Governor Douglas.⁴

As well as sending petitions to the Imperial authorities, the colonists obtained aid from various individuals to lobby their causes in England.⁵ One such individual that the colonists asked for support was Malcolm Cameron, the same politician who had induced the Robson family to move to

³Columbian, July 16, 1862, p. 1.

⁴Ibid., July 19, 1862, p. 2. See C.O.60/14, p. 104.

⁵William Fisher had been in British Columbia in 1861 and was deputized by the New Westminster Council to promote the interests of the colony in Britain. (Columbian, May 3, 1862, p. 2.) This he appears to have done, corresponding with the Colonial Office over the establishment of trade and an adequate postal service with the colony and by delivering lectures. (C.O.60/14, p. 370, and Columbian, June 4, 1862, p. 3.) In addition the colonists seemed to have their champions in the House of Commons. (Columbian, May 14, 1862, p. 2, Letter from W. S. Lindsay.)

Sarnia. In early September 1862, while touring the west, Cameron spent over a week in New Westminster, attending banquets and a temperance meeting before visiting the interior of the colony. During Cameron's absence in the interior The British Columbian suggested that Cameron be sent to London as a common delegate from the two colonies to request a separate governor, responsible government, and the control of their own resources.⁶

Accordingly, on September 30, after Cameron's return from the interior he received an address prepared by Robson and the city clerk, Valentine Hall, at a meeting in New Westminster. The address recapitulated the usual grievances, noted that four previous petitions had gone unanswered and requested that Cameron become the British Columbian delegate to be sent to London. Denying that he had as much influence as the residents of New Westminster credited him with, Cameron, nevertheless, accepted the position. The meeting next appointed two committees, the first to obtain the necessary funds for Cameron's expenses, and the second, of which Robson was a member, "to prepare instructions and afford any desirable information to the Hon. M. Cameron."⁷

⁶Columbian, September 27, 1862, p. 3. An account of Cameron's trip is in a pamphlet, E. G. Desbarats, Lecture Delivered by the Hon. Malcolm Cameron to the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association (Quebec: n.p., 1865).

⁷Ibid., October 4, 1862, p. 1. Cameron had natural liberal reform tendencies and was therefore quite willing to accept the position of delegate. There may be room for

By the end of October, armed with a catalogue of documents supplied by Robson's committee as well as a petition on the various grievances, Cameron left New Westminster on his mission. He was joined in Victoria by Leonard McClure who had been selected as a delegate for Vancouver Island and the two left for England.⁸

Robson was disappointed that Cameron was not chosen as a common delegate, although he was not displeased at the selection of McClure. He looked with optimism on the entire affair, feeling "as though our emancipation from political serfdom were an affaire accompli. That we shall have a distinct Governor, and representative Government of some sort, there is little doubt." Robson's optimism continued throughout the early part of 1863, although it was somewhat dented by rumors from Britain. These fears were allayed by Cameron's reports which advised that the Colonial Secretary would grant the colony's request for a separate government with a resident governor and self-government. Cameron later reported that he was confident of his mission and was returning home to Canada.⁹

speculation as to Robson's role in Cameron's acceptance. Certainly Robson's friendship with Cameron would not have hindered his decision.

⁸Columbian, November 1, 1862, p. 1.

⁹Ibid., October 29, 1862, p. 1; November 1, 1862, p. 1; March 25, 1863, p. 2, and April 8, 1863, p. 2.

The changes that Robson speculated upon in his editorials were contained in an order-in-council dated June 11, 1863. It proclaimed that the colony of British Columbia was to have a separate Legislative Council which was to advise the Governor. The Council would consist of fifteen members, one-third of the body consisting of the public officers of the colony, one-third the district magistrates and the last five members elected by the population of the colony in such a manner as was to be determined by the Governor.¹⁰ As the term of Douglas as Governor of Vancouver Island and British Columbia had expired it was also decided by the Imperial authorities that he should retire and would be replaced by a governor for each colony.

Robson first noticed the new policy for British

¹⁰Instructions, Duke of Newcastle to Governor Douglas, June 15, 1863, C.O.60/17, p. 159. The changes in government in British Columbia had been the result of some discussion in the Colonial Office, as well as the lobbying of Malcolm Cameron and Leonard McClure. On his arrival in London in January 1863 Cameron saw the Duke of Newcastle, (Columbian, March 25, 1863, p. 3.) although it is not certain what influence his presence had on the formulation of colonial policy. It is possible that he presented the same arguments in person as he advanced in a lecture to the British North American Association in London (The Times [London], January 22, 1863, p. 9), and in a letter to the Duke of Newcastle after the order-in-council had been issued. (Letter, Cameron to Duke of Newcastle, July 20, 1863, C.O.60/17, p. 422.) In addition to the order-in-council the British Columbian Boundaries Act was passed to enlarge the colony. This act also extended the provisions of the August 1858 act establishing the colony of British Columbia to the end of 1863, after which the order-in-council would come into full force. (Great Britain, Statutes, 26 & 27 Vic. 1863, ch. LXXXIII.)

Columbia in August 1863. He maintained that the colonists could be thankful for being assured of having a resident governor and having escaped from the "one man rule" that had been their lot for the past several years, but he viewed the new form of government with some misgivings. It was not as liberal nor as satisfactory as might be expected, particularly as to the number of elected members on the Legislative Council.¹¹

While Robson expressed dissatisfaction with the new form of government, Governor Douglas attempted to establish it, and have the people elect their representatives on the Council. In accordance with instructions supplied by the Colonial Secretary, the Governor purposely left the manner of selection vague.¹² This led Robson to reconsider the new form of government. The order-in-council, Robson noted, did not even outline a system of franchise. He protested against the presentation of such an "absurd and illiberal system", but advised the colonists to attempt to use it to prove to the authorities that they were desirous and capable of managing something better.¹³

¹¹Columbian, August 22, 1863, p. 2.

¹²Instructions, Duke of Newcastle to Governor Douglas, June 15, 1863, C.O.17/17, p. 159.

¹³Columbian, October 3, 1863, p. 2.

At a mass meeting in New Westminster the colonists expressed discontent with the new form of government but decided that the system should be given a trial. Accordingly they established their own qualifications for candidates and electors. The election was held in New Westminster at the beginning of October. Although he voted for J. A. R. Homer, who won the election, Robson did not have his newspaper take sides in the election struggle. It would be good enough the editor claimed if the people would return a man of good, solid principles.¹⁴

The new Legislative Council was called to meet in the middle of January 1864. The dissatisfied Robson suggested that "The man who is entitled to the credit of originating the new system of government for this colony ought to be embalmed in cabbage leaves and placed in a glass case for the use of future generations." "To point out objections in the new system of Government for which we waited and prayed so fervently", Robson asserted, "would be too much like looking for holes in a sieve".¹⁵

When the Legislative Council met at the old Royal Engineer's Camp outside New Westminster, Robson continued his derision of Governor Douglas and the new system of government,

¹⁴Ibid., October 3, 1868, p. 2 and p. 3; October 7, 1863, p. 2, and October 10, 1863, p. 3.

¹⁵Ibid., January 9, 1864, p. 2.

pointing out the numerous errors in parliamentary procedures that were made. Robson noted that the throne speech contained several significant measures and was quite respectable, but claimed its most notable aspect was what it did not consider.¹⁶

Robson was not to continue in his analysis of the Legislative Council's actions or Governor Douglas' proposals unhampered. Influenced perhaps by the critical tones of Robson's editorials and deciding that a "comedy of errors", as Robson called the Council, need not be reported in the newspaper, the Council decided by a vote of five to four to prohibit the public and press from attending their meetings.¹⁷

This development, as might be expected, received Robson's strong censure. As might not be expected, he did not indulge himself in a rhetorical denouncement of the action, but simply drew attention to the "humiliating act" of the Council, promising to discuss the situation later. He could not trust himself in what he might write in his present state of feelings and thought it better to wait "till cool reflection resumed its sway."¹⁸

When it had, Robson wrote a rather subdued editorial.

¹⁶Ibid., January 23, 1864, p. 3.

¹⁷Ibid., January 23, 1864, p. 3, and January 27, 1864, p. 3.

¹⁸Ibid., January 27, 1864, p. 3.

The people, Robson maintained, had a right to know what business was being conducted in the Legislative Council and the newspaper had the responsibility of publishing the debates. Public scrutiny of the Legislative Council's actions served to keep it honest and faithful to its duty. Now, even if the Council was as honest as could be, there was still suspicion cast upon its proceedings because of its secrecy. As for his paper, the councillors need not have worried, he would have not been too severe in his criticisms, acknowledging the fact that the councillors were in some ways hampered by their inexperience.¹⁹

The proceedings of the Council were published in The British Columbian in the form of the clerk's minutes for several issues, but then claiming that they were dull and very unreadable Robson began to publish the proceedings from what he could find out happened in the Council. In doing this he pointed out that some errors might be made, but then the councillors had no one to blame but themselves.²⁰

Robson's bitter feelings over the expulsion of the public and press from the Council meetings were justified, at least in his own eyes. If the reason behind the expulsion was to repudiate Robson and his paper it would not have been

¹⁹Ibid., January 30, 1864, p. 2.

²⁰Ibid., February 6, 1864, p. 3.

the first occasion when Robson received discriminatory treatment from the government officials.

From its commencement, The British Columbian published within its pages the Government Gazette, as its predecessor The New Westminster Times had done. In September 1861 a verbal contract was agreed to whereby Robson published the Gazette to September 1862. When this contract expired Robson visited Victoria and reached an understanding with the Colonial Secretary, Young, that the Gazette was to be published to September 1863, with an increase in payment. As no written contract was signed the previous year, Robson felt that one was not necessary now. This understanding was adhered to until the end of December 1862 when the government informed Robson that he would no longer be printing the Gazette and that the function was to be taken over by the Royal Engineer's printing office. Robson protested that there had been an understanding, but the government claimed ignorance of any agreement. The editor first considered but then decided against taking the matter to court when informed that, although the case would be won, it would take too much time and money.²¹

Robson had little doubt about the reason for the government's action. The British Columbian was following its

²¹Robson's account from which the above is taken is in the Columbian, January 24, 1863, p. 1.

own course and would not support the government. The government had therefore decided to start their own newspaper as a method of revenge.²² Perhaps Robson's interpretation does have some truth in it. At least it is interesting to note that it was at the same time the Gazette was taken away from him that he was thrown into jail by Judge Begbie.

The episode with Chief Justice Matthew Begbie may have been building for some time. Robson had few kind words to say about the Judge whom he regarded as a member of the government clique. During the month of November 1862 Robson considered the administration of law in the colony in several editorials. He noted that rumors were circulating that various government officials, including the Chief Justice, were speculating in gold claims and in land. This must not be so, Robson commented, as those officials must retain their impartiality. Robson also condemned the law which put several persons in the New Westminster jail for debt.²³ In addition, following the death of James Locke who had been imprisoned for embezzlement and debt, he resumed his criticism of the appalling state of the jail in New Westminster. Locke had fallen ill in jail and with his

²²Ibid., January 23, 1863, p. 1, and May 13, 1863, p. 2.

²³Ibid., November 1, 1862, p. 3, and November 12, 1862, p. 2.

condition worsened by what Robson described as a small, damp cell, he died. The authorities claimed they would have removed Locke from his cell to the Hospital, but for his debt. When an inquest decided that the prisoner "died by the visitation of God", Robson refused to believe this verdict, claiming that Locke died instead "by a visitation of the law." The editor labelled the whole affair the "Late Judicial Murder".²⁴

Neither these last editorials nor an anonymous letter signed "A" appearing in the same issue as the editorial on James Locke were calculated to earn the favour of Judge Begbie. The letter asserted that Begbie, in return for a gift of twenty acres of land, had granted a certificate of improvement on a plot of land apparently belonging to an individual named Dud Moreland. The resident magistrate had earlier refused to grant such a certificate of improvement, as little or no improvement had been made.²⁵ Begbie denied the letter's charge of bribery and demanded that Robson appear before him on a charge of contempt of court. The following day Robson appeared and apologized that "if" the charge in "A's" letter was untrue the editor regretted its publication. Begbie, having already stated that the charge

²⁴Ibid., November 22, 1862, p. 2, and November 26, 1862, p. 2.

²⁵Ibid., November 26, 1862, p. 2.

was untrue, refused to accept a qualified apology and had the editor placed in jail.

The situation remained for the next three days. The jailed but strong-willed Robson faced an equally strong-willed Judge Begbie. Begbie believed that his position as Judge, and through him the reputation of the whole judicial system of the colony, was threatened by the allegations and that reprimands must be made. Robson, perhaps somewhat surprised by Begbie's action after all the veiled editorial allegations he had thrown at other government officials, made the best of his imprisonment. In an editorial written from his jail cell he composed a piece of rhetoric entitled "A Voice from the Dungeon" which released his emotion at being incarcerated and which easily surpassed for verbosity and emotion all his previous writings.²⁶

With a little thinking, and perhaps the memory of the unfortunate prisoner who died in jail, Robson's martyr's zeal, which was evident in his editorial, seems to have soon quelled. He may have also believed that he was of more use in his editorial office than in jail and he therefore asked to see Judge Begbie. The Judge also had time to think and he may have been surprised at the support that Robson received from the people of New Westminster and the rest of the colony. He may have also felt some trepidation over the

²⁶Ibid., December 6, 1862, p. 2.

action of the colonists in sending all the documents in the case to Malcolm Cameron for presentation at the Colonial Office.²⁷ The climax came on December 5 when Robson appeared before the Judge and stated that the letter of "A" came to him in the ordinary course of business and he only glanced at it before it was published.²⁸ He therefore did not note if it contained anything that might be taken as contempt of court. As for the matter of Begbie accepting the land as a bribe, the Judge had stated from the bench that he paid for the land and Robson, as a gentleman, was bound to accept his assertion. Therefore, Robson told the Judge, the letter "contained a statement not warranted by facts; and I have to express my regret, and offer my apology for allowing such statement to be published in the said British Columbian newspaper."²⁹ Begbie accepted the apology and Robson returned to freedom and the editorial pages of his paper.

The editor was overjoyed with the support that he received from the citizens of New Westminster. During his

²⁷Ibid., December 6, 1862, p. 3.

²⁸This has doubt cast upon it by the fact that the letter was dated New Westminster, November 7, 1862, almost three weeks before it was published.

²⁹Columbian, December 10, 1862, p. 2. The written form of the apology refers to the letter as published in the newspaper of the "24th ult." The letter appeared in the November 26 issue. This may be a simple printing error.

imprisonment some 400 citizens had gathered to protest Begbie's action.³⁰ With such support it was to be expected that Robson would return to the question of Judge Begbie and what became known as the "Cottonwood Scandal". In the first editorial in which he specifically considered the allegation against the Judge, Robson admitted that the Judge's dealings were suspect when he managed to obtain at the price of ten shillings an acre of land destined to become a valuable townsite. In reply to Begbie's assertion that in publishing "A's" letter Robson was defying the sanctity of the law and the bench, the editor responded that there must also exist the freedom of the press. Using that freedom, and almost challenging the Judge to again call him on a charge of contempt, Robson asked:

Is the liberty of the press of British Columbia less sacred than that of other countries? Is a tyrannical Judge, who mere accident has for a time placed upon the Bench, to crush it with impunity? Shall we permit this great and sacred institution to be immolated in order that his conduct may not be unveiled--so that his arbitrary and relentless heart may be gratified?

Mr. Begbie the other day, in noticing the alleged offence we had committed against the dignity of his Court, prefaced his remarks by professing to uphold the liberty of the press. The sequel proves how rotten was that profession.³¹

By January 1863 a letter from Dud Moreland appeared in the Victoria Colonist asserting that he had given 20

³⁰Ibid., December 6, 1863, p. 3.

³¹Ibid., December 10, 1862, p. 1.

acres of land to Judge Begbie.³² Moreland's statement contradicted Judge Begbie's that he paid for the land, and it was accepted by Robson and others as proof of the allegations contained in the letter by "A". In Robson's view Begbie had lost the colonists' respect and was permanently stamped with the allegation of "an unjust judge . . . never, never to be erased."³³

Whether or not Judge Begbie was guilty of dubious dealings has never been proven.³⁴ During the spring of 1863 a petition was taken up among New Westminster citizens claiming that they would not sit on a jury when Judge Begbie was on the bench³⁵ but by the summer of 1863 the whole matter appeared to have died down. In later years Robson contended that he was thrown into jail because of his criticism of the government officials.³⁶ But this appears to have been an exaggerated claim for political purposes. It is difficult to see the episode between Begbie and Robson as much more than

³²Colonist, January 17, 1863, p. 3.

³³Columbian, January 31, 1863, p. 1, and February 28, 1863, p. 2.

³⁴See Sydney G. Pettit, "His Honour's Honour: Judge Begbie and the Cottonwood Scandal," British Columbia Historical Quarterly, XI, No. 3, (July, 1947), pp. 187-210, for a detailed examination of the Cottonwood Scandal.

³⁵Columbian, March 11, 1863, p. 2.

³⁶The Daily Telegram (Vancouver), June 30, 1892, p. 1.

a clash of characters. The Judge believed that he and his court had been maligned by allegations in The British Columbian. Robson, on the other hand, believed that he had the right, and responsibility, of offering constructive criticism of the colony's law system.

Governor Douglas did mistrust the actions of the "New Westminster Clique" and had earlier asked the magistrates to keep the members of the "Clique" under surveillance.³⁷ As for John Robson, his tirades against the Governor and the government easily earned him Douglas' dislike. While the Governor and his officials would not have any concerted plans to harass Robson, they were also probably not closed to any opportunity of hindering the editor. With this in mind, the matter of Robson's loss of the contract to publish the Gazette does appear suspect. It is unlikely that the government would, as Robson later claimed, start its own newspaper in opposition to The British Columbian as the expense would have been too great. What is suspicious is the fact that the government should have taken the moment when Robson was involved in his dispute with Begbie to decide to take away the contract. The Royal Engineers had been printing material for some time previous to this³⁸ and

³⁷Letter, Governor Douglas to Duke of Newcastle, October 8, 1861, C.O.60/11, p. 35.

³⁸Madge Wolfenden, "Early Government Gazettes", British Columbian Historical Quarterly, VII, No. 3 (July, 1943), p. 175.

the contract could have been placed with them earlier. It is to be wondered if Robson had been a supporter of the government whether or not he would have been allowed to retain the Gazette. It would appear that the government, realizing that only a verbal agreement had been made, decided that it could break the agreement with impunity.³⁹

The closing of the meetings of the first Legislative Council of British Columbia to press and public also appears questionable, although it may do so only because there is little evidence as to the reasons for its closure. At the next session of the Council, after Douglas left, the meetings were again open to the public.⁴⁰ It would appear that the government officials were again attempting to harass John Robson as the editor of the only newspaper in the colony.

While citizens took their leave of Governor Douglas, Robson could see no reason for giving the Governor any type of celebration on his departure.⁴¹ Although Robson made no

³⁹It is curious that Robson did not get a written agreement from the government he distrusted, even if he did not have one previously. It may be significant that the government did not respond to Robson's interpretation of events. If the editor's interpretation was wrong, and the government could demonstrate that it was, they would have likely shown such evidence in public.

⁴⁰Columbian, January 14, 1865, p. 1.

⁴¹Ibid., March 16, 1864, p. 2.

secret of the fact that he was glad to see him replaced, he agreed that Douglas did have the qualities of a gentleman. Perhaps somewhat mollified by Douglas' retirement, Robson admitted that he had made some indiscreet comments and perhaps did not make sufficient allowances for the difficult times:

In the heat of political excitement one is very liable to adopt extreme views and measures which, however well meant sometimes do injustice to those to whom they are opposed. In so far as we may have fallen into this common error, in a sincere endeavour to promote the public good, we are free to express our regret.⁴²

It was as much of an apology as anyone was to receive from John Robson.

(ii)

Governor Seymour finally arrived in New Westminster in April 1864. As he explained to the Colonial Office, he found that previous to his arrival the Legislative Council had completed a large amount of work. With so much legislation awaiting his approval, the new governor decided that

⁴²Ibid., April 2, 1864, p. 1. After Douglas' death in 1877 a memorial fund was started in his name. Robson appears to have played a leading part in the organization of the fund. See Colonist, September 8, 1877, p. 3. John Robson's diary entry for February 8, 1878 reads: "Went on Douglas memorial collecting tour. Completed Pandora and North Park." (John Robson, Diary, MS, in possession of Mrs. J. D. Hunter, Victoria.)

it was best to prorogue the Council.⁴³

Robson thought the work of the first Legislative Council was generally productive. As for the new Governor, Robson was pleased with his Excellency and believed that there was reason to think that the conduct of the colony would be improved under his administration. A little over two weeks after Seymour arrived The British Columbian noted his administration already demonstrated what could be accomplished with a liberal attitude, even under the unfavourable form of government that the colony possessed.⁴⁴

Part of the optimism that Robson felt during the early part of 1864 may have been brought about by events in his personal life. In February 1864, the family that Robson left in Upper Canada arrived in New Westminster. The difference in time was probably not noticeable on his wife Susan, but Robson was undoubtedly pleased with the growth of his children, Frances Ellen and John Longworth. His family was to increase in size three years later with the birth of Robson's second son, Frederick William.⁴⁵

⁴³Letter, Frederick Seymour to Duke of Newcastle, June 1, 1864, C.O.60/18, p. 311.

⁴⁴Columbian, May 11, 1864, p. 1.

⁴⁵Ebenezer Robson, Diary, Tuesday, February 25, 1864, and Columbian, August 3, 1867, p. 3. The birthdates of Robson's wife and his first two children are difficult to affix precisely. Susan died in 1918 in her 86th year. This would place her birthdate in 1832. Fannie died in her 87th year in 1944. This places her birth in 1857. John Longworth

John Robson himself had likely not changed in his appearance from the time he left Upper Canada. He was a little taller than average and slightly muscular. His hair was quite full and it was supplemented by mutton-chops and a full mustache which set off the distinctive nose altered by the accident in his childhood. His dress may have seemed to somehow match some of his editorials, being a little too flamboyant or foppish, with a gigantic top hat and flowing cape fastened with metal clasps, or a bow tie that seemed unproportionately large.

Financially, the years spent in British Columbia had not made Robson as rich as he hoped when he first arrived, but he did have something to show for his efforts. The arrangement that was made with Robson in 1861 was that he gained the free use of the newspaper printing plant for one year. At the end of that year, expressing approval of the course followed by The British Columbian, the original owners of the press turned it over to Robson.⁴⁶

Following his acquisition of the press in 1862 Robson attempted to increase the paper's revenue. The paper moved into new offices and new additions were made to the press, enabling it to "execute with promptitude every

died in Ontario in 1875 in his 19th year. This puts his birthdate as 1856.

⁴⁶Columbian, May 21, 1864, p. 1.

description of plain and ornamental job printing." By the end of April 1862 The British Columbian had changed from its usual day of publication on a Thursday to twice a week publication on Wednesday and Saturday.⁴⁷

If Robson hoped for improved profits it appears that he was not to realize them. Hurt by the loss of the contract for the government Gazette at the end of 1862, Robson admitted in February 1863 that "The expense of publishing a semi-weekly sheet like the Columbian in a community so small is far too great to admit of its proving a lucrative undertaking."⁴⁸ This statement would remain true throughout the career of the paper.

In February 1865, at the conclusion of the fourth volume of the paper, Robson again attempted an expansion. Influenced by competition from the North Pacific Times and British Columbian Advertiser which began publication in New Westminster four months previously, The British Columbian became a tri-weekly paper, being published on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The advertising space in the paper was increased, the new telegraph was used to obtain news,

⁴⁷Ibid., March 27, 1862, p. 2; April 17, 1862, p. 3, and April 30, 1862, p. 2. R. E. Gosnell claims that the old office was in a second story room, which also served as Robson's dwelling place. (The Daily Province [Vancouver], April 30, 1921, p. 4.)

⁴⁸Ibid., February 14, 1863, p. 2.

and at the same time Robson entered into a partnership with Joseph D. Sullivan. Neither tri-weekly publication nor the partnership lasted long. By September, maintaining that it was too expensive to obtain telegraphic news, the paper resumed a bi-weekly publication schedule. By October the Robson-Sullivan partnership was dissolved to be replaced by one between Robson and James E. McMillan. In January 1867 McMillan, perhaps as a result of the fire which destroyed The British Columbian offices in September 1866, sold out to Robson who again became sole proprietor of the paper.⁴⁹

The British Columbian was never an overly prosperous concern. With the grip of depression after 1865 gradually tightening and the removal of the capital of the colony from New Westminster in May 1868, Robson found himself in financial difficulty. By November 1868 Robson explained that the paper was to be published only once a week on Saturdays for the winter months.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Ibid., February 21, 1865, p. 4; September 2, 1865, p. 2; October 18, 1865, p. 2, and February 6, 1867, p. 2. Little is known about Joseph D. Sullivan. He was married in 1867 to a daughter of Peter Lester, a Victoria negro merchant. (Colonist, February 15, 1867, p. 3.) George Wallace of The British Columbian Tribune (April 30, 1866, p. 2) published in Yale notes: "After being established for seven years! [sic] the New Westminster paper was reduced to the low state that the present editor had to sell out a half-interest to a negro for \$1,200." This would be the Robson-Sullivan partnership.

⁵⁰Ibid., November 14, 1868, p. 2.

The business of running The British Columbian occupied much of Robson's time, and the editorials, which all bear Robson's style of writing, were his responsibility. But he had assistance in the paper's composition and in its publication. In the spring of 1862 the youngest of the Robson family, David, joined his brother in New Westminster.⁵¹ With David's help, until 1866 when he returned to Canada, and others⁵² in publishing The British Columbian, John had some spare time. By composing several editorials to be placed in the paper while he was away, he also had the opportunity of travelling throughout the colony. Moreover, there was time to take an active part in New Westminster town life.

Robson's religious inclinations, as have been seen, prompted him to assist the Methodist Church. When a Presbyterian minister R. Jamieson arrived in New Westminster Robson also helped him, becoming treasurer of the Presbyterian body and assisting in the building of a church. Robson also became a vice-president of the British Columbian Bible Society

⁵¹Charles George Robson, "A Short Account of the Lives of John, Ebenezer and David Robson, three British Columbian Pioneers." MS, (term essay, University of British Columbia, 1938), PABC. David served his apprenticeship in newspaper work under his brother John. He returned to Canada and became editor of the Collingwood Bulletin. In 1881 he returned to B.C. to work with John on the new British Columbian.

⁵²Including Warren Lambert of Chatham, Ontario, and R. H. Alexander. (R. E. Gosnell, The Daily Province, April 30, 1921, p. 4.)

which had been formed to distribute Bibles throughout the colony.⁵³

Robson entered the social side of life in the settlement as a member of various lodges and organizations that existed in the city. He was treasurer and vice-president of the St. Andrew's Society and the Master of the first Orange Lodge in British Columbia. The Hyacks, the New Westminster Fire Department, included Robson in their number as an honorary member. He was also a member of the New Westminster Debating Society and served as vice-president on the Board of Management of the Royal Columbian Hospital.⁵⁴ In addition he was on various of the city committees formed to receive dignitaries, or to plan for city celebrations.⁵⁵

As a newspaper editor who often advocated the formation of organizations for some specific purpose it was to be expected that Robson would participate in such bodies himself. Thus, after the Royal Engineers left the colony and Robson called for the establishment of a militia, he joined the New Westminster Volunteer Rifle Corps as a

⁵³Columbian, April 25, 1865, p. 2, and November 7, 1863, p. 3.

⁵⁴Ibid., December 24, 1862, p. 3; November 28, 1866, p. 3; January 16, 1864, p. 3; January 14, 1863, p. 2; February 13, 1862, p. 2 and March 13, 1862, p. 2, and Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, April 25, 1879, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

⁵⁵For examples see Columbian, November 18, 1862, p. 1, and May 20, 1868, p. 2.

Lieutenant. Robson's belief in British Columbia as a potential agricultural area prompted him to become president of the New Westminster Agricultural Society and the Chairman of the 1867 Agricultural Exhibition. His belief in the need for the proper exploration of the colony to determine its resources and the hope of financially improving himself prompted Robson to become Chairman of the New Westminster Exploration Association, whose purpose was to explore the land around the settlement. Also in the hope of financial gain Robson became Director of the British Columbian Coal Mining Company which endeavoured to capitalize on the discovery of coal at English Bay in Burrard Inlet.⁵⁶

His consideration of political questions in the paper likely induced Robson to enter into the town's political life. In October 1863 with the addition of three new wards to the town council Robson won by acclamation the right to represent ward 7. From 1864 to 1867 he represented ward 3 and became President of the Municipal Council in 1866. This latter position he relinquished in January 1867 because of his election to the colony's Legislative Council.⁵⁷

Throughout 1864 and 1865, with his interest partially

⁵⁶Ibid., June 20, 1866, p. 2; December 11, 1867, p. 3; October 12, 1867, p. 3; August 13, 1864, p. 3, and July 27, 1865, p. 2.

⁵⁷Ibid., October 10, 1863, p. 1, and January 30, 1867, p. 3.

absorbed by other newsworthy events, Robson continued to give general support to the policies of Governor Seymour. One problem that the editor spent some time considering was the system of education that should be established in the colony. He had studied the question earlier, but in February 1864, with the arrival of his family, the matter seemed to hold more interest for Robson. His chief concern was whether or not education should be sectarian.

Robson was influenced in his opinion on state support for religious schools by the controversies over state supported churches and clergy reserves that he had witnessed in his youth in Upper Canada. In particular he remembered the Upper Canadian movement of "voluntaryism", which contended that churches should receive only voluntary contributions and not grants from the state, in order to preserve their religious independence.

The British Columbian earlier opposed giving state grants to churches when Governor Douglas suggested doing so. Robson claimed that state supported churches had caused strife and discontent in England and Ireland. Drawing upon his Canadian experiences, Robson argued that there had been a continuing struggle in the Canadian colonies over state-supported churches until all churches were placed on an equal basis. When deprived of state support the churches demonstrated more vitality and missionary spirit than

previously.⁵⁸

In conformity with the voluntary principle Robson proposed that government money should be spent only on a public system of education, free from any religious affiliations. A single public school system, free from sectarian influence, receiving the whole education grant, would be more efficient than several denominational systems. Religious training could be done either in the home or at Sabbath School.⁵⁹

In the establishment of a public school system Robson suggested that the examples of other countries, including Canada, might be studied. A good common school should be established in every district with a Collegiate school for higher learning established in New Westminster. To support such a public school system Robson again referred to the procedure in Upper Canada where various sections of the public domain were used as a source of endowment.⁶⁰

The majority of the population in British Columbia, if not influenced by Robson's views on education, at least agreed with them.⁶¹ But the plans for an established school

⁵⁸Ibid., January 30, 1864, p. 3.

⁵⁹Ibid., February 13, 1864, p. 1, and p. 2.

⁶⁰Ibid., April 6, 1864, p. 2, and April 23, 1864, p. 1.

⁶¹See the accounts of public meetings at Yale and New Westminster. (Columbian, June 8, 1864, p. 3, and June 18, 1864, p. 2.)

system were thwarted by the declining economic prosperity.

(iii)

Robson was aware of the colony's economic difficulties but his editorials remained optimistic as he continued to promote the exploration of new areas and the discoveries of new mining fields.⁶² When the Legislative Council opened in late January 1866 he proposed retrenchment to make up for the colony's past heavy spending by reducing present expenses. One specific area where Robson hoped retrenchment would take place was in the "bloated Civil List" which supported an "army of officials".⁶³

Robson's hope was not reflected in the colony's estimates for the year, nor by the actions of the Legislative Council. The official members of the Council, joined by the elected member for Hope, Yale and Lytton, Clement Francis Cornwall, passed the objectionable estimates, in opposition to the other four elected members. The British Columbian reported the estimates' passage in an off-hand fashion, inserting several asides, and labelling the procedure a "farce", a description which prompted Cornwall to secure approval of

⁶²See Columbian, June 15, 1865, p. 3, or October 14, 1865, p. 3.

⁶³Ibid., February 7, 1866, p. 2, and May 5, 1866, p. 1.

a motion of censure against the editor of The British Columbian.⁶⁴

Robson indignantly raised the cry that the liberty of the press was in danger and that he stood condemned without a trial. As J. A. R. Homer asserted in the Council, the censure motion "had its origin in personal feeling for some time existing between the Hon. Mr. Cornwall and the editor of The British Columbian".⁶⁵ The editor opposed some of Cornwall's measures during the previous session and had condemned Cornwall's land speculation scheme of acquiring land in the "Hat Valley".⁶⁶ This was not to be the only occasion upon which Robson was involved in personal animosity.

The economic depression which Robson hoped to mitigate with his call for retrenchment continued to plague British Columbia and Vancouver Island. In Victoria the hardships prompted many people to promote the cause of union of

⁶⁴Ibid., February 14, 1866, p. 3, and February 17, 1866, p. 3.

⁶⁵Ibid., February 17, 1866, p. 2, and p. 3. The animosity between the two continued. A month later Cornwall moved that the House be cleared of strangers as matters of secrecy were to be discussed. However this was not the case and that member seemed to be hoping for revenge against The British Columbian reporter by forcing him to retire. (Columbian, March 17, 1866, p. 3.)

⁶⁶Ibid., August 24, 1865, p. 2. Answered by a letter from Cornwall. Columbian, October 28, 1865, p. 3.

the two colonies. Robson had made his opposition to union known as early as the first issue of The British Columbian. Throughout the following years he warned Vancouver Island against any attempt at union unless it was on British Columbia's terms.⁶⁷

By 1865, as Victoria's campaign for union reached its climax, Robson devoted numerous editorials to the subject. Much of his animosity to union was the result of his view that Governor Douglas had originally established Victoria at the expense of New Westminster. He remained critical of the scheming politicians of Vancouver Island who attempted to find a new route to the interior by way of Bute Inlet, bypassing New Westminster. He also claimed to see Victoria money in the establishment of the Cariboo Sentinel and the Yale British Columbian Tribune which supported union. These papers, Robson asserted, were attempts to divide and conquer the populace of the mainland colony by Victorians who hoped to arouse a jealousy between the miners of the interior and the merchants of New Westminster.⁶⁸

When the terms of the Union Bill were known, Robson continued to maintain that British Columbia did not want

⁶⁷Ibid., March 14, 1861, p. 2, and March 21, 1861, p. 2.

⁶⁸Ibid., October 28, 1865, p. 1, and March 4, 1865, p. 2. This charge was denied. (The British Columbian Tribune [Yale], April 30, 1866, p. 2.)

union but was resigned to accept it. The "Annexation Bill", as Robson called it, did away with the colony of Vancouver Island and extended the control of British Columbia. Such terms, Robson maintained, wherein the island colony could not harm British Columbia were acceptable, but this did not mean that union would benefit British Columbia. He claimed that the colony only accepted the terms "from the most patriotic and unselfish motives."⁶⁹

Robson may have also felt resigned to accept the union terms for he had actively entered colonial politics and now had other matters to concern him. In the October 1866 election for positions on the Colonial Legislative Council, John Robson stood against Dr. A. W. S. Black in New Westminster District. The election platforms of the two candidates were almost identical. Both disagreed with union but were willing to accept it, and both advocated retrenchment, Homestead Law, a change in policy towards Indians, the abolition of Tonnage Dues and the furthering of agricultural interests.⁷⁰

Notwithstanding the similarity of the candidates' views, the election developed into a heated and close contest. Black's supporters proclaimed that the election of

⁶⁹Ibid., August 4, 1866, p. 2, and September 22, 1866, p. 2.

⁷⁰Ibid., September 22, 1866, p. 2, and September 8, 1866, p. 2.

the "people's candidate", as Robson called himself, would endanger his usefulness as a newspaper editor. They pointed out Robson's inconsistency as he had a year previously recommended Dr. Black to the electors of Cariboo West and they accused Robson of using his newspaper to unfair advantage in the election campaign. Robson refuted each charge and retaliated by casting doubts on Black's political accomplishments.⁷¹ For Robson, the main issue was the attempt by the government officials to influence the election of Black. To combat this Robson canvassed throughout the settlement, delivering what he claimed were "splendid speeches."⁷² He did not use his paper to the extent that he might have done, possibly deterred by Black's charge that such a use was an unfair method of campaigning. Then as the election campaign approached its climax, the offices of The British Columbian were destroyed by fire.

The fire broke out about 3 o'clock Saturday morning, September 29, 1866 and although some of the paper and type were rescued, the wooden newspaper offices were soon destroyed.⁷³ The loss to Robson and his partner McMillan was

⁷¹Ibid., September 8, 1866, p. 2; September 12, 1866, p. 3, and September 22, 1866, p. 1.

⁷²Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, October 22, 1866, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

⁷³Ibid., September 29/October 3, 1866, p. 3. The first and fourth pages of the paper for September 29 had already been printed when the fire struck and were

considerable and disheartening. By October 2, the people of New Westminster raised enough money to purchase the press of the recently abandoned North Pacific Times and presented it to Robson. The British Columbian re-appeared on October 3.⁷⁴ Robson believed that some enemy had purposely set the fire by igniting wood under the building. This contention could not be proven, but its inference may have played a decisive role in the outcome of the close election. As Robson admitted, the fire "excited a strong feeling in my favour".⁷⁵ It is likely that the fire earned for Robson numerous sympathy votes.

saved. When Robson resumed publication he retained these pages but printed new material and altered the dates for pages two and three.

⁷⁴The British Columbian of September 29/October 3, 1866, p. 3 put the total loss of Robson and his partner at about \$4,000. It also asserts that the populace collected \$1,000 by subscription, bought the \$1,250 North Pacific Times press and presented it to Robson. In a letter written to refute an inference that Robson profited by the fire (Columbian, May 15, 1867, p. 3) Robson considered his loss in more detail. He notes that he lost the building which cost over \$1,000. In addition one half of the building had been leased for \$25 a month, and with the ground rent for which he was left liable, his personal loss was \$1,250. The printing plant cost \$2,750 before the fire and about \$325 after. The loss to the plant was \$2,425 shared between Robson and his partner. Robson's individual loss then was \$2,462.50, from a total loss of \$3,675. He also claims that the subscription list taken up by the people raised \$875 of which \$820 was received.

⁷⁵Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, October 22, 1866, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. A reward was offered for information in discovering the person or persons who had set numerous fires in New Westminster, including that of The British Columbian offices, but nobody was found and the matter was dropped.

The polling for New Westminster took place on October 12, and in the outlying areas the following day. In an effort to obtain as much support in the city as possible, Black's friends allowed non-British subjects to vote and brought hospital patients to the polling place. Black won the city by a majority of 40 votes but the next day Robson had his revenge in the outlying areas. When the over-all count was completed Robson had a slim majority of 16.⁷⁶

The union of the two colonies was officially proclaimed on November 19, 1866. The Legislative Council to which Robson was elected was the first under the new political situation. In the Council session which opened in January 1867 Robson quickly emerged as one of the more prominent speakers. He wasted little time in attempting to redeem his election promises, particularly in respect to a Homestead Bill and a change in Indian policy.

Robson was also deeply involved in the proposal to move the capital of the colony from New Westminster to Victoria. Although resigned to the union of the two colonies as a "marriage de convenance",⁷⁷ Robson could not accept the

⁷⁶Columbian, October 17, 1866, p. 3; October 13, 1866, p. 3, and October 20, 1866, p. 3. It was claimed that 15 Kanakas, Hawaii or Sandwich Islanders, were allowed to vote. The city figures were 168 for Black, and 128 for Robson, but the final totals were Black, 194, and Robson, 210.

⁷⁷Ibid., November 21, 1866, p. 2.

removal of the capital from New Westminster. The question of the capital arose soon after the decision in favour of union was made. The British Columbian considered the question early in 1867 in a series of editorials. Employing available documents, Robson noted the history behind the establishment of New Westminster. The site, he claimed, was purposely selected as capital with reference to its military and geographical advantages. The fact that Vancouver Island joined British Columbia should in no way alter the situation. Besides, the government made a commitment that New Westminster was the capital and people invested money on the faith of that commitment. If the capital were removed the faith and honour of the government would be damaged.⁷⁸ Robson also realized that the loss of the capital would mean a decline in revenue for New Westminster businesses, including The British Columbian.

Neither the residents of Victoria nor the interior agreed with Robson. This was partially demonstrated during the 1867 Council session by the 13-8 vote suggesting that the capital be moved.⁷⁹ Although the vote was not binding on the

⁷⁸Ibid., January 5, 1867, p. 2; January 12, 1867, p. 2, and January 19, 1867, p. 2.

⁷⁹The 13-8 vote of the Council cannot be taken as indicative of the feelings throughout the entire colony as only nine members of the 23 seat Council were elected. The Victoria newspapers, of course, supported Victoria as capital as did the Cariboo Sentinel, the only paper in the mining interior. See Robson's answer to the Sentinel, Columbian, April 17, 1867, p. 2.

Governor, Robson and The British Columbian appeared down-cast. During the following year this attitude gradually changed as Robson continued to advance New Westminster's cause, with The British Columbian engaged in verbal battles with Victoria newspapers over the capital's location.⁸⁰ By January 1868 Robson expressed confidence that despite the agitation of the island colony the capital would remain at New Westminster. On the eve of the opening of the 1868 Council session, there was a trace of uncertainty in his editorial but he was confident that the question would not be settled by a Council vote.⁸¹

Robson was wrong. Governor Seymour temporized over making a decision through 1867 and asked for the opinion of the Colonial Office. The reply left the decision in Seymour's hands, allowing him to quote the British government in support if it was decided to select Victoria as the capital. Seymour sent this reply to the Council and again asked their opinion, allowing the official members a free vote.⁸² In desperation, for the outcome was never in doubt,

⁸⁰There was continuous discussion on the merits of each town, particularly as to the accessibility of each town's harbour.

⁸¹Columbian, January 22, 1868, p. 2, and March 21, 1868, p. 2.

⁸²See Columbian, April 1, 1868, p. 3, for a copy of the Colonial Office's reply and Seymour's address to the Legislative Council.

Robson delivered an impassioned speech, repeating the arguments in favour of New Westminster. He asserted that as New Westminster had originally been established by Imperial authorities a Colonial Council had no authority to change the site of the capital. He pleaded for New Westminster where "about 100 heads of families who have been trying to build homes will be 'beggared'", and he condemned the Victorians for their desire to rule the country. By a 14-5 vote the Council decided to move the capital to Victoria.⁸³

One of the immediate effects of the capital debate was the surfacing of a feud that climaxed a couple of weeks later. As early as 1863,⁸⁴ there had been animosity between Robson and Robert Thompson Smith, Council member for Kootenay and Big Bend. The feeling increased with Robson's criticism of Smith when he voted for the exclusion of press and public from the Legislative Council in 1864.⁸⁵ The feud intensified during the capital debate when Smith altered his vote to favour Victoria. Robson moved that Smith was ineligible to sit in the House as he was bankrupt. Following this latter action, Smith met Robson outside the House and "'expressing his mind quite freely' perpetrated one of the grossest

⁸³Ibid., April 5(4), 1868, p. 3. Incorrectly dated.

⁸⁴At least Smith claims so. Colonist, April 3, 1868, p. 3.

⁸⁵Columbian, April 30, 1864, p. 2.

indignities possible for a gentleman to commit toward another." Robson turned away but brought the matter up in the next Council meeting which decided that Robson, by questioning Smith's eligibility, provoked the insult.⁸⁶

The matter did not end here. Smith met Robson on the road leading from New Westminster to the old Royal Engineers' Camp where the Council was meeting. Demanding to know what the editor had against him, Smith knocked Robson to the ground and proceeded to hit him with his own cane about the head and face. At this moment Dr. J. S. Helmcken and W. L. Wood arrived on the scene and managed to pull the two men apart.

Robson took the matter to the courts, which determined that the immediate cause of the assault was the appearance of Smith's name placed between typographical fists in The British Columbian. Taking what he believed to be the only redress open to him against a newspaper editor, Smith decided to beat Robson physically. Smith was fined £5, a

⁸⁶Colonist, April 6, 1868, p. 3. Smith had a varied career in British Columbia. He was appointed Justice of the Peace and Revenue Officer by Governor Douglas in 1858. He was a member of the first (1864) Legislative Council. In 1865 he transported goods into the Big Bend mining region. The gold rush in this area soon collapsed and many traders and packers who had bought and sold goods on credit found themselves in financial difficulty. It is very possible that Smith was bankrupt as Robson charged. (See Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. II, p. 36 and pp. 236-242.) He died in Victoria. (Colonist, January 23, 1891, p. 5.)

punishment which Robson asserted was too light while suggesting that others had put Smith up to the deed.⁸⁷

As may be seen from the episode with Judge Begbie and the quarrel with Cornwall, this was not the first time Robson became involved in disputes with other individuals. Nor was this the first time that Robson was involved in a physical confrontation. In June 1866, just after Robson published a letter accusing the Surveyor-General, Joseph Trutch, of being overpaid and failing to perform his duties, Robson was charged with assault upon John Trutch, the Surveyor-General's brother. The circumstances are not known, but the result was that Robson was fined 5 shillings.⁸⁸ The underlying cause in all these incidents appears to be the accusations and inferences that Robson made in The British Columbian. It was inevitable that as a newspaper editor

⁸⁷Columbian, April 25, 1868, p. 3, and May 16, 1868, p. 2. The appearance of Smith's name in fists occurred in the April 18, 1868, p. 3 issue of The British Columbian. Robson reported that the moved, J. S. Helmcken, the seconder, Amor De Cosmos, and "R. T. Smith" voted in favour of establishing a free port in north-western British Columbia. Robson believed the assault merited stronger punishment. He claimed that the surgeon's bill alone came to \$20. He also thought that the Magistrates, who were in the Council, to be fair, should have sent the case to another tribunal. (Columbian, May 16, 1868, p. 2.) Robson later claimed that the government officials were responsible for Smith's attack. (The Daily Telegram [Vancouver], June 30, 1892, p. 1.)

⁸⁸Colonist, June 4, 1866, p. 3. The letter is in the Columbian, May 30, 1866, p. 3. Robson had earlier opposed Joseph Trutch's appointment as it was claimed he had too many personal interests in various sections of the colony. (Columbian, April 27, 1864, p. 1.)

living in an era of personal politics Robson would make enemies. Still, there is room for speculation as to the role played in these occurrences by Robson's own strong-willed personality.

While the capital's removal from New Westminster brought the Smith-Robson feud into the open, the event was to have more important consequences. The removal of the capital marked a turning point in Robson's life and in his thinking. It eventually resulted in Robson leaving New Westminster. It was also to influence him in his consideration of British Columbia's union with Canada.

CHAPTER III

CONFEDERATION

Not long after Canada's Confederation in 1867 the far western Colonists displayed an interest in the question of British Columbia joining the new Dominion. Robson always believed that such a union would take place. Indeed, he seemed to take the union for granted. In February 1863, commenting on the future of British North America, he noted that the inhabitants of those colonies would become "one people, and one empire, from the Atlantic to the Pacific." A week later, in commenting on a federation of the entire North American continent, Robson claimed that although he could not envisage this broad union, he "did see a federation of all the British North American Colonies in one empire or vice-royalty bound together with bands of iron, and ranking as one of the great powers of the Globe."¹

¹Columbian, February 28, 1863, p. 1, and March 7, 1863, p. 3. The first editorial mention that Robson appears to make on Confederation was in the October 15, 1862, p. 1, issue. He expressed fear that if the Americans annexed the Red River area it would result in a break between the eastern and western British possessions. His solution was to unite the British possessions "into one united Federation". He also noted "the only effectual tie by which these Provinces can be bound together is an iron band--a Continental Railroad." See also Columbian, May 6, 1863, p. 2 where Robson

In spite of the fact that Robson saw British Columbia joining Confederation as an inevitable and desirable event, by 1867 he had adopted a cautious and hesitant attitude. He reasserted his belief in Confederation, but pointed out the need for more information before the step was taken. The Northwest Territories must join Canada and communication with the west coast established before union. Robson declared he could not see that "any really practical benefit" would "result to either party from the immediate admission of British Columbia." He also warned that it would be unwise to "'throw ourselves' away while smarting under the effects of a temporary depression."² When the Legislative Council met at the end of March 1868, Robson was still maintaining his cautious attitude.³ But events in the first week of April 1868 were to alter Robson's hesitancy towards Confederation.

The first of these events was the Dominion's answer to a memorial from citizens of Victoria. Drawn up in January, the petition asked to join the new Dominion and cited the terms that British Columbia would expect. Canada replied it was discussing the matter with the Imperial authorities and recommended that the British Columbia Legislature immediately

suggests a colonial alliance to fight for more responsible institutions from the Colonial Office. Also see Columbian, October 10, 1866, p. 2.

²Ibid., May 22, 1867, p. 2, and June 1, 1867, p. 2.

³Ibid., February 15, 1868, p. 3.

ask for union. Robson tended to agree with the conditions of union outlined in the memorial, and he was pleased by the Canadian government's willingness to accept British Columbia. He also took note of the Dominion's suggestion that immediate action on Confederation be taken.⁴

The second event that exercised a strong influence on Robson's thinking was the removal of the capital from New Westminster. Robson placed the blame for the capital's removal upon the Colonial Office, which allowed its authority to be quoted if Victoria was selected. He saw that if British Columbia joined Canada, the colony would no longer have to deal with the Colonial Office. Moreover, with Confederation it was likely that British Columbia would be the recipient of a free and responsible government.⁵

Robson's new attitude towards Confederation became one of full support. He joined several other New Westminster citizens in calling for a meeting to discuss Confederation. The meeting accepted Robson's resolution that British Columbia seek entrance into Confederation immediately. Robson became the leader of a delegation appointed to present such an address to Governor Seymour. Within three days after

⁴Ibid., April 1, 1868, p. 2. For terms contained in the memorial see H. Robert Kendrick, "Amor De Cosmos and Confederation", in Shelton, ed., British Columbia and Confederation, Appendix B, p. 92.

⁵Ibid., April 8, 1868, p. 3.

the New Westminster meeting he travelled to Yale where he addressed another meeting on Confederation.⁶ Robson also supported the defeated resolution put forward by Amor De Cosmos in the Legislative Council, proposing that British Columbia seek union with Canada.⁷

Throughout the summer of 1868 Robson retained his enthusiasm for Confederation. He had also realized that his support of Governor Seymour had been misplaced. The manner in which the Governor had at first supported New Westminster and then allowed Victoria to be chosen as capital, earned for him Robson's mistrust.⁸ Robson knew that with Confederation would also come the removal of Seymour.

As the result of the defeat of De Cosmos' resolution in the Legislative Council, it was apparent to the supporters of Confederation that they would have to look to another body to promote union. In May 1868 the Confederation League was formed. By August the League was proposing that a convention be held at Yale to advance the cause of Confederation.⁹ The delegates to the Convention were chosen throughout the colony by citizens' meetings. In New Westminster

⁶Ibid., April 1, 1868, p. 2; April 8, 1868, p. 3, and April 11, 1868, p. 3.

⁷Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. II, p. 282.

⁸Columbian, May 13, 1868, p. 2.

⁹See notice of meeting in Columbian, August 29, 1868, p. 2.

John Robson was elected at the head of a delegation of four. These men left New Westminster on September 12 to join their counterparts at Yale where the Convention opened on September 14. After a preliminary certification of the various delegates, the convention appointed a Business Committee composed of Robson, De Cosmos, James McMillan, Henry Havelock and E. H. Babbitt. This committee prepared a report on the conditions desired for the admission of British Columbia into Canada which formed the basis of the Convention's discussions.¹⁰

The Convention had little trouble in deciding upon the terms for Confederation, with the principal terms being the Dominion's assumption of the colony's debt and construction of an overland wagon road. But there was considerable discussion over what resolutions should be proposed with respect to the matters of retrenchment and reform in the colony. The outcome of the Convention was manifested in a series of resolutions and Robson was placed on a committee to aid in the carrying out of the Convention's objectives.¹¹

Robson favoured the terms for Confederation and many of the proposed reforms outlined by the Convention but he was

¹⁰Ibid., September 12, 1868, p. 3, and September 16, 1868, p. 2.

¹¹Ibid., September 23, 1868, p. 2. The Colonist, September 24, 1868, supplement, contains the terms agreed to by the Convention.

not completely satisfied with the Convention's resolutions.¹² Some of Robson's disappointment may have resulted from his failure to have the Convention specifically approve the retention of the New Westminster Assay office, something that The British Columbian favoured.¹³ It is difficult to gain an accurate picture of the occurrences at Yale¹⁴ but there may have also been disputes among the delegates as to whether the Convention should concern itself with any reforms for the colony, or whether it should use all its energy to advance the cause of Confederation. Robson contended that union with Canada must be supported, but at the same time he hoped that work for the reform of British Columbia's grievances would also take place.¹⁵

With the completion of the Yale Convention, and as the end of 1868 approached, other matters pushed Robson's attention towards Confederation into the background. In

¹²Ibid., September 23, 1868, p. 2.

¹³Ibid., July 6, 1867, p. 2. Amor De Cosmos hints at Robson's discontent over this point during the 1870 Confederation Debates. British Columbia, Legislative Council: Debate on the Subject of Confederation. Reprint from the Government Gazette Extraordinary of March, 1870. (Victoria: Government Printer.) p. 140. (Hereafter cited as Confederation Debate.)

¹⁴During the period of the Yale Convention meeting a forest fire raged on both sides of the Fraser. The telegraph line was put out of operation and the smoke stopped navigation. (Columbian, September 19, 1868, p. 3.)

¹⁵Columbian, October 31, 1868, p. 3.

October he again stood for election to the Legislative Council. The populace had expressed approval of Robson and his policies as Legislative Councillor in June with the presentation of an address and a sum of money. They reaffirmed their support by electing him to another term by acclamation. Then in December the Legislative Council met, this time in Victoria.¹⁶

The capital's removal from New Westminster was beginning to make itself felt on Robson's financial affairs. In the middle of November his newspaper began a weekly publication schedule. The editor still found the situation difficult, and in February 1869 he informed his readers that he had made a decision to move the paper to Victoria as a daily. He was making this move reluctantly, he admitted, but it was necessary to "seek the center of population and commerce, with the hope of attaining a wider range of usefulness."¹⁷ Almost three weeks after The British Columbian ceased publication in New Westminster, The Daily British Columbian on March 16 began publication in Victoria.¹⁸

Thus, while the Legislative Council was in session,

¹⁶Ibid., June 20, 1868, p. 3; October 21, 1868, p. 3, and December 5, 1868, p. 3.

¹⁷Ibid., February 27, 1869, p. 2.

¹⁸The Daily British Columbian, March 16, 1869, p. 1. (Hereafter cited as Columbian.)

Robson was preoccupied with making his decision to come to Victoria, and moving his equipment and family. In spite of this he took an active part in the Council discussions. In particular, he was appointed the head of a select Committee on Immigration which presented its report to the Council in February.¹⁹

The 1868 session of the Legislative Council offered no encouragement to Confederation supporters. Governor Seymour opposed the movement as did the four elected island representatives who were elected on an anti-Confederation platform. One of these members proposed that Confederation at this time was undesirable and impractical. Robson responded that British Columbia was ready for Confederation and that the Mainland favoured union. His speech and those of his colleagues were to no avail; the resolution against Confederation passed.²⁰

The vote of the Legislature on Confederation marked the low point for the union movement. Robson's own life also approached a low point. With two other daily newspapers in Victoria and the declining economic situation The Daily British Columbian was in financial trouble. Occasionally,

¹⁹Colonist, February 12, 1869, p. 3. Robson was also appointed to a committee by Governor Seymour to carry out a system of female immigration. (Letter, Frederick Seymour to John Robson, March 22, 1869, John Robson Collection, PABC.)

²⁰Columbian, February 20, 1869, p. 2, and Colonist, February 19, 1869, p. 2.

Robson's usual editorial optimism was broken by a feeling of despondency. In April, while considering the difference between British Columbia and the United States he noted that the boundary between the two areas divided "a condition of inactivity, poverty, stagnation and chronic discontent, from one of bustle, enterprise, prosperity and buoyancy." He concluded that the reason for the difference was that to the south they possessed a form of responsible government, while British Columbia did not.²¹

Through his columns Robson maintained his support of Confederation and responsible government. He again blamed the present illiberal form of government for the economic difficulties of the colony. He asserted that Confederation was inevitable. The Colonial Office would eventually throw its influence on Confederation's side, whereupon the officials in British Columbia would also give it support. This latter circumstance did worry Robson, for he considered it possible that the terms of Confederation would be negotiated for the people, rather than by them. He suggested the organization of large meetings throughout the colony to forestall this likelihood.²²

At the end of July The Daily British Columbian ceased

²¹Columbian, April 18, 1869, p. 2.

²²Ibid., May 2, 1869, p. 2; June 3, 1869, p. 2, and June 5, 1869, p. 2.

publication. Robson had sold out and, for a salary of \$250 a month, had taken the position of political editor of David Higgins' journal, The Daily British Colonist. The new editor of the Colonist explained his reasons for taking the job in his first editorial for his new newspaper. He admitted that the major reason was financial, but also pointed out the necessity of having a strong united press to work for the common good.²³

The outlook for both Confederation and Robson was beginning to look brighter. With his assumption of the editorship of the Colonist he was free of the financial worries of conducting his own newspaper. As for Confederation, Governor Seymour's opposition was removed with his replacement by Anthony Musgrave, who was selected with the concurrence of Canadian officials as an advocate of union with Canada. The Imperial authorities were also anxious for Confederation. The Colonial Secretary, Earl Granville, in a published dispatch, noted that the Northwest Territories were about to be joined with Canada and outlined the advantages that British Columbia could expect with union. The Colonial

²³Colonist, August 3, 1869, p. 2. Higgins claims that Robert Burnaby, a Victoria merchant, suggested that The British Columbian and Colonist join forces to fight for Confederation. (Colonist, July 3, 1892, p. 3, letter from Higgins.) R. E. Gosnell claims that J. F. Barnard brought Higgins and Robson together. (R. E. Gosnell, The Story of Confederation With Postscript on Quebec Situation (n.p.: 1918), p. 103. See also Columbian, July 8, 1882, p. 2.

Secretary asserted his belief that the majority of British Columbians were in favour of union and declared "I have no hesitation in stating that such is also the opinion of Her Majesty's Government." Robson thought the dispatch justified his belief that Confederation was inevitable, as those who opposed Confederation were opposed to a grand design of Canada and the British authorities.²⁴

In spite of Robson's enthusiasm there were still opponents to Canadian Confederation in the colony. In what amounted to a final stand against union, an annexation petition was circulated, and J. D. Pemberton, a former Surveyor-General of mainland British Columbia, wrote three letters to the Colonist supporting the annexation cause. As would be expected, Robson answered Pemberton's proposals by declaring that whatever advantages could be obtained by union with the United States could also be achieved in union with Canada. In addition, British Columbia would be a vital part of the Canadian union providing that nation with a port on the Pacific whereas joined to the United States British Columbia could only become an unimportant economic outpost

²⁴Dispatch, Earl Granville to Governor Musgrave, August 14, 1869, in Sessional Papers of Canada, 33 Vict., 1870, no. 31. Cited in H. F. Angus, ed., British Columbia and the United States, p. 195. Colonist, October 20, 1869, p. 2.

of San Francisco.²⁵

For lack of support the annexation movement subsided. Robson's editorial speculation climaxed with the opening of the Legislative Council in February 1870. The throne speech contained two items which keenly interested Robson and the rest of the colonists. The first was the proposal of the Governor to increase the people's representation in the Legislative and Executive Councils, and the second was the intention to present to the Legislative Council for debate a list of terms which when passed would form the basis for union negotiations.²⁶

The debate on the proposed Confederation terms began near the end of the Council session and lasted almost a month. Most members had expected that the motion to go into Committee of the Whole to discuss the terms would be quickly passed. This was not the case, as some members expressed opposition to the motion. The debates on procedure lasted three days and afforded most of the members the opportunity to outline their general views on Confederation.

Robson rose specifically to answer Dr. Helmcken,

²⁵The letters from Pemberton are in Colonist, January 26, 1870, p. 2; January 29, 1870, p. 3, and February 1, 1870, p. 2. See Robson's answers, Colonist, January 28, 1870, p. 2; January 29, 1870, p. 2, and January 30, 1870, p. w. For a biography of J. D. Pemberton see Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. IV, pp. 34-39.

²⁶Colonist, February 16, 1870, p. 1.

who, in opposing Confederation, had vaguely asserted "that there was another place besides Ottawa to which we could go." It was plain, responded Robson, that this referred to annexation. He had hoped that such references would have been avoided in the debate. Robson explained that Confederation, on proper terms, would be beneficial to British Columbia. He denied Helmcken's statement that British Columbia could successfully attempt to go her own way as this was essentially what British Columbia had been attempting to do with little success for the last fifteen years. Robson closed his speech by promising general support for the terms of Confederation as proposed by the government, but with a reservation:

That, if this colony is to become a Province of Canada, the people of British Columbia shall have the right to manage their own local affairs, as fully as every other province has. . . . I say that it would be most injurious to go into Confederation upon terms which might inaugurate a fresh era of political agitation, which would probably continue for a series of years.²⁷

After the motion to go into Committee was passed, the individual terms were considered separately. Hoping to achieve the best possible terms for British Columbia within the Canadian union, Robson offered various amendments. The government proposal that the province expect an annual grant of \$35,000 from the Dominion until a provincial population

²⁷Confederation Debate, pp. 14-16.

of four million was reached was altered by Robson's resolution of \$50,000 a year until British Columbia had one million people. This resolution, after further amendment by M. W. T. Drake to a \$75,000 annual grant, was accepted.²⁸

Robson's suggestion that a coach road connecting Yale and New Westminster be included in the terms as part of a wagon road between the colony and Canada was also accepted.

Robson's resolution that the Dominion government be required to make a geological survey of British Columbia was unanimously carried.²⁹

Not all of Robson's resolutions and amendments met with approval. The two terms which he deemed to be most important, a free port and responsible government, were rejected. In proposing a free port to benefit both British Columbia and the Dominion Robson explained that "if this is to be the true north-west passage, the gates must be thrown open." The other members did not agree.³⁰

In view of Robson's past editorial comments and the reservation he had placed on his support at the beginning of the debate, it was to be expected that his major speeches

²⁸Ibid., p. 65. The figure cited here is \$70,000, but it is apparently a printing error. Compare Confederation Debate, p. 157.

²⁹Ibid., p. 88 and p. 148.

³⁰Ibid., p. 140, and p. 143.

were to be on the subject of responsible government. Drawing upon the arguments he had used in his editorials Robson delivered what was perhaps the best speech of the Confederation debate. "What is responsible Government?" he asked. Answering rhetorically, he declared:

I have been led to believe that considerable confusion of ideas exists upon this point; and I was the more impressed with this upon listening to the remarks of the Honourable Member for Cariboo, [Dr. R. W. W. Carrall] a few days ago. That Honourable gentleman compared the introduction of Responsible Government into this Colony to applying the machinery of the Great Eastern to a dairy churn. Now, Sir, Responsible Government is not a quantity; it is a principle; and as such it is as applicable to the Great Eastern or to a dairy churn,--capable of being applied to a tiny lady's watch. It is a principle admirably adapted to the largest communities in the Old World. It is a principle admirably adapted to the smallest communities in the New World. . . . All true Governments derive their power from the people. All true Governments must be responsible to the people. Responsible Government is, then, a principle which may be adapted to, and successfully worked out in, this community. | *

Continuing, Robson gave a description of what he considered to be the responsible system of government:

The Cabinet of the day is, under the responsible system, the Government, just so long as it has the confidence of a majority of the representatives of the people in the House. In the event of that confidence being lost, one of two courses is open: The Ministers place their resignation in the hands of the Governor, who commonly calls upon a prominent member of the opposition to form a Ministry; or, if they believe that the House does not truly represent the people upon the question at issue, they advise a dissolution and an appeal to the country.

After pointing out that there were capable men in British Columbia to form a cabinet, Robson asked "What would

Responsible Government have to do here?" As a province he noted the government would have matters of national concern taken away. Only local matters would remain, and it must be admitted that a British Columbian government based on responsible principles would be capable of managing those concerns. "Are the people in British Columbia fit for it?" Robson's answer was evident. "The opinion of His Excellency the Governor to the contrary notwithstanding, I boldly assert that the people of British Columbia are fit for Responsible government."

"Do they want it?" Robson believed that British Columbians did. They did not want to surrender all their rights to the government at Ottawa, while other provinces only gave up federal questions. Allowing his emotion to rise he asserted:

I stand here, and, in the name of my ancestors, protest before Heaven against the surrender of constitutional rights purchased by the best blood of our race--a priceless legacy we have no right to barter away, even if we would. We owe it to our ancestors to preserve entire those rights which they have delivered to our care. . . . To alienate even our own rights would be a crime as much more enormous than suicide, as a life of civil security and political freedom is superior to a condition of serfdom; and if life be the bounty of Heaven, we scornfully reject the noblest part of the gift if we consent to surrender that certain rule of living, and those constitutional rights, without which the condition of human nature is not only miserable but contemptible.

Answering those who believed that the inclusion of responsible government in the terms would hinder union

negotiations, Robson asserted that Canada knew the worth of free government and wanted to give it to the province. The question, Robson warned, must be settled.

The possible consequences of a refusal to grant Responsible Government coincident with Confederation, is a part of the subject I almost hesitate to touch. I would neither prophecy, [sic] nor threaten; but I would ask the Government to read well and carefully the lessons written in blood in other countries. Human nature is much the same on both sides of this great continent.

Repeating his hope that the government would allow the people to manage their own affairs, the member for New Westminster concluded his speech with a resolution. He asked that it be resolved "that a Constitution based upon the principle of Responsible Government, . . . may be conferred upon this Colony, coincident with its admission into the Dominion of Canada." The resolution was defeated.³¹

³¹Ibid., pp. 96-99, passim; and p. 124. It has been claimed (H. Robert Kendrick, "Amor De Cosmos and Confederation", in Shelton, ed., British Columbia and Confederation, p. 87) that Robson was not in favour of responsible government without Confederation. It is true that he voted against De Cosmos' resolution during the Confederation debate to have Responsible government with or without Confederation. But his long espousal of the cause shows that this was not Robson's true thinking on the matter. His argument that as a province British Columbia was more capable of working responsible government did not mean that he only wanted that type of government if British Columbia was a province. See Robson's editorial Columbian, April 11, 1869, p. 3, in which he maintains that responsible government must be obtained, Confederation or not, in order to gain prosperity. In the Confederation Debate itself Robson also pointed out that he would advocate responsible government even without Confederation, although he admitted his advocacy of the cause might not be as strong. Confederation Debate, p. 96.

Robson's final proposal also failed to form part of the Confederation terms. When De Cosmos introduced a resolution that Canada attempt to acquire Alaska, Robson, with tongue-in-cheek, proposed that Maine be included in De Cosmos' resolution. Feeling a sense of power, as they were involved in nation making, the members passed the amended resolution in Committee, but regaining a practical outlook, later rejected it in the Legislative Council.³²

With the debate concluded, and the Confederation terms agreed upon, the next step was to enter into negotiations with the Dominion government. In particular it was necessary to decide upon the delegates who would go to Ottawa. The selection fell to Governor Musgrave. Although his choice was not known when the Council voted for the delegation's travelling expenses,³³ a rumor circulated by April 7 that Joseph Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Dr. R. W. W. Carrall, member for Cariboo, and Dr. J. S. Helmcken, member for Victoria, were to form the delegation.³⁴ The Governor faced a difficulty in his selection when Dr. Helmcken declined the appointment, having

³²Ibid., p. 150.

³³Ibid., pp. 153-156. M. W. T. Drake was the only member to vote against giving the delegation funds, not Robson. Compare Derek Pethick, "The Confederation Debate of 1870", in Shelton, ed., British Columbia and Confederation, p. 193. See Colonist, April 7, 1870, p. 3.

³⁴Colonist, April 7, 1870, p. 3.

other matters to attend to. Recognizing the contributions they had made towards Confederation, Helmcken suggested that either De Cosmos or Robson be asked to go in his place.³⁵

Robson was asked by the Governor, but the circumstances under which the request took place, and under which Helmcken eventually did become a delegate are not clear. The most probable explanation is given by David Higgins, owner of the Colonist:

Hon. Mr. Trutch, Hon. Dr. Carrall, and Hon. Dr. Helmcken were selected as the delegates. Dr. Helmcken declined and the Hon. John Robson was suggested in his stead. Indeed, his appointment was on the eve of being gazetted, when Mr. Robson's enemies urged Dr. Helmcken to go. The opposition to Mr. Robson was based on the facts that he was an advocate of responsible government and that he and Mr. Trutch were not on good terms. The doctor finally relented and the delegates as originally planned left for the east.³⁶

³⁵Helmcken Reminiscences, Vol. 5, p. 100. John Sebastian Helmcken Papers, PABC.

³⁶R. E. Gosnell, A History of British Columbia (Victoria: Lewis Publishing Company, 1906), p. 122. There are several sources that maintain that Robson was asked. In a letter to his brother, Ebenezer Robson, October 28, 1872, (Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC), John Robson claims he was asked as does David Higgins; J. S. Helmcken seems to agree. (Helmcken Reminiscences, Vol. 5, p. 102, John Sebastian Helmcken Papers, PABC.) In an editorial in 1882 (Columbian, July 8, 1882, p. 2), Robson repeated the claim and says that he failed to go because of business pressure. It has been claimed that it is doubtful that Robson was asked because his vanity would have prompted the editor to mention the fact at the time. (Olive Fairholm, "John Robson and Confederation", in Shelton, ed., British Columbia and Confederation, p. 227, footnote #67). It may be shown that Robson was not necessarily an overly vain person. Nevertheless, if Robson was first asked to become a delegate, and

This explanation agrees with Robson's assertion that he "missed by a mere slip being one of the three Delegates to Ottawa to negotiate terms, in 1870, Governor Musgrave having offered me the appointment, and then asking me to step aside for Dr. Helmcken."³⁷ Trutch and Robson were not on the best of terms and Trutch would have preferred Helmcken as a member of the delegation. It would appear that Governor Musgrave, who continually hoped that Helmcken would become a delegate,³⁸ offered Robson the appointment, likely on the condition that if Helmcken reconsidered he would take Robson's place. With pressure placed on him, Helmcken finally agreed to become a delegate, and Robson had to step aside.

If Robson had been selected as a delegate, it is obvious that the complexion of the Delegation would have been

then asked to step aside for Dr. Helmcken, it would be far more likely that his vanity would prompt him not to mention the affair.

³⁷Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, October 28, 1872, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. Higgins' account may agree with Dr. Helmcken's comments. He points out that he told Trutch to ask Robson to become a delegate. "Well then I said send Robson--he is a clever fellow, but somehow or other Robson was at this time [obnoxious?]" Helmcken Reminiscences, Vol. 5, p. 102, John Sebastian Helmcken Papers, PABC. The final word is illegible in the manuscript but may be "obnoxious"--perhaps obnoxious to Trutch.

³⁸Letter, Governor Musgrave to Dr. Helmcken, April 18, 1870. John Sebastian Helmcken Papers, PABC. Musgrave informed Helmcken that "You must go." ". . . Let me have a positive answer--in the affirmative."

changed. The outcome of the Confederation negotiations would probably not have been materially altered, although it might be wondered if any dislike felt between Robson and Trutch would have hampered the negotiations. As it was, the composition of the delegation caused Robson and David Higgins some concern as all three of the delegates had expressed disapproval of responsible government.

Circumstances again become a little vague. Robson and Higgins decided to send Henry E. Seelye, another advocate of Confederation and responsible government,³⁹ to Ottawa to report on the negotiations. Although the Colonist denied that Seelye was to be concerned with anything except newspaper business,⁴⁰ it appears that he was also to lobby for responsible government. Higgins and Robson paid Seelye's expenses, and charged him with the message to the Federal government that any terms which did not include responsible government would not meet with the approval of British Columbians⁴¹ and would be opposed by the Colonist, the

³⁹Henry E. Seelye came to British Columbia about 1862 from New Brunswick. He was employed in several capacities including editor of The Cariboo Sentinel. (Columbian, April 5, 1868, p. 2.) By 1869 he was in Victoria acting as business manager on Robson's Daily British Columbian, as well as selling insurance. (Colonist, February 20, 1869, p. 3.

⁴⁰Colonist, May 12, 1870, p. 3.

⁴¹Ibid., July 3, 1892, p. 3. Letter from Higgins. See also Gosnell, Story of Confederation, p. 103. The Colonist, July 17, 1870, p. 3, comments: "Possibly it may

colony's leading newspaper.⁴²

How much importance should be attached to Seelye's mission is almost impossible to determine. It may be quite likely that Canada had already decided that British Columbia should be the recipient of responsible government, although Charles Tupper credits Seelye with persuading the Dominion government to do so.⁴³ At least it might be seen that the final terms upon which British Columbia entered Confederation contained the provision that "the Dominion will readily consent to the introduction of Responsible Government when desired by the inhabitants of British Columbia. . . ."⁴⁴

The negotiations in Ottawa lasted through the month of June 1870, and on July 7 Seelye informed the Colonist that the terms were agreed upon. The precise terms were not made known until the end of August but, through rumors during June and July, Robson seemed to have a fair indication

not be generally known that the editor of the Standard, [De Cosmos] passed over by the Governor and repudiated by the people, was anxious to go to Ottawa as 'Our Special Delegate'."

⁴²W. A. Harkin, ed., Political Reminiscences of the Right Honourable Sir Charles Tupper (London: Constable & Company, Ltd., 1914), p. 87. See also Sir Charles Tupper Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1914), p. 127-28.

⁴³Harkin, ed., Political Reminiscences, p. 88. By the Manitoba Act of 1870 that province was granted responsible government, thus creating a precedent for British Columbia.

⁴⁴Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. II, Appendix V, The Terms of Union, Clause 14, p. 697.

of what they were. He expressed his satisfaction, particularly over the promise of responsible government. Robson also began considering the next steps. As the two year terms of the elected members of the Legislative Council were completed, a new Council, which in accordance with a new constitution would have the majority of its members elected, would be formed. This Council would be charged with the responsibility of ratifying the terms of Confederation.⁴⁵

Among those who intended to stand for election in the new Council was John Robson, but the prospective candidate faced some difficulty. It had been some time since he had left New Westminster, and it appears that his popularity there had declined.⁴⁶ Therefore he decided to seek a candidacy in the Nanaimo-Comox district. At first it appeared that Robson was to be the only candidate, but the Victoria brewer Arthur Bunster, supported by De Cosmos and his paper The Daily Standard, also decided to contest the seat. After a recount, Bunster emerged as the victor with an eleven vote majority over John Robson. It was ironic that this election, the only one ever lost by Robson, a strong

⁴⁵Colonist, July 8, 1870, p. 2; July 12, 1870, p. 2, and June 15, 1870, p. 2.

⁴⁶The paper now established in New Westminster, The Mainland Guardian, was criticising Robson. See Guardian, July 23, 1870, p. 2.

temperance advocate, was lost to a brewer.⁴⁷

Thus, Robson, who had been in two Legislative Councils and played a large role in the Confederation debates, was excluded from the Legislative Council which finally accepted the terms of Confederation. As it was, the 1871 Council session was anti-climactic. On January 18, 1871 Trutch moved, and Helmcken seconded, that the terms be accepted. The motion was carried unanimously.⁴⁸ On July 20, when British Columbia officially entered the Canadian union, Robson enthusiastically proclaimed:

To-day British Columbia and Canada join hands and hearts across the Rocky Mountains, and John Bull the younger stands with one foot on the Atlantic and the other on the Pacific with his back to the North Pole and looking southward-- Let the people of this Province accustom themselves to think of the Dominion as a second edition of Great Britain . . . and while joining hands with Canada in the grand and patriotic work of building up a second British Empire on this continent, let us join hands among ourselves in a friendly but firm resolve to begin our new political life a united and harmonious bond for the purpose of making British Columbia--what Nature designed her to be-- the Queen Province of the Dominion.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Colonist, November 20, 1870, p. 3. Arthur Bunster later became a member of the Federal Parliament. His occupation of brewer ("If you want pure ALE, that is not stale, DRINK BUNSTER") perhaps aided his election campaign.

⁴⁸Colonist, January 19, 1871, p. 2.

⁴⁹Ibid., July 20, 1871, p. 2.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE

Although Robson had been denied the opportunity to vote on the terms of union, he remained hopeful that he would be able to assist in the organization of the new province and he was not discouraged from seeking office again. In the election for the first Legislative Assembly, held at the end of 1871, Robson stood for the provincial constituency of Nanaimo. He promised that he would support the Canadian tariff, education for the young, liberal land grants, economy in government, restriction of Chinese immigration and abolition of certain taxes in view of the annual Dominion grant. J. W. Carey offered opposition, but Robson won the seat with a majority of 24 votes.¹

Both before and during the election campaign Robson indulged in an editorial battle with Amor De Cosmos, editor of The Daily Standard. Although these two individuals had a common cause in Confederation and responsible government, they were never on the best of terms. Robson saw De Cosmos as too emotional and egotistical, classifying him as the

¹Colonist, August 15, 1871, p. 2, and October 20, 1871, p. 3.

leader of the "Meites", with the emphasis on "Me". Yet it was these two men who had become among the most powerful individuals in shaping the new province's political outlook.²

The main argument between the two editors centered on the relationship between Party government and responsible government. De Cosmos contended that it was necessary that "Party Government" be established in British Columbia, and that in reality responsible government was Party government. De Cosmos maintained that there should be two political groups, the "ins" who would attempt to retain power and dispense patronage, and the "Outs" who would use all constitutional means to become the "ins".³

For Robson, De Cosmos' interpretation presented Party government at its worst as simply being a matter of "To the victors belong the spoils". Robson believed that Party government would be the eventual outcome of responsible government, with political Parties based on two distinct sets of political principles, but he could not agree that Parties were a pre-requisite of responsible government. There were not, Robson claimed, two distinct political views in the

²Ibid., January 17, 1872, p. 2. They owed part of their strength to the fact that each was supported by a newspaper. Another factor was that past political leaders such as Crease, Helmcken and Carrall were no longer involved in local politics.

³The Daily Standard (Victoria), September 6, 1870, p. 2. (Hereafter cited as Standard.)

province around which Parties could be formed. If Parties were created without distinct political principles the result would be factions and the disruption of the smooth running of government. Moreover, the community was small and the number of able legislators insufficient to permit the establishment of separate political Parties. Robson hoped that a coalition government would be formed that would rise above factions and work together in the conduct of British Columbian affairs.⁴

In their views it may be seen that both editors were wrong. De Cosmos failed to see, as was pointed out by Robson, that the political situation in British Columbia was not conducive to the establishment of political Parties. There was little around which they could be formed. On the other hand, Robson's view of the establishment of a coalition was idealistic. Unless the coalition had some strong concrete objective to hold it together, the result would be exactly what Robson hoped to avoid, the creation of factions. As it was, the assembly was to be composed of loose, rather unstable, groupings.

In July 1871 Joseph Trutch was appointed the first Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. In November, Trutch appointed John Foster McCreight as Premier and Attorney General, A. Rocke Robertson as Provincial Secretary and Henry Holbrook as Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works.

⁴Colonist, July 4, 1871, p. 2.

Robson believed Trutch's appointees to be a rather poor selection of men. They were, he said, as weak a cabinet as could be expected from men who predicted the failure of responsible government in British Columbia.⁵ Robson was particularly disappointed that he had not been selected for the cabinet. There appears to be little evidence to indicate why he should have been so encouraged, beyond the fact that he had become one of the more prominent political figures in the province. He did feel optimistic enough during August 1871 to accept a nominal salary of a \$100 a month from the Colonist, expecting to be soon asked to join the cabinet.⁶ Robson, however, had to wait for his cabinet appointment.

The McCreight ministry was created from political unknowns, and at its conception faced the opposition of both Robson and De Cosmos. In order to gain support for his ministry, McCreight approached Robson. Several conversations took place and McCreight offered Robson a seat in the cabinet without a portfolio. Robson declined to accept. McCreight

⁵Ibid., July 7, 1871, p. 2; November 14, 1871, p. 3, and November 15, 1871, p. 2. Holbrook's appointment was only temporary. After the elections in the Cariboo were completed he was replaced by George A. Walkem, and Holbrook became President of the Council. (Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. II, p. 330.)

⁶Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, October 28, 1872, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

persisted and made an agreement whereby Robson would give the government independent support. In return, Robson would have a portfolio if one were created, or, failing that, he was to receive a government appointment. This offer Robson refused. McCreight then proposed that Robson would be given the first cabinet vacancy, which he hinted would occur soon. Robson replied that it was too late for a change in government. As there was a substantial amount of legislative work to do, he promised the government independent support, both as editor and legislative member, but he reserved the right to criticize and vote against the government if necessary. When he was later informed that two new portfolios were to be created and was given to understand that one was to be offered to him, Robson claimed that he refused the seat, being unable to justify an acceptance before the public.⁷

The whole episode is open to question. Lieutenant Governor Trutch writing almost a year later noted:

There was during the earlier months of the year an understanding between him [Robson] and the Ministry that if he gave the Government a general support in the Assembly and in his paper he should when an opportunity offered be taken into the Executive Council and some sort of emolument conferred on him. But he failed to give such support to Government either in his place in the house or in his capacity as Editor--but on the contrary his course has been such that Mr. McCreight and his colleagues now regard him as having been during the past year their most subtle and dangerous enemy and

⁷Colonist, December 21, 1872, p. 3, and British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Journals, 1872, pp. 9-10.

have become so convinced of his political dishonesty that they have lately declared their determination not to connect themselves with him in any way or under any circumstances.⁸

Some type of political deal was made, although the principals do not appear in total agreement as to its terms. The simplest explanation for the whole matter is that McCreight and Robson had different interpretations of "independent support". Thus, when Robson criticized the government and then refused a proffered cabinet seat McCreight could find him guilty of "political dishonesty".

In spite of the fact that he did hope to attain a cabinet position, Robson did not enter McCreight's cabinet. It is likely that he felt that McCreight's government would sooner or later fall from power and he would therefore be able to form his own ministry untainted by association with McCreight. Nevertheless, Robson was not prepared to bring about the downfall of the McCreight ministry. He continued to believe in the idea of creating a coalition government to do the legislative work in "an honest, patriotic, conciliatory mood". As he claimed in his explanation to McCreight, and as he later justified his policy to his readers, Robson believed that there was not enough time to create another

⁸Letter, Trutch to Macdonald, October 24, 1872, Macdonald Papers, 254-5. (Cited in W. N. Sage, "John Foster McCreight, The First Premier of British Columbia." Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Third Series, XXXIV, (May, 1940), Section II, p. 181.)

cabinet. To do so would delay calling the Legislative Assembly and there was urgent work to be done.⁹ In addition, Robson was aware that responsible government in British Columbia would be discredited if among the first things to happen in the Legislature was the downfall of one government and the scramble to create another. He was also aware of public opinion which seemed to indicate that it wanted McCreight to have the opportunity to govern.

The first session of the first Legislative Assembly of British Columbia which lasted from February 15, to April 11, 1872, was characterized by a general unwillingness on the part of the members to bring about the downfall of McCreight's ministry. This can be demonstrated by reference to the circumstances surrounding legislation to increase the members' indemnities. The decision to bring this question into the Assembly was passed by a vote which included two members of the cabinet in the majority. Yet when it came time to consider the measure, McCreight informed the members that the matter could only be brought in by the government, and he refused to introduce it, in spite of the previous vote of the House. The Assembly adjourned to consider McCreight's pronouncement. At their next meeting, the members decided that rather than force the question and risk the downfall of

⁹Colonist, January 3, 1872, p. 2, and January 5, 1872, p. 2.

the government, they would postpone the whole question. Suggesting that McCreight was perhaps confused as to the correct parliamentary procedure, Robson truthfully pointed out, "The House did not wish to have the ministry upset at present."¹⁰

The vague political truce had its results. Legislation needed for the establishment of the new province was passed and Robson was able to compliment the Assembly at its conclusion.¹¹ By subduing his opposition to McCreight's ministry, Robson allowed the Premier to carry on. His stringent opposition might not have defeated McCreight, but it would have seriously disrupted and hampered the work of the newly established Legislature.

During 1872, after the close of the first Legislative session, Robson's attitude towards the McCreight government gradually changed. By the end of October "independent support" became open opposition. Returning to earlier criticism, he pointed out that the ministry was composed of men who were opposed to responsible government and did not really understand it. The only reason that they were not removed from office was that "considerations of time forbade it". The ministry had now been given a fair trial of almost a year, but

¹⁰Ibid., March 16, 1872, p. 3; March 19, 1872, p. 3, and March 20, 1872, p. 3.

¹¹Ibid., April 11, 1872, p. 2.

they had done nothing to earn the people's favour.¹²

The second session of the Legislative Assembly opened on December 17. Two days later the government was defeated by one vote on a want of confidence motion. On the following day, McCreight resigned. The Lieutenant Governor called on Amor De Cosmos to form a new government.¹³ Behind the defeat of McCreight was an uneasy alliance between Robson and De Cosmos. As the alliance took place behind the scenes it is impossible to gain a complete picture of it. According to Robson, a group of M.L.A.'s was organized with the object of turning McCreight out. They agreed that every member of this group would be regarded as an equal. If any member was called upon to form the government he would seek the approval of the others and would be guided by their

¹²Ibid., November 10, 1872, p. 2.

¹³It is curious that De Cosmos was called upon to form the government instead of Robson. Both were strong political leaders, but De Cosmos had been absent from most of the first Legislative session, attending the Federal parliament. Perhaps the answer rests in John A. Macdonald's instruction to Trutch that if the government fell, he should call the leader of the opposition to form a new government. If there was no recognized leader of the opposition then the mover of the want of confidence motion should be called. (Letter, Macdonald to Trutch, December 18, 1871, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 519. Cited in J. T. Saywell, "Sir Joseph Trutch: British Columbian's First Lieutenant Governor." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIX, No. 1 & 2, (January-April, 1955), p. 80. Humphreys, the mover of the motion, was not Premier material, but was, at this time, a follower of De Cosmos. There may be the possibility that the antagonism felt by McCreight towards Robson also played a part in the selection of De Cosmos.

advice. In forming his cabinet, he would include no more than one member of the old government.

There was hesitancy to allow De Cosmos to join this group. The members told him that if he was placed in the cabinet he would have to resign his federal seat. De Cosmos agreed to this and the other arrangements that the members of the group had decided upon. When he was called upon to form the government, De Cosmos called the members of the group together but, to Robson's chagrin, also called in the M.L.A.'s who had voted for the government. It was this larger body that ratified De Cosmos as Premier. The new Premier then offered, contrary to his pledge to the alliance, two of the three cabinet posts to ministers who had just resigned and offered the third to a supporter of the past government.¹⁴

In view of what Robson called "treachery and desertion" the alliance, which had as its only purpose the defeat of McCreight, broke down. Robson, again disappointed that he had not been selected for the cabinet, proclaimed that he could not support De Cosmos and his government. During the legislative session Robson and De Cosmos engaged in wordy

¹⁴Colonist, December 29, 1872, p. 2. The two ministers were Robertson and Walkem. Robertson refused the offer, but Walkem accepted. Robert Beaven, a supporter of the McCreight government, received the third cabinet post. Robson later claimed that De Cosmos had met Walkem secretly at Kriemler's farm before the non-confidence vote where it was agreed that Walkem was to be a member of De Cosmos' cabinet. (Columbian, May 6, 1882, p. 2.)

battles on several occasions. Robson was particularly opposed to the creation of a new cabinet post, believing that such an addition was an unwarranted waste of money. He also strongly censured De Cosmos for not following the normal custom of seeking re-election before taking the Premiership. While Robson's opposition to De Cosmos and his government was general, it was not unreasoning. Looking back at the session, Robson gave the government credit for some of its measures. These good measures were unfortunately, claimed the editor, a contrast to other legislation passed by the government.¹⁵

During 1872 Robson continued his opposition to the provincial government through his editorials. He also commented on events in Ottawa and the construction of the trans-continental railway. The promise of a railway, to be started within two years, finished within ten, with a million dollars spent per year in British Columbia, was likely the term of Union that was best received by British Columbians. Such a railway was looked upon as a guarantee of prosperity.

¹⁵Ibid., December 29, 1872, p. 2; January 24, 1873, p. 3; February 12, 1873, p. 2; January 30, 1873, p. 3, and February 22, 1872, p. 2, and Letter, Trutch to Macdonald, December 31, 1872, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 278. (Cited in J. T. Saywell, "Sir Joseph Trutch", British Columbia Historical Quarterly, p. 83.) Trutch wrote to Macdonald "There will be a grand fight throughout the Session I expect as the House is divided into three nearly equal sections, McCreight's De Cosmos' and Robson's the latter having (to his infinite disappointment) not been included by De Cosmos in his Cabinet."

Unfortunately, as the July, 1873 deadline to start work passed, only a token effort had been made on the railway's construction. The De Cosmos government protested the delay,¹⁶ but their memorial was lost in Ottawa during the Pacific Scandal and the subsequent change in governments.

Through the editorial pages of the Colonist, Robson also protested the delay, noting that the province "should insist upon Canada making good this primary condition of Union."¹⁷ The editor had not expected that the Pacific Scandal would bring down the Macdonald government,¹⁸ but his editorial reception of the new Mackenzie administration was one of conditional support. In a series of editorials¹⁹ Robson pointed out that British Columbia only had one federal political article of faith,--"Terms of Union." Emphasizing the benefit that British Columbia would receive from the terms, Robson contended that the province should support whatever federal government was willing to "discharge these treaty obligations, no matter whether that Government be

¹⁶British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Papers in Connection with the Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway between the Dominion, Imperial and Provincial Governments. (Victoria: Government Printer, 1880), p. 151.

¹⁷Colonist, August 21, 1873, p. 2.

¹⁸Ibid., October 31, 1873, p. 2.

¹⁹Ibid., November 11, 1873, p. 2; November 16, 1873, p. 2, and November 27, 1873, p. 2.

composed of 'Conservatives' or 'Reformers'." Although Mackenzie previously opposed the Confederation terms with British Columbia, the agreement was binding and should be honoured. If Mackenzie honestly attempted to fulfill the Terms of Union, in particular the construction of the railway, Robson claimed he should be granted the province's support.

It was likely these editorials that Robson included in a letter written to Alexander Mackenzie at the end of November 1873. As the Robson and Mackenzie families were among the first to settle in the Sarnia area, the Prime Minister had known the young John Robson, and, with this past relationship in mind, Robson decided to write. After congratulating the new Prime Minister, the editor, speaking for himself and David Higgins, offered Mackenzie the Colonist's support, provided that Mackenzie would "do right towards British Columbia notwithstanding the hard things and unkind words [you] have on previous occasions uttered."²⁰

In reply Mackenzie challenged Robson to point to any such language. He asserted that he opposed the construction of the railway within ten years because he believed it impossible to accomplish and was skeptical of forming an agreement

²⁰Letter, Alexander Mackenzie to John Robson, December 15, 1873, Mackenzie Letterbooks, Vol. 3, pp. 179-182, (MG 26, B2), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, The Public Archives of Canada. (Hereafter cited as PAC.)

which was not possible to fulfill. In addition, he saw no reason for granting more than British Columbia originally requested. In respect to his future policy and Robson's offer of support, Mackenzie noted that he would "endeavour to do what is right" and "keep faith with all parts of the Dominion." If Robson's paper gave him support "well and good--if not I daresay the government will survive the opposite course."²¹

Robson and the Colonist appear to have accepted Mackenzie's answer. Yet, while the paper gave general support to the Mackenzie administration, public opinion in the province, and especially in Victoria, seemed to dictate a cautious, sometimes hesitant support. Although Robson's editorials and speeches favoured Mackenzie, they were often framed in a careful or roundabout fashion, sometimes employing pragmatic reasoning, or attacking the policies of those opposed to Mackenzie, without offering any specific approval of the federal government.

Robson's contention that the province's political article of faith was "Terms of Union" was partially demonstrated during the 1874 Legislative Assembly session. The union terms had provided for the building of a graving dock at Esquimalt. During 1873, on travels to Ottawa and London, De Cosmos had re-negotiated this provision. The people of

²¹Ibid.

Victoria did not approve his proposal to alter the union terms. They feared that any change in the terms by the province would justify the Dominion government to alter the terms as well, particularly the railway clause which had assumed a sacred position in their minds. On February 7, in an atmosphere already heated by the Dominion election campaign, a protest meeting was held. After the meeting the protesters marched on the Assembly where De Cosmos' resolution was then being considered. After the Speaker failed to maintain order in the face of the protest, the House was forced to adjourn.²²

Two days later at their next sitting the Assembly passed a resolution guaranteeing that no alteration in the railway clause would be made without the approval of the people. At the same time, De Cosmos resigned his seat and the premiership. He was replaced as Premier by George Anthony Walkem, who had been the head of the government in De Cosmos' absences. Robson, as expected, was pleased to see the discomfiture of the government and, recognizing a good election issue, suggested a dissolution. He later maintained that British Columbia was "indebted to the Loyal Opposition" for the destruction of the government's plan over the graving dock and for many of the other good works done during the session. At a banquet honoring those who forced

²²Colonist, February 8, 1874, p. 3.

the government to permit no alteration in the union terms without the electorate's approval, Robson excited further opposition to the provincial government. Disagreeing with a statement made by McCreight that the province would have a long struggle with Canada, Robson pointed out that he had known Mackenzie for almost thirty years and that he was a fair and honest man. It was the provincial government, Robson contended, that was attempting to set one part of the country against the other and was thus following policies damaging to both British Columbia and Canada.²³

Negotiations with the federal government over the union terms began in March 1874 with the arrival in the province of Mackenzie's emissary, James D. Edgar. Edgar proposed that in return for Canada's inability to honour the railway time limit the Dominion would offer as compensation: the construction of a railroad from Esquimalt to Nanaimo; the speedy location of the route of the trans-continental railway; the immediate building of a wagon road and telegraph line between British Columbia and the eastern provinces; and the annual expenditure of \$1,500,000 in British Columbia once construction work began.²⁴ Walkem's

²³Ibid., February 10, 1874, p. 3; February 12, 1874, p. 2; March 1, 1874, p. 2, and March 11, 1874, p. 3.

²⁴Colonist, April 30, 1874, p. 3. The Colonist was aware of the terms before they were presented to Walkem on May 8, 1874. (See Margaret A. Ormsby, "The Relations Between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada 1871-1885." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1937), p. 194.

answer was to question Edgar's authority to make such proposals. Edgar's response was to withdraw the proposals and depart from British Columbia.

The correspondence between Mackenzie and Robson had continued and in a letter to Robson the Prime Minister explained that the federal government intended to build the wagon road and telegraph line on the same route as that to be employed by the railway. This would open up the interior of the province to travel and at the same time facilitate the construction of the railway when it started.²⁵ Robson and the Colonist received the terms coolly, but Robson did not oppose the consideration of any new terms. He criticized Walkem's dismissal of Edgar and defended Edgar's credentials, at the same time pointing out that the provincial government could not hope to solve any of its problems in this manner. He also prophesied the failure of Walkem's proposed trip to London where he would protest the Dominion government's non-fulfillment of the union terms.²⁶

Robson's criticism of the De Cosmos-Walkem governments was not restricted to their policies in respect to the union terms and relations with the federal government. At the

²⁵Letter, William Buckingham to John Robson, August 12, 1874, Mackenzie Letterbooks, Vol. 3, pp. 590-93, (MG 26, B 2), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.

²⁶Colonist, May 1, 1874, p. 2; May 10, 1874, p. 2; May 17, 1874, p. 2, and June 18, 1874, p. 2.

beginning of February 1874 the Colonist reported on the "Taxhada [sic] Island Ore Grab!" and charged members of the government with suspicious dealings. The accusations seemed to be forgotten with the other eventful legislative occurrences. Then, on February 20, Robson proposed in the Legislature that a Royal Commission be formed to inquire into the matter. When Walkem attempted to have him make a specific charge, Robson refused. He replied that the charges were common throughout the province, and that he believed that he possessed enough information to warrant the creation of a Commission. After considerable discussion, Robson's motion was defeated, but it was replaced by a similar one proposed by Walkem.²⁷

Robson's information had, for the most part, been obtained by the publisher of the Colonist, David Higgins. In August 1873 Higgins met Captain John Devereux who revealed in conversation that he had travelled to Texada Island, taking S. P. Moody, one of the owners of the Moodyville sawmill at Burrard Inlet; William Dalby, Mayor of Victoria; De Cosmos, Walkem, and others to see an iron mine. Later, as the steamer returned to Burrard Inlet the Captain

²⁷Ibid., February 8, 1874, p. 2; February 22, 1874, p. 3, and British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Papers Relating to the Appointment and Proceedings of the Royal Commission for Instituting Enquiries into the Acquisition of Texada Island, (Victoria: Government Printer, 1874), p. 1. (Hereafter cited as Texada Royal Commission Papers.)

overheard a conversation among the men to sell the mine in London. When they arrived at the Inlet there was a great effort to get the names of British subjects to be used on pre-emption papers, so as to gain control of the island. The Captain described the scheme as "a dirty transaction."

Higgins heard nothing more about the matter until the beginning of February 1874 when he was informed that Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, the Agent-General for British Columbia, was offering the Texada iron mine for sale in London. The next day Higgins happened to meet Charles Morton, a Victoria Alderman, and told him that he was beginning to suspect that De Cosmos, while in England over the graving dock, had authorized Sproat to sell the mine. Morton claimed that Dalby had told him that was the case and went on to offer Higgins several other pieces of information.²⁸

With this evidence Higgins, in his newspaper, accused De Cosmos and his colleagues of taking advantage of their positions. He maintained that Walkem, De Cosmos, Dalby and others had gone to Texada Island and taken possession of the lead of iron ore there in the names of various individuals. He ^{implied} inferred that these names were only a cover. The pre-emption claims of these men were recorded by the government but another party wanting to record another lead on the same island was refused permission. Continuing, the article

²⁸Texada Royal Commission Papers, pp. 58-9.

reported rumours that when De Cosmos went to Ottawa on graving dock matters he also held power of attorney to sell the mine. This he attempted to do, offering his support to John A. Macdonald over the Pacific Scandal if Macdonald bought the mine for \$120,000. Negotiations failed when Macdonald resigned. Fearing that the plot might be revealed by the new Prime Minister, Alexander Mackenzie, De Cosmos instantly switched his support from Macdonald. Travelling to England, De Cosmos gave the mine to Sproat to sell, who was presently offering its stock on the London market.²⁹

After the appearance of this article William Dalby, rather than denying the whole affair, approached Higgins and noted that some details in the account were wrong. The mine was to be sold for \$150,000 not \$120,000 and Sproat was not offering any stock. Higgins told him that he had information that Sproat was selling the mine. Dalby admitted "that is an entirely different 'thing'".³⁰

Robson maintained that he had not known anything of the matter before it appeared in print. He therefore made various enquiries, talking with Moody and questioning Higgins on the sources of his information. Concluding that Dalby, as one of the principal members in the scheme, was telling the

²⁹Colonist, February 9, 1874, p. 2.

³⁰Texada Royal Commission Papers, p. 59.

truth, Robson called for a Royal Commission.³¹

The Commission held its first meeting on March 24, 1874 and continued meeting periodically in Victoria and New Westminster until October. At the first meeting Robson noted that the resolution contained in the Commission's instructions was different from that passed by the Assembly. The faulty version claimed that Robson "alleged" rather than "was credibly informed" that there were suspicious dealings in regard to Texada Island. Robson wanted it to be understood that he was not charging anyone with wrongdoing, but that he believed that he did have information which merited investigation.³²

The error in the resolution was corrected and in order that the proceedings might be facilitated Robson was appointed an amicus curiae. In that capacity he put forward what information he had, performing a function similar to a Crown Prosecutor. A considerable degree of latitude was allowed at the Commission's hearings and any witnesses that Robson or other parties wanted to examine were called and cross-examined by anyone who wished to do so. Any witnesses unable to attend the hearings, such as John A. Macdonald and Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, were sent detailed questionnaires to answer.³³

³¹Ibid., pp. 57-58.

³²Colonist, March 25, 1874, p. 3.

³³Texada Royal Commission Papers, p. 5.

The evidence of the witnesses in the case, occasioned sometimes by lapses in memory and contradictions, was produced. Some of the circumstances surrounding the matter were cleared up. Sproat claimed he had not attempted to sell the mine in London, and showed that it was largely rumour fed by exaggeration that had led to that conclusion. John A. MacDonald, in answering the Commission, denied having dealings with Texada Island with anybody.³⁴

Perhaps the major part of the case revolved around the apparent statements made by Mayor William Dalby. He now claimed that he had told no one that there was some type of deal in operation.³⁵ This was flatly contradicted by Charles Morton. Walkem, upon examination, claimed that his trip to Texada Island had been simply for pleasure, but Moody claimed that they went specifically to see the iron deposit. Both Captain Devereux and the Cook on the steamer maintained that, although they were secretive, the men were involved in deep discussion about the mine on their return trip.

After exhausting all avenues of inquiry, the Commission released its report. The findings were made in the following statement:

³⁴Ibid., pp. 10-15, and pp. 8-10.

³⁵As one witness suggested, it is possible that Dalby was "gassing" (i.e. boasting) when he made the original statements. (Texada Royal Commission Papers, p. 31.)

That although there were circumstances apparently suspicious attending the pre-emptions on Texada Island in August 1873, yet, in their [the Commissioners'] opinion, upon a thorough examination of those circumstances, there is no sufficient ground to believe that any member of the late or present Government, either by himself, or in unlawful or dishonourable combination with any other person, has attempted to acquire possession of the whole or of any part of Texada Island, in a manner prejudicial to the interests of the public.³⁶

De Cosmos and his supporters claimed that there was nothing to the Texada incident and that Robson was only indulging in unreasoning revenge against the government.³⁷ While it must be admitted that Robson had hopes of using the scandal to overthrow the government and certainly discredit it,³⁸ it can be seen that he was justified in calling for the investigation. He did not specifically charge anyone with wrongdoing but only claimed that there were suspicious dealings. The Commission, while it did not believe that good government had been jeopardized, agreed that matters did appear suspicious. In his actions Robson was only performing a duty expected of a leader of the opposition. As the Mainland Guardian pointed out:

³⁶Ibid., p. 6.

³⁷See Robson's answer to this charge in Colonist, July 30, 1874, p. 2. The Daily Standard also charged Robson with attempting to imitate the Pacific Scandal. (Standard, March 24, 1874, p. 2.)

³⁸This can be seen from the fact that the Colonist later reprinted its Texada Island charges, hoping to influence the defeat of Dalby in a provincial by-election. (Colonist, February 25, 1874, p. 2.)

Persons who can see no fault in the conduct of present Ministry may attribute Mr. Robson's proceedings to political spleen; but the fact of Mr. Robson being a politician, does not prevent his being a patriot and if he sees or fancies he sees corruption or jobbery in the Government of the day, he has a perfect right--and in fact it is his duty--to insist on the truth being made public. We are taxed heavily enough in all conscience to pay men who pretend to govern us, and we are entitled to know whether they do it honestly or not.³⁹

After the final report of the Texada Commission was made known, and the editorial comment on its findings decreased, interest in the question declined and the whole matter was generally forgotten. This was not the case with provincial relations with the Dominion which continued to absorb Robson's editorial attention.

By the summer of 1874, possibly believing that the Texada Island Scandal was discrediting the Walkem government, Robson was more confident in offering Mackenzie support. Seeing Walkem's policies as detrimental to British Columbia he proclaimed that if it were not for "the 'insane' conduct of our own Government" the province would now be seeing a railway constructed on the Island and preparations leading towards construction on the mainland. He agreed with Mackenzie's policy of carrying out the surveys and attempting

³⁹The Mainland Guardian, cited in Colonist, October 28, 1874, p. 3. A promotional pamphlet advertising the Texada Iron Mines was later printed and the mine offered for sale. The proprietors were listed as Hon. Hugh Nelson, Sewell P. Moody and Robert P. Rithet, with the agent for sale of the mine being Hon. A. De Cosmos. See Texada Iron Mines, (Montreal: Printed by the Lovell Printing and Publishing Co., 1875.)

to begin railway construction as soon as possible. By November, Robson was able to write Mackenzie that "the feeling [in British Columbia] continues to improve."⁴⁰

In spite of what Robson may have seen as favourable circumstances, he had written to Mackenzie in September suggesting that "secession is the next card intended to be played" by the provincial government. He also offered his opinion that if Mackenzie could somehow thoroughly convince the population of British Columbia that he soon intended to finish the surveys and complete the railroad he would gain additional support. Mackenzie was sorry to hear that secession was possible, but would not humiliate himself by attempting to prove that he meant what he said. He made an offer which met with rejection and he remained willing to receive further suggestions on that offer. As for the policy followed by Walkem, Mackenzie agreed that the provincial politician was "treating the whole question as a political shuttlecock."⁴¹

Walkem's visit to London lasted over four months. Hoping to assume the position of mediator between the two governments, the Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, offered

⁴⁰Colonist, July 1, 1874, p. 3, and July 5, 1874, p. 2, and Letter, Alexander Mackenzie to John Robson, November 27, 1874, Mackenzie Letterbooks, Vol. 4, p. 29, (MG 26, B 2), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.

⁴¹Letter, Alexander Mackenzie to John Robson, October 2, 1874, Mackenzie Letterbooks, Vol. 3, pp. 650-655, (MG 26, B 2), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.

opinion" Mr. Walkem reiterated his statement that he did not intend to propose any legislation in British Columbia, upon which Mr. Mackenzie remarked--"I think you are mistaken there Mr. Walkem. It seems to me that you must legislate, or else you declare your insincerity in the course you took last winter. If you were right then you must have the sanction of the Legislature and the people now. This evidently troubles Mr. Walkem a good deal, and it is for you in British Columbia to take such advantage of it as you deem best.⁴⁴

In order to postpone consideration of the altered terms until after the election, Walkem met the 1875 Legislative Assembly later than usual. Robson's interpretation of this maneuver was that it was indicative of the failure of Walkem's mission. The editor claimed that the Carnarvon terms could have been achieved in negotiations with Mackenzie without making the expensive trip to England. Waiting until the Legislature opened, Robson employed the information conveyed by Buckingham. The incident demonstrated, he claimed, that Walkem hoped to avoid presenting the terms to the Legislature, recognizing himself that they were a failure.⁴⁵

In the House, in answering Robson, Walkem claimed that he had not received any official correspondence on the matter of the terms, and as a result would be unable to present any legislation. Robson, on the other hand, in a

⁴⁴Letter, William Buckingham to John Robson, January 13, 1875, Mackenzie Letterbooks, Vol. 4, pp. 142-43, (MG 26, B 2), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.

⁴⁵Colonist, January 31, 1875, p. 2, and March 3, 1875, p. 2.

lengthy speech, reviewed his criticisms against the government and attempted to have Walkem admit that the terms were arbitrated and that the Premier would have to seek legislation.⁴⁶ As events occurred it was not necessary for Walkem to formulate any legislation.

In Ottawa Mackenzie decided that, as a provision in the Carnarvon terms to build a railway from Esquimalt to Nanaimo was not part of the original union terms, it was necessary to seek legislative approval for its construction. The bill passed the House of Commons, but surprisingly was defeated by two votes in the Senate. With the Senate's rejection of the bill to provide the Island railway, the Carnarvon terms were effectively dead.

The Colonist at first refused to believe that the Senate had defeated the bill. When the defeat was verified, Robson claimed it was the result of statements made by the British Columbian ministers. Whatever the cause, as Robson pointed out, the whole matter of negotiations between the two governments was back to where it started. He repeated his argument that almost all the blame could be placed on the provincial government which had failed to negotiate in faith with the federal government, and had sent the Premier on a lengthy and expensive pilgrimage to London to obtain terms which could have been achieved if he had stayed at

⁴⁶Ibid., March 5, 1875, p. 3, and March 11, 1875, p. 3.

home. Then, by quoting statements made by the provincial government, the Senate rejected the Island railway.

According to Robson, referring to the Walkem government and the situation as it stood in the spring of 1875 after the close of the session:

As it is, the result of their crooked, tricky course is most disastrous to this section of the country. The fruit of all the tedious and costly negotiations . . . has turned to ashes in their selfish grasp. And the end is not yet! The full measure of mischief to Columbia who shall foretell?⁴⁷

⁴⁷Ibid., April 10, 1875, p. 2, and April 27, 1875, p. 2.

CHAPTER V

PAYMASTER AND PURVEYOR

The completion of the 1875 session marked the end of British Columbia's first Legislative Assembly. It also marked the start of a break in Robson's career from newspaper work and politics. He did not stand for re-election and leaving his position of editor on the Colonist he entered the employ of the federal government as "Paymaster and Purveyor of the Canadian Pacific Railway Surveys."

Robson's appointment to the position was dated April 16, 1875.¹ The appointment was probably a political reward for his support of the Mackenzie government, but Robson had good reason to accept the position. He was probably still on a nominal salary at the Colonist, employed at "the editorial treadmill",² producing an editorial a day, six days a week. He was also likely disappointed at not obtaining a cabinet post and in failing to discredit the government more severely over the Texada Scandal.

¹Appointment from Dominion Department of Public Works, F. Braun to John Robson, April 16, 1875, John Robson Collection, PABC.

²Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, March 14, 1876, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

The ex-editor soon involved himself in the necessary work of his new position. Writing almost a month after beginning his duties he described them as well as displaying his satisfaction with the job.

Well, I have at last been liberated from the slavery of politics and editorial duties; and I can assure you it came none too soon, for I was completely worn down in both body and mind.

You will doubtless have seen or heard that I have been appointed Paymaster and Purveyor for the Pacific Railway operations on this side of the Rocky Mountains. The salary is \$3000 per annum and the duties are onerous enough. The year's operations will in all probability involve the expenditure of about \$300,000. It devolves upon me to purchase and forward all supplies and pay for all labour and services soever. The Government allow me all the assistance I need in the shape of deputies, clerks and agents, and I shall, of course take care and not do too much work myself.

So far it has been busy times enough, I have organized and sent to the field in three weeks seven survey parties!

Well, I trust to be able to better enjoy life, both inner and outer a little more than I have³ been enabled to do in the past few years, . . .

Robson's satisfaction with his position received a disappointing blow in August when his eldest son, John Longworth died, but there were other happier changes occurring in the Robson household. In January 1878 at Robson's home in Victoria, Fannie, Robson's daughter, married Joseph Hunter, a surveyor and a member of the first Legislative Assembly.⁴

³Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, May 31, 1875, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. For Robson's salary of \$3,000, compare the Columbian, July 8, 1882, p. 2. The figure given here is \$6,000.

⁴Colonist, August 19, 1875, p. 3, and January 22, 1878, p. 3. Also see John Robson, Diary, January 21, 1878.

Not surprisingly, the new paymaster was subjected to "the reckless attacks and stupid innuendos of implacable political enemies." The Victoria Daily Standard, in particular, charged Robson with favouritism in the letting of contracts, with using his position to obtain land at Bute Inlet, a possible terminus for the railway, and with surreptitiously involving himself with the election of A. C. Elliot, M.L.A. for Victoria. In spite of these attacks John could write to his brother that everything was going well.⁵

Robson took no active part in the provincial election held in the fall of 1875, but he remained an observer of the political events, particularly those affecting relations between the federal and provincial governments, including the problems over the construction of the railway. He also continued his correspondence with Alexander Mackenzie, serving in general as a commentator on British Columbia's affairs for the Prime Minister.

The difficulties between the two governments over the union terms and the construction of the railway remained, but they were placed in the background. In British Columbia the Walkem government, attacked over its financial policy, survived the 1875 election with a reduced majority. Walkem did

⁵Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, March 14, 1876, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. The Colonist responded to the charges. Colonist, October 8, 1875, p. 3; March 28, 1876, p. 2; June 4, 1876, p. 2, and January 23, 1876, p. 3.

secure the passage of a petition to the Queen threatening secession if the union terms were not met, but his government was defeated in the 1876 assembly session on a want of confidence motion. The new Premier, A. C. Elliot, had to contend with financial difficulties. In Ottawa, Mackenzie was faced with a minor rebellion of members in his party led by Edward Blake who opposed granting any more beneficial terms to British Columbia.⁶ The Prime Minister was therefore willing to let the difficulties with the province remain as they were.

In the summer of 1876, partially in the hope of improving feelings between the province and the Dominion, Lord Dufferin, the Governor General, visited British Columbia. In Robson's opinion the Governor General's visit was to be commended. He informed Mackenzie that, "Probably no better evidence of the potent and salutary influence" of Dufferin's visit could be presented "than the simple fact that the 'Colonist' newspaper now dares to come out openly in defense of your Administration." In commenting on the situation, Robson also approached the truth when he assigned some of the difficulties between the governments to local party politics.

I presume, however, you quite understand that the real object behind this hostile movement is less to gain anything for the Province from the Dominion than to get hold of the Provincial purse strings. The great curse of the question at issue between

⁶Margaret A. Ormsby, British Columbia: A History (Vancouver: MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1958), pp. 268-9.

this Province and the Dominion is the fact that it has always been made subservient to local exigencies. Had it not been for that the whole matter would have been settled when Mr. Edgar came. Had it not been for that the last petition to the Queen would have never been sent. . . .

Should this turbulent spirit continue in Victoria, I think a quiet intimation that the Island might be permitted to drop out and resume the position of a Crown Colony, the Mainland of course, remaining to the Confederacy, would operate as a cure.

On the mainland a very decided opinion against Victoria bluster about separation is growing up, as you will see from addresses coming in to Lieutenant Governor Richards. An address about to come from Yale is even more pronounced on these subjects. I have been promoting (on the quiet) these addresses as much as possible, both by way of endorsing Mr. Richards' appointment and having the mainland frown down this abominable Victoria bluster and I have reason to believe that a proposition to let the Island out and establish the seat of Government on the Mainland, from where it should have never been removed, would be regarded very favourably in that section.⁷

His letter to Mackenzie revealed that Robson essentially remained attached to the mainland, and was still embittered over the removal of the capital from New Westminster. However, much of Robson's feeling can be attributed to his disgust at Victoria's bombast, particularly where the resolution threatening separation is concerned. Robson hoped to see British Columbia develop but he wanted it to be as part of the Canadian nation.

While the difficulties between the province and the

⁷Letter, John Robson to Alexander Mackenzie, September 27, 1876, General Correspondence Section, pp. 1360-65, (MG 26, B 1; microfilm reels M-198 and M-199), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.

Dominion changed little during 1877, the railway surveys were progressing. By December 1877 Mackenzie was able to announce that the route along the Fraser river had been chosen for the railway and that tenders would soon be called.⁸ In February 1878, for the first time since he arrived in British Columbia in 1859, Robson departed for eastern Canada in connection with his job. Travelling by rail by way of San Francisco and Chicago on March 5 he reached Ottawa. On March 22 Robson saw the Minister of Customs and on March 28, likely through the intervention of Edgar Dewdney, he was introduced to John A. Macdonald, Peter Mitchell and A. Morris. The climax of his visit to Ottawa was on April 2 when he met with Mackenzie and L. S. Huntington. Robson's only comment on the meeting was that he "Had a long and most satisfactory interview."⁹ In addition to other matters, it is likely that the political climate and circumstances in British Columbia formed a topic of conversation. Mackenzie's term of office was almost over and he faced an election in the fall of 1878.

Returning to Victoria, Robson, on instructions from Mackenzie, began preparations to start railway construction on the mainland. The rails which had been shipped to the

⁸Ormsby, "Relations Between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada", p. 278.

⁹John Robson, Diary, March 5, 1878; March 22, 1878; March 28, 1878, and April 2, 1878.

province in 1874 to be used on the Island railway were transferred to Yale.¹⁰ Although Mackenzie intended to place the terminus for the railway at Burrard Inlet, he decided that construction should be started as soon as possible between Yale and Lake Kamloops in order to gain access to the interior. In connection with the beginning of construction Mackenzie, in July 1878, instructed Robson to move to the mainland from Victoria. This Robson did later in the year, taking up residence at the old government house in New Westminster.¹¹

If Mackenzie or Robson hoped that the commencement of railroad construction would result in better feeling towards the Dominion government they were disappointed. In the September 1878 federal election the defeat of the government was probably never in doubt. In a lengthy letter written to

¹⁰Ibid., July 25, 1878. Notice calling for tenders is in the Colonist, June 15, 1878, p. 2.

¹¹Letter, Alexander Mackenzie to John Robson, July 11, 1878, Mackenzie Letterbooks, Vol. 2, pp. 91-93, (MG 26, B 2), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC; and Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, January 6, 1879, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. It was during this period that Robson's career came close to being ended. His diary entry for June 30, 1878 notes: "Was shot at by Oliver as I was entering front door, bullet striking close by my head." Apparently Robson's neighbour, Oliver, went insane and commenced indiscriminate shooting. Robson picked up the spent bullet which missed him and called the police. After some time the police managed to capture Oliver and detain him. (Colonist, July 3, 1878, p. 3.) In 1876 Robson escaped injury when the horses drawing his carriage took fright, forcing him to jump for safety. (Colonist, April 8, 1876, p. 3.)

the defeated Prime Minister after the election Robson offered his opinion on the reasons for the government's defeat in British Columbia.

Well may you feel surprised and disgusted with British Columbians--more especially those interested in the southern route, in so far as their political attitude is concerned. And yet it is susceptible to a sort of explanation; although the explanation falls far short of justification: The Macdonald party--in power at the time--were so lavish in promises and some of these promises were so absurdly unreasonable and, indeed, impossible, that you were, in a manner, forced to take a position which it was only too easy to teach Columbians to regard as hostile to their interests. Hence the feeling that Macdonald was the friend and Mackenzie the enemy of B.C. gradually took form and root.

Macdonald went out just a little too soon for the people to have sufficient evidence of the absolute worthlessness of his promises.

Upon coming to power your first effort in the direction of dealing "not only justly but generously" with Columbia, did not, it must be admitted, attain any satisfactory results; although that was doubtless attributable in a great measure at least to the action of Walkem in his determination to make everything subservient to his local political interests.

Your British Columbia railway policy--although such as should have commended itself to the sober, thinking portion of our people not warped by conflicting route interests--could hardly be expected to satisfy the masses who had been inflamed by Macdonald's great swelling promises; and the worst of all was that you went out of power just too soon to have the opportunity of convincing the sceptical crowd of the bonafides of your promises and policy. I admit that all fair, reasonable minds ought to have been convinced; but that class of mind would not seem to predominate. It may be remarked, too, that the (as I venture to think indiscreet) utterances of Blake assisted the enemy greatly in making your party appear inimical to B.C.

Before the revolution [election] last September, Dewdney was industriously engaged in making the impression throughout his constituency that it was to Sir John the people must look for the railway--that you would not remain in power; and even if you

did your ingenuity would be employed in demonstrating "how not to do it." And to these efforts must be added the influence of Marcus Smith, who in passing through the District in the fall of 1877, everywhere and most industriously spoke of your railway policy as shuffling humbug, declaring that you had really not the slightest intention of going on with the work in BC and predicting very positively the return to power of the Conservatives, the only men, he said, from whom Columbia could hope for railway,--statements which, coming from such a source, were bound to have considerable influence with men not in the habit of looking below the surface.

Well the change came. Dewdney was supposed to be "on the inside"--to be on the most confidential terms with Sir John. And New Westminster (although thoroughly round to your side before) could not afford to follow you into the cold shades of opposition, more especially as she was led to expect that Sir John would push on railway work on this route, with greater vigour than you have done; and so she agreed that her representative should support the Macdonald government, provided they would carry out your railway policy.¹²

The result of the election put Robson's own position in jeopardy. His appointment was made by Mackenzie and he could expect that the new Macdonald ministry would ask him to resign. In January 1879 Robson noted that he did not know how the change in government was to affect him, although he believed that Edgar Dewdney, the Conservative member for Yale, was his friend, and "his presence at the capital will be the means of warding off mischief."¹³ But on February 18

¹²Letter, John Robson to Alexander Mackenzie, September 26, 1879, General Correspondence Section, pp. 2300-2305, (MG 26, B 1; microfilm reels M-198 and M-199), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.

¹³Letter John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, January 6, 1879, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. Robson also noted: "I have already felt the loss of influence and confidence

John wrote to Ebenezer that he had been officially notified of his dismissal. Noting that it was not an easy thing for a man his age to be removed from his position, Robson was still confident that "If Railway work goes on as Quartz interests look up, I am not the least afraid of getting on."¹⁴

In addition to his employment on the railway, Robson, seemingly in common with most other British Columbians, was investing money in mines and in land. In December 1877 Robson, together with several other individuals, organized the British Columbia Gold and Silver Milling and Mining Company.¹⁵ In the spring of 1879, commenting on his financial affairs after his notice of dismissal, Robson pointed out:

Should railway construction commence at Emory's Bar this year you may see a town-site at that point puffed into existence. Hunter [Robson's son-in-law and a railway surveyor] is just now laying it out on paper, so as to be ready. He and I own most of it; and should railway matters go right, we will both come out pretty well I think. Of course, we are

occasioned by the change and have had to do less for the boys this winter than formerly. My enemies waxing bold, made an outcry about my having so many relations in the service and the consequence was that I considered it judicious to let Willie and George out."

¹⁴Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, February 18, 1879, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

¹⁵Colonist, December 5, 1877, p. 3. See also March 21, 1878, p. 3.

keeping our connection with it as dark as possible, for the present at least, as a handle might be made of his being so interested.¹⁶

It is also quite likely that Robson was considering investing in land at Burrard Inlet which Mackenzie had selected as the terminus. Robson, in opposition to those in Victoria led by De Cosmos, appears to have always favoured the southern route for the railway which would terminate at Burrard Inlet. De Cosmos and most Victorians, on the other hand, hoped to see the railroad constructed on a northern route to Bute Inlet where it would cross over to the Island and eventually terminate at Victoria. In 1879, after Macdonald was returned to power, the federal government rescinded Mackenzie's selection of the southern route, in order to make their own decision. Anticipating this move by the Macdonald government as well as efforts that would be made by De Cosmos and his friends to have the southern route selected, Robson wrote to Mackenzie. Apologizing for repeating circumstances that Mackenzie already knew, Robson

¹⁶Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, April 17, 1879, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. It is possible that Robson and Hunter did make some money from their speculation at Emory's Bar. At a sale in Victoria in March 1880 lots at the townsite composed of 13 streets and 32 blocks containing 400 lots were sold for an average price of \$250 a lot. (Colonist, February 4, 1880, p. 3, and March 17, 1880, p. 3.) In May 1880 the town was considered important enough for the Inland Sentinel to decide to move there, but the period of optimism appears not to have lasted long. (Colonist, May 13, 1880, p. 3.)

repeated the arguments in favour of the Burrard Inlet route which he had likely previously employed.

Robson contended that the wagon road and railway, discussed both before and during the Confederation debate, was to terminate at Yale and eventually be continued down to Burrard Inlet. De Cosmos and his supporters at that time favoured this route and even advanced the valid argument that construction of the railway between the head of navigation on the Lower Fraser and the inland water routes would result in access to the products of the interior of the province. Moreover, according to Robson, the surveys for the southern route down the Fraser had occupied eight seasons and involved considerable expense. A thorough investigation of the feasibility of the northern route would mean additional time and money with no assurance that any better route would be found.¹⁷ While Robson's statements would have no effect on the federal government, the Macdonald administration did agree after some further surveys that the southern route was the best and construction was finally started on the railway in May, 1880.¹⁸

Rubbish
Burrard Inlet
Surveyed
1st!

After receiving notification that his position as

¹⁷Letter, John Robson to Alexander Mackenzie, January 16, 1879, General Correspondence Section, pp. 2214-27, (MG 26, B 1; microfilm reels M-198 and M-199), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.

¹⁸Colonist, May 16, 1880, p. 3.

purveyor had been abolished Robson attempted to continue in the employ of the federal government. Edgar Dewdney pressed Robson's suit in Ottawa and Ebenezer travelled to the capital for the purpose of lobbying. In spite of this assistance, by April 1879 Robson reached the conclusion that his attempts to retain his position would prove futile.¹⁹ His interpretation proved correct. By 1880 he was debating what course his future should take. The most obvious answer was for John Robson to re-enter journalism and politics.

¹⁹Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, April 17, 1879, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. In order to ameliorate his financial situation Robson wrote to Mackenzie to ask if he might obtain the agency of the Isolated Risk Insurance Co. for British Columbia. (Letter, John Robson to Alexander Mackenzie, September 26, 1879, General Correspondence Section, pp. 2300-2305, [MG 26, B 1; microfilm reels M-198 and M-199], Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC.)

CHAPTER VI

GOVERNMENT MEMBER, 1883-1889

Robson's re-entry into journalism was abrupt. At the beginning of October, 1880 the postmaster at New Westminster committed suicide. His replacement was the owner of The Dominion Pacific Herald. Robson was looking for an opportunity to re-enter the journalistic field and on October 13, Robson in partnership with his brother, David, were announced as the new owners of the paper. They proposed "to publish a thoroughly independent journal--one that shall be equally free to criticize and approve or condemn what emanates from Government or Opposition." While his first issues attempted to live up to this creed, it was soon evident that the Herald was in general opposition to the government of Walkem. Within the year, the Robson brothers also attempted to increase the paper's circulation. It was expanded in size, and at the same time its name was changed. John Robson was again editor of The British Columbian.¹

¹The Dominion Pacific Herald (New Westminster), October 2, 1880, p. 3; October 9, 1880, p. 3; October 13, 1880, p. 2, and October 16, 1880, p. 2. (Hereafter cited as Herald.) The first issue of the new British Columbian was January 4, 1882. As Robson earlier noted, the Herald

In the first issue of his renamed paper Robson reminded his readers of the editorial battles that its namesake had fought. Many of those battles had been won, but, the editor maintained, others remained to be fought. This first issue also contained a broad hint that Robson intended standing in the coming provincial election. His decision to re-enter provincial politics was opportune. During the 1882 Assembly session revelations about excessive expenditure on cement for the Esquimalt graving dock discredited the Walkem government.² The members' confidence in the government declined, but Walkem managed to carry on, relying on several occasions on the Speaker's deciding vote to win divisions. At the end of the session Walkem accepted an appointment to the Bench. He was replaced as Premier by Robert Beaven, whose government called an election in July 1882.

As the election approached, Robson announced his intention to run for one of the two seats in New Westminster District. In his election address, he summarized much of what he had expounded in his editorials. He criticized the government for the Graving dock fiasco and maintained the necessity for a reorganized fiscal policy. Chinese labour,

(and now the Columbian) was published for the most part on the same press as the old British Columbian. (Herald, October 16, 1880, p. 3.)

²Columbian, January 4, 1882, p. 1, and p. 2, and March 29, 1882, p. 3.

which was damaging the labour market, should be curtailed. There should be a more equitable basis of representation by population, particularly for the New Westminster District. Public works and schools were needed throughout the province. Judges should take up posts in the interior and remuneration should be made to jurors and Crown witnesses. The Island Railway should not make any charge on the province, nor should it interfere with the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway. In spite of the fact that Robson had supported the previous Mackenzie administration he was willing to work with the Macdonald government to assist in the province's growth. He expressed the opinion that it would be best if relations of a friendly nature could be maintained between the province and the Dominion, thus avoiding conflicts detrimental to both.³

In the election campaign Robson found that his main opposition came not from his fellow candidates, but from his newspaper rival in New Westminster, The Mainland Guardian and its editor James K. Suter. The Guardian attempted to discredit Robson by reference to his past career. It was claimed that Robson was "a professional politician, hence not to be trusted; . . ." Robson defended himself, but Suter continued to attempt to fasten the epithets of "chameleon"

³Ibid., June 17, 1882, p. 2, and July 5, 1882, p. 2.

and "Honest John" onto Robson.⁴ In spite of the Guardian's accusations the final results placed Robson at the head of the New Westminster District poll.⁵ As the results were reported from the other provincial constituencies it was evident that the government had lost its support.

The problem which now occupied Robson's attention was whether the Beaven government would recognize its defeat and resign. Beaven, however, continued in office. Finally in December a memorial signed by 14 of the 25 legislative members, including Robson, was presented to the Lieutenant Governor requesting that the Assembly be called. Although an earlier petition failed to have any effect, this memorial accomplished its purpose. The Legislature was called to meet in January 1883.⁶

Beaven was soon removed as Premier by a non-confidence motion, with Robson, as would be expected, voting against the government.⁷ Assuming the leadership of the forces opposed

⁴The Mainland Guardian, July 19, 1882, p. 3, and July 22, 1882, p. 2. (Hereafter cited as Guardian.) The sobriquet of "Honest John" followed Robson throughout most of his career. The name was used at least as early as 1876. (Colonist, March 28, 1876, p. 2.)

⁵Columbian, July 29, 1882, p. 2.

⁶Colonist, December 5, 1882, p. 2, and December 19, 1882, p. 2, and Columbian, August 26, 1882, p. 2.

⁷Ibid., January 27, 1883, p. 3. Beaven must have known he would be defeated. Ebenezer Robson makes the interesting comment, "The Beaven Govt was defeated at 6 this evening by a vote of 16 to 8. This result is within 1 of what

to Beaven was William Smithe who had likely known since the election that he would eventually be called upon to form a ministry. Wasting little time, Smithe organized his cabinet. He took for himself the position of Commissioner of Lands and Works and appointed Alexander Edmund Batson Davie as Attorney General; M. W. T. Drake, President of the Council; and John Robson, Secretary and Minister of Finance and Agriculture. Robson's appointment to the new cabinet is not difficult to understand. Although he had not been in the Assembly for several years he retained his interest in politics, was respected for his debating skill, and was recognized as a leading political figure who had consistently opposed the Walkem-Beaven regimes.

Moreover, Robson and Smithe appear to have been close friends ever since the first Legislative Assembly. In his editorials Robson complimented Smithe for various measures; recognition that does not appear to have been given to other members.⁸ It was Smithe who seconded Robson's motion for the Texada Commission. After Smithe's death Robson would become the executor of Smithe's estate and the guardian to his

R. B. [Robert Beaven?] told me it w'd be last month." (Ebenezer Robson Diary, Thursday, January 25, 1883, [sic, Ebenezer is mistaken as the date of Beaven's defeat was the following day, Friday, January 26, 1883], Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.)

⁸For example, see Colonist, March 1, 1874, p. 2, and Herald, March 5, 1881, p. 1.

children.⁹ At first glance the friendship between the two might seem incongruous, particularly because Robson does not appear to have made many close friends. Perhaps the somewhat shy, unassuming, sometimes hesitant Smithe and the serious, confident, and occasionally explosive Robson each saw something in the other's personality that he wished that he had.

With his assumption of two ministerial posts, Robson faced a heavier work load than his colleagues, but it is likely that he was satisfied with his appointment, particularly as Provincial Secretary. He later relinquished the portfolio of Finance and Agriculture but for the remainder of his career in government he retained the Provincial Secretary's post. This latter portfolio covered a wide domain of concern. The Provincial Secretary was also Minister of Mines and was, in addition, responsible for such matters as health, education and immigration. These last two aspects had absorbed a considerable amount of Robson's editorial attention and his interest in them continued.

After obtaining a three week recess of the Legislative Assembly the new government undertook to prepare its legislative program. In an attempt to settle the difficulties between the provincial and Dominion governments which

⁹Letters, John Robson to Mrs. Smithe, April 8, 1892, and April 27, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC; and Colonist, November 18, 1890, p. 5.

were hindering the province's development, Smithe and his ministers, as foreshadowed by Robson in his election address, rejected the "Fight Canada" policies of the former government for "relations of a friendly character".¹⁰ The day after assuming control, the government ministers met with Joseph Trutch, who was now acting as an agent of the Dominion government, and negotiations were started to settle the various difficulties.¹¹

As was required of new members of the cabinet, Robson stood for re-election. Being re-elected by acclamation,¹² he was able to take his seat when the Legislature reconvened. It was evident that the climax of the session would come when the results of the Federal-provincial negotiations were made known. There was some delay before Smithe was able to bring the terms into the House for ratification on May 7. Briefly, the agreement provided that in return for land along the mainland rail route and in the Peace River District, the Dominion was to construct the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway within three and a half years. The graving dock was also to be taken over and built by the Dominion, after compensating the province for the work already done and giving a further

¹⁰Herald, July 5, 1882, p. 2.

¹¹Colonist, January 31, 1883, p. 3.

¹²Ibid., February 11, 1883, p. 3.

grant of \$250,000.¹³

Robson, as Finance Minister, was unable to present his estimates until the terms of the settlement were made known. His task was made considerably easier with the promised Dominion grant of \$250,000. After rebuking the previous government for its financial policies, he went on to outline the financial figures for the ensuing year. The major increases in expenditure were to be in public works and education. The government believed that the increase in public works was justified by what Robson saw as the coming prosperity for the province and the arrival of new settlers. As for education, Robson contended that immigrants would not come to a province that did not have a liberal common school system.¹⁴

Both the financial estimates and the terms of the Dominion-provincial settlement were speedily passed by the Assembly, which was then prorogued. Unfortunately, in the haste to have it ratified, the agreement contained several minor points which the Canadian government would not accept. These differences were corrected during the summer of 1883 and, desiring to ratify the amended settlement terms, the government called for an early Assembly session in December 1883. With their passage by the provincial assembly and

¹³Ormsby, "The Relations Between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada", p. 335.

¹⁴Colonist, May 8, 1883, p. 2.

later by the Canadian parliament, the Settlement terms brought to a conclusion the many points of contention that characterized the previous decade of federal-provincial relations and represented, as claimed by Robson, the most important legislation since Confederation.¹⁵

Although Robson undoubtedly played some part in the negotiations and was in agreement with the results that were achieved, he was also concerned with other matters. By the 1883-84 session the Provincial Secretary, partially as a result of consultations with school examiners and teachers,¹⁶ was able to present amendments to the Public Schools Act. The amendments dealt mainly with revisions in teacher certification, but the act also increased the number of school trustees to six in the cities from the previous three. In addition, women were given the right to vote for trustees, thus contributing to female suffrage, and high schools were to be provided in any school district which contained over twenty pupils of high school age.¹⁷

One of the more important debates of the 1883-84 session centered around the problem of British Columbia's Chinese population. As early as 1865 The British Columbian

¹⁵Ibid., May 11, 1883, p. 3.

¹⁶Ibid., July 27, 1883, p. 3.

¹⁷British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Statutes, 1884, ch. 27.

drew attention to the problem. Robson contended that the Chinese did manage to live economically, but being able to live cheaply they sent all their money back home to their masters. In the process, he claimed, the Chinese were hindering the economic development of British Columbia. They failed to become permanent settlers. They were willing to work for cheap wages and, by taking jobs away from white settlers, they discouraged white immigration to British Columbia. Robson's suggested answer to the problem was to place a special poll tax on all Chinese.¹⁸ Robson's ideas changed little over the years.¹⁹ In the first Legislative Assembly in 1872 he moved a resolution that a \$50 head tax be placed on all Chinese. He later proposed that the government prohibit Chinese labour on public works in the province. Both motions failed. In the 1874 legislation session Robson again proposed that a special tax be levied on the Chinese population, a measure which again failed to find support.²⁰ While Robson's motions resulted in no legislation, they were indicative of the general public's concern over the Chinese population.

¹⁸Columbian, February 23, 1865, p. 2; March 2, 1865, p. 3, and June 15, 1865, p. 2.

¹⁹See Colonist, September 2, 1871, p. 2; September 28, 1871, p. 2; January 16, 1872, p. 2; January 13, 1874, p. 2, and August 21, 1874, p. 2.

²⁰British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Journals, 1872, pp. 15-16, and Journals, 1873-74, p. 18.

By 1881 Robson was again engaged in a campaign to warn against the consequences of employing "these long-tailed slaves" on railway construction for 50 cents a day, thus ruining the labour market for whites. The question of the Chinese also played some part in the 1882 election.²¹ In the first session of the Smithe government a resolution was passed asking the government to use all constitutional methods to restrict Chinese immigration, but the matter received its first full attention in the 1883-84 session. Three acts were passed: An Act to regulate the Chinese population of British Columbia; an Act to prevent Chinese from Acquiring Crown Lands; and an Act to prevent the immigration of Chinese.²²

This last act, in dealing with immigration, dealt with an area that was not of provincial legislative concern, and the act was later disallowed. Robson earlier recognized that this might happen, but he asserted then that the

²¹Herald, January 29, 1881, p. 1, and Colonist, July 24, 1882, p. 2. Robson could still take the Chinese side against those who did not want the Chinese population to build an arch for the reception of the Governor General in 1882. (Columbian, September 20, 1882, p. 2.) After the mistreatment of one Chinese Robson asserted: "To say 'it was only a Chinaman' is no excuse. Indeed that only makes the matter all the worse, blaekens [sic] the blot upon our vaunted civilization. In matters of this kind we should know no creed, color or nationality, 'a man's a man for a'that.'" (Herald, March 12, 1881, p. 3.)

²²Journals, 1883, p. 17, and Statutes, 1883-84, chs. 2, 3, and 4.

disallowed act would still serve a purpose in demonstrating to the Dominion government the need for anti-Chinese legislation. To a certain extent Robson was correct. The Dominion government appointed a commission to investigate Chinese immigration and later passed legislation to restrict it.²³

The debate on the matter of the Chinese in the 1883-84 session unfortunately saw a clash between Robson and Robert Beaven, who was now serving as leader of the opposition. In his speech Robson referred to a report that Beaven was employing Chinese. Beaven denied this and retorted that he had information about the Provincial Secretary that would severely condemn that minister. Robson asked Beaven to make his information known, but he refused, saying he would save the charge until later. After a further demand by Robson that Beaven divulge his charge, and another refusal, Robson, in his temper, condemned the leader of the opposition as "a slandering coward". Robson admitted later that he regretted having used the language that he did, but claimed that it was under great provocation. He offered to apologize, but only if Beaven withdrew his insinuation. The general opinion of the House was that such a mutual apology

²³Colonist, January 13, 1874, p. 3, and August 15, 1884, p. 3; and Canada, House of Commons, Statutes, 1885, ch. 71, "An Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration into Canada."

should be made, but neither member was willing to back down from his position.²⁴

The incident was of no consequence, but it served to demonstrate that Robson still retained the temper which had earlier brought him into confrontation with other individuals, such as Judge Begbie. Unfortunately while outraged indignation and bursts of temper can be effectively used by an opposition member, they are not qualities admired in a government leader. Although Robson tried to control it, his temper was a point of weakness which detracted from his other legislative abilities.

The legislative session closed in February 1884, but as a cabinet minister Robson still had to concern himself with the more mundane and administrative duties of government. The report of the New Westminster insane asylum for 1883 outlined the many deficiencies of that institution.²⁵ During the 1883 Assembly session a legislative commission was appointed to investigate conditions. The commission's report stated that the asylum resembled "a prison rather than a hospital for the insane, and a far less preferable

²⁴Colonist, January 12, 1884, p. 3, and January 16, 1884, p. 3.

²⁵British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Sessional Papers, 1883-84, Annual Report on the Asylum for the Insane, p. 333. Robson was earlier aware of the deficiencies. See Herald, November 27, 1880, p. 1, and May 28, 1881, p. 2. Also editorial "The Way to Death!", Columbian, June 7, 1882, p. 2.

place of abode than the Penitentiary at New Westminster." The building was overcrowded and in a state of disrepair and the living conditions were not conducive to the health of the inmates.²⁶ By employing the report's recommendations Robson was able to effect numerous improvements. By 1885, the Medical Officer at the asylum was able to refer to the "Great number of improvements" as "very encouraging".²⁷

As newspaper editor one of Robson's recurring themes had been the necessity for increased immigrations to aid British Columbia's development.²⁸ As minister, he attempted to carry many of his proposals into effect. Among the first appointments that Robson made were those of John Jessop and William Ross as immigration agents in Victoria and New Westminster. In his instructions to Ross, the Provincial Secretary pointed out that his duty in return for his salary of \$100 a month would "consist in meeting immigrants on their arrival at New Westminster and, by imparting information and

²⁶See their report in Sessional Papers, 1883-84, Asylum For the Insane, Report of Commissioners, p. 281.

²⁷Sessional Papers, 1885, Report on the Asylum for Insane, p. 337.

²⁸See Columbian, May 4, 1864, p. 1; June 15, 1864, p. 2; April 3, 1869, p. 2; May 30, 1869, p. 2; Colonist, January 12, 1870, p. 2; April 24, 1870, p. 2; August 3, 1870, p. 2; January 4, 1871, p. 2; December 10, 1871, p. 2; January 28, 1872, p. 2; March 24, 1872, p. 2; September 15, 1872, p. 2; October 29, 1873, p. 2; December 4, 1874, p. 2; Herald, April 9, 1881, p. 2; November 2, 1881, p. 2; Columbian, January 25, 1882, p. 1.

advice, assisting them in finding suitable locations or employment." With these objects in mind, Ross was instructed to obtain a knowledge of the lands in his area in order to recommend suitable places for settlement and also to contact employers in order to determine what labourers they might require. He was also to keep a record of immigrants and to make them "feel that they are welcome and appreciated."²⁹

With other municipalities Robson proposed an agreement whereby the town council and the government would divide the cost of providing an immigration agent for the respective municipality. The agent, who was to perform duties similar to Jessop and Ross, was to be nominated by the municipality and appointed by the government. The majority of municipalities accepted Robson's proposal and agents were appointed.³⁰

In addition to local immigration agents, Robson appointed several others in England, Scotland, Europe, Toronto and Winnipeg. These positions were basically honorary, although the agents were allowed sums for incidentals, including the placement of advertisements for British Columbia

²⁹Letters, John Robson to William Ross, June 1, 1883, and John Robson to John Jessop, March 29, 1883, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC.

³⁰Circular Letter, John Robson to Delta Municipality/Surrey/Richmond/Langley/Maple Ridge/Chilliwack, March 27, 1884, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC. Robson also appointed immigrant guides. Letters, John Robson to M. Edgson, May 19, 1884, and John Robson to Donald H. McNeill, April 23, 1885, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC.

in various newspapers. The primary duty of these men was to publicize British Columbia and distribute immigration literature among prospective immigrants.³¹

Among Robson's over-all plans for immigration was also a scheme to build sheds to accommodate new arrivals until they could be properly located. In March 1884 Smithe, then in Ottawa, proposed that the Dominion government contribute \$2,000 towards the erection of a large hall and sheds in Victoria. The buildings were to serve the triple purpose of an agricultural hall, an immigrants' home and a museum to exhibit the products of the province. The provincial government, the provincial Agricultural Society and the city of Victoria were also to contribute towards the \$8,000 to \$10,000 total cost of construction. A similar arrangement, Smithe pointed out, had already been made with New Westminster and buildings erected in which the Provincial Agricultural Exhibition was held in September 1883, and in which immigrants now resided, under the charge of the New Westminster immigration agent.³²

³¹Letters, John Robson to H. C. Beeton, May 3, 1883, (Agent General in London); Geo. Faulkner, March 19, 1884, (Agent in Toronto); J. Graham, March 19, 1884, (Agent in Winnipeg); J. S. K. deKnevett, June 16, 1865, (Agent in Paris, Europe); and C. S. Jones, July 14, 1885, (Agent in Edinburgh). Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC.

³²Rough draft of a letter, William Smithe to Joseph Pope, March 8, 1884, MS, William Smithe Collection, PABC.

The plan to build the Victoria buildings did make some progress, but there was considerable controversy over their location.³³ By July 1884 Robson reported to Ottawa that the arrangement was definitely abandoned, although he still maintained there was the need for such a building.³⁴

It is difficult to determine the effect of Robson's efforts to increase immigration. Undoubtedly the population of the province did increase, but this was far more attributable to the construction and completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, than to anything done by Robson. The local immigration agents and guides did assist some settlers in locating,³⁵ but the minister's schemes seemed to have died a quiet death by 1886. There are several reasons for the demise. In 1884 Jessop's office was taken over by the Dominion government, and with the completion of the railway and increase in population, Robson may have felt that his efforts were no longer needed. Whatever the reasons, they did not

³³Colonist, August 2, 1884, p. 2. The Agricultural Society wanted the buildings to be situated on the far side of Beacon Hill Park, whereas the government, for processing reasons, hoped to see the buildings erected near the public offices.

³⁴Letter, John Robson to Minister of Finance, Ottawa, July 24, 1884, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC. For a period the government did rent at \$25 a month a frame house in which immigrants resided. Sessional Papers, 1885, p. 306.

³⁵Sessional Papers, 1883-84; 1885, 1886, Report of Immigration Agents in British Columbia, pp. 293-307; pp. 295-308, and pp. 609-23.

signify an end to Robson's interest in immigration schemes.

Robson was also interested in putting into effect the amendments that had been made in the School Act. By the end of 1884 he was able to fulfill an election promise made to his constituents with the construction of a high school in New Westminster. As part of his duties the minister also visited many schools, particularly during exam times which took place before the Christmas and summer holidays.³⁶

Recognizing the importance of the teachers' conventions held in Victoria during the summer, the Provincial Secretary encouraged teachers from the interior to attend by obtaining half fares for them on the province's rail and steamer lines.³⁷ At the conventions the teachers, the majority of whom had not received any formal teaching training, took part in seminars or listened to lectures on teaching methods.

In the 1885 session Robson consolidated the various amendments to the Public Schools Act. The opposition, however, criticized him over the removal of the Superintendent of Education. C. C. McKenzie's dismissal, primarily because of

³⁶Columbian, July 5, 1882, p. 2. See also March 8, 1882, p. 1. In June 1888, for example, Robson visited the closing ceremonies at Spring Ridge School, James Bay Ward School and Johnson Street School. (Colonist, June 26, 1888, p. 3.) He also visited the High School and Central School in Victoria. (Colonist, June 27, 1888, p. 3.)

³⁷Letter, John Robson to R. A. Anderson, Corresponding Secretary, Teachers' Convention, March 20, 1886, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC.

his belligerent attitude, was justified,³⁸ although the government had possibly decided on his removal previously.³⁹ McKenzie was appointed to his position to put into effect the education policy of the Walkem government after the previous Superintendent had been forced to resign. It was to be expected that the new Smithe government would want to see McKenzie's departure and appoint a superintendent of their own choosing. While his dismissal cannot be classified as an embarrassment to the government or to Robson, McKenzie did prove an irritant in the constant pressing of his claims. After McKenzie won a seat in the 1890 election he brought his revenge against Robson and the government into the Legislative Assembly.

The most important legislation during the 1885 session was an agreement which established the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The railway company stopped the rail line at the first tidewater reached at Port Moody. It was generally recognized that the rail line would eventually have to be extended to a locality further along Burrard Inlet at Coal Harbour where adequate dock facilities could be provided. During 1884, with negotiations between the Smithe government and the Canadian Pacific, an agreement was reached

³⁸Sessional Papers, 1885, Return: Correspondence-- C. C. McKenzie, pp. 343-355 passim.

³⁹Colonist, March 3, 1885, p. 1.

whereby the Canadian Pacific was to build a rail extension to Coal Harbour and English Bay in return for a land grant of almost 6,000 acres including a substantial portion of the townsite at that location.⁴⁰ After some debate the legislature ratified the agreement but the circumstances behind the establishment of the agreement offer considerable room for conjecture, particularly where Robson is concerned.

The gift of 6,000 acres, a considerable portion of which would be valuable town land, for a rail extension which would eventually have to be built anyway, does appear overly extravagant. The inference is that the grant was an incentive to have the railroad build the extension and establish its terminus at Coal Harbour in order that investors there could profit from the sale of their property.⁴¹

⁴⁰Sessional Papers, 1885, Correspondence Relative to the Terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway, pp. 129-136 passim, and the Proposed Agreement Between the Government of B.C. and the Canadian Pacific Railway Co., pp. 185-86.

⁴¹While there may be suspicion that the land grant was given in the form of a bribe, there may have also been other reasons for the government's liberal attitude. Part of the new Smithe government's philosophy was the belief that it was necessary to remove barriers hindering the prosperity of the province. It was for this reason that they moved quickly to solve the difficulties with the Dominion government through the Settlement Bill. If the province was to expect prosperity from the railroad it was necessary that the rail terminus be established at a good deep sea port. The Smithe government may have felt that it was worth the land grant to have the port and prosperity established sooner, rather than later. If this was the case a sizeable land grant was necessary as the Canadian Pacific Railway was at this time in financial difficulty. Throughout the period when negotiations were taking place between the C.P.R. and the provincial

Where vagueness exists as to the nature of the total agreement it is almost impossible to determine Robson's precise role in the matter. Opposition newspapers accused Robson of owning land at Coal Harbour and of being connected with a syndicate interested in land speculation. Robson, in a personal explanation in the Assembly, admitted that he did own land at Coal Harbour but claimed that he had bought the land over a number of years.⁴² It would seem to be certain that such was the case. Robson had continually advocated the Burrard Inlet route for the railway.⁴³ As for any connection between Robson and the Coal Harbour Syndicate, there appears to be no direct evidence to support that contention.

government the C.P.R. was also directing appeals for more money to the Dominion government. Donald Creighton, John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1965), p. 395.

⁴²Colonist, February 21, 1885, p. 3.

⁴³See Letter, John Robson to Alexander Mackenzie, January 16, 1879, General Correspondence Section, pp. 2214-2227, (MG 26, B 1; microfilm reels M-198 and M-199), Alexander Mackenzie Papers, PAC. Also Herald, October 20, 1880, p. 2, and June 15, 1881, p. 2. It may also be possible that Robson bought land at Coal Harbour as early as 1865 when he was involved with the British Columbia Coal Mining Company. At least Robson's belief in the coal deposits in this area would furnish another reason to prompt him to buy land. ". . . it would indeed be difficult to over-estimate the value of such coal deposits under the terminal city." (Herald, June 19, 1881, p. 2.) See also F. W. Howay, "Coal Mining on Burrard Inlet, 1865-1866." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 1, (January, 1940), pp. 1-20.

The newspapers that were most vehement in their charges against Robson were the Port Moody Gazette and The Mainland Guardian. It was to be expected that the former paper would support its home town as the terminus. The Mainland Guardian was actively engaged in a campaign in favour of Port Moody as early as 1881.⁴⁴ While there may have been some truth in the charges these papers made against Robson, it is also possible the charges owed something to the newspapers owners' personal interest in the terminus question.

As Robson did own land at Coal Harbour, it would perhaps be naive to assume that he would not attempt to use influence to secure the construction of the rail extension. This was particularly the case with the atmosphere of speculation and lobbying that was being carried on. On the other hand, it is not known how much Robson used his position and influence, or, lacking a complete knowledge of the Coal Harbour extension, whether his influence was even needed.

The end result appears to be that there is not enough evidence to reach a satisfactory conclusion over the matter of the Coal Harbour extension, particularly where Robson is concerned. While a lack of evidence may indicate that Robson had little to do with the extension, the facts

⁴⁴Guardian, December 18, 1880, p. 2, and June 18, 1881, p. 2.

remain that he owned land at Coal Harbour and he was a member of a government which gave a sizeable grant to the Canadian Pacific Railway to build the Coal Harbour extension. Robson is perhaps unfortunate because given only these facts, the suspicion remains that additional evidence will be found to condemn him.

Whatever the circumstances, the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, its extension to Coal Harbour, and the establishment of Vancouver did bring prosperity and increased immigration to British Columbia. Robson was also able to realize a profit from the lands he held there. In 1885, possibly anticipating that he would share in the prosperity that British Columbians expected with the completion of the railway, Robson constructed a new house just behind the Legislative Buildings.⁴⁵ In March 1885 Robson's ministerial work load was eased by the addition of Simeon Duck to the cabinet as Minister of Finance and Agriculture.⁴⁶

By now both the life style and the appearance of the former editor had changed. Soon after being appointed to the cabinet Robson turned The British Columbian completely over

⁴⁵His two-story house and that of his son-in-law, Joseph Hunter, were constructed next to each other on reverse plans for the total cost for both houses of about \$10,000. (Colonist, January 1, 1886, p. 2.) The two houses are still standing at the corner of Government and Michigan Streets, behind the Provincial Government Printing Offices. Painted in civil service gray they are used as government offices.

⁴⁶Colonist, March 24, 1885, p. 2.

to his brother David. After the close of the 1883 assembly session he left New Westminster to take up residence at Victoria. As for the minister's appearance, he was now a sober minister of the Crown rather than a flamboyant editor. His clothes had become more conservative and the mutton-chops had disappeared, leaving only his slightly graying mustache.⁴⁷

In Victoria Robson continued to support religious organizations, including temperance societies. In addition to welcoming temperance lecturers to town and assisting in organizing temperance meetings, Robson occasionally delivered a temperance speech himself. In the fall of 1884 Robson also assisted in the reorganization of the Young Men's Christian Association in Victoria.⁴⁸ In arguing for the need of such an organization Robson referred to the social corruption that he claimed existed in Victoria, including the contention that one could not go anywhere "without being

⁴⁷Columbian, February 7, 1883, p. 1, and Ebenezer Robson, Diary, Wednesday, June 20, 1883. A good idea of how Robson's appearance altered during 1882 to 1890 can be seen in the three pictures in Howay and Scholefield, British Columbia, Vol. II, facing p. 445.

⁴⁸See Colonist, January 4, 1885, p. 3; May 4, 1884, p. 3; April 5, 1885, p. 3, and September 27, 1885, p. 3. Also Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, November 4, 1884, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC. Robson delivered the welcoming address for Francis E. Willard, temperance lecturer. (Colonist, July 1, 1883, p. 3.) The Y.M.C.A. had earlier been established in Victoria, but had apparently been dissolved. (Colonist, July 23, 1876, p. 3.)

offended by the presence of brazen-faced, lewd women, who parade themselves with more boldness, and in greater numbers in proportion to the population than in any community I know of. . . ." Robson's statements did not meet with the approval of the town councillors. They censured Robson for his attempt to "injure the reputation of the city" and condemned his statements which were, it was claimed, "evidently intended to injure the mayor and councillors and the citizens of Victoria, for political purposes."⁴⁹

This was not the only occasion when statements made by Robson in religious speeches or addresses were to cause some minor feelings against him. As a religious person, Robson likely felt it was his duty to point out the immorality that he believed he saw, but while such remarks on "gamblers", or "lewd women" were to be expected from a clergyman, it must be admitted that they were slightly inappropriate coming from a government minister, particularly if they could be interpreted as criticism of municipal officers.⁵⁰

The 1886 Assembly session lasted from the end of January to the beginning of April, but it was only a preface

⁴⁹Colonist, November 14, 1884, p. 2, and November 13, 1884, p. 3.

⁵⁰Ibid., December 16, 1886, p. 3. Robson caused antagonism when he referred to some of the youth of Victoria as "hoodlums". He also attempted to have school children taught temperance principles. Letters, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, June 5, 1884 and June 9, 1884, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

to the provincial election which was due that year. Robert Beaven seemed to be particularly active during the session with non-confidence motions and requests for returns, in order to find an issue on which the opposition could fight an election. The election held in July resulted in the Smithe Government being returned with substantially the same number of members as previously.

While the government forces as a whole faced an easy electoral victory, this was not particularly the case for Robson. In New Westminister The British Columbian under David's editorship supported the government, but both The Mainland Guardian in New Westminister and the Gazette in Port Moody supported the opposition. In their attacks against the government these two latter papers concerned themselves almost exclusively with a campaign of condemnation against Robson and his actions.⁵¹ Among other charges, they maintained that Robson was pro-Island in his beliefs, pointing to his residence in Victoria and thus raising the cry of sectionalism. Moreover, Robson's constituency, the District of New Westminister, included the settlement at Port Moody as well as the newly established city at Vancouver. While the minister could expect some support from the latter, it was likely that this would be more than offset by opposition in

⁵¹The Mainland Guardian admitted that its opposition to the government was more an opposition to Robson. (Guardian, February 21, 1883, p. 2.)

Port Moody, disappointed in the loss of the terminus.⁵²

The opposition candidates also waged an extensive campaign, particularly charging the government with a policy of "give-aways". They circulated a poster declaring that the government gave away land for the Settlement Bill which resulted in no benefit; gave away land to build the Island railway; gave away the dry dock for money that was spent on the Island; and, perhaps most damaging to Robson, gave away land for the Coal Harbour extension, in order that Robson and his friends could profit.⁵³

During the end of June and beginning of July, Robson travelled throughout his constituency refuting the opposition charges. The minister could point to the fact that the majority of items promised in his 1882 election address were fulfilled. He could also point to the coming prosperity and note that eleven times as much had been spent in the constituency by the government since he took office as had been before.⁵⁴

Travelling through the district, Robson also attended to one of the duties that was carried out by provincial

⁵²Port Moody also opposed Robson for his failure to allow them to be incorporated. See Letters, John Robson to Messrs. Scott, Cowderon, and Burnett, December 4, 1886, and John Robson to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, December 31, 1886, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC.

⁵³Columbian, June 30, 1886, p. 2.

⁵⁴Ibid., July 7, 1886, p. 3.

representatives each year. The settlers were asked to declare by resolution what public works they wished to have done. These resolutions, when submitted to the cabinet for consideration, formed the basis for determining the public works to be done in the various districts. While it was a common procedure during the ordinary years it was unusual for the incumbent candidate during an election campaign, and at what were apparently political meetings, to ask for the people's choice. Robson explained that he was unable to ask the people's decision before, and if left it was possible that the public works might be delayed.⁵⁵ The opposition contended that Robson was, in effect, bribing the electors.

When the election results were known, Robson was at the head of the poll, although the two members to represent New Westminster District with him were both from the opposition.⁵⁶ During the 1887 session it was apparent that the majority of works which were asked by the New Westminster constituents had been granted. Robson was therefore charged in a resolution with "using undue influence in order to procure his election. . . ." In answer he denied the charge and stressed the point that ". . . the very same course was pursued on former occasions, with this difference that he

⁵⁵Ibid., June 26, 1886, p. 2.

⁵⁶Colonist, July 10, 1886, p. 3.

carefully abstained from promising anything until after the election was over." He maintained that he only discussed with the settlers their wants in order that he could later determine where the appropriations would be spent with the greatest common good and that such a procedure could not be classed as bribery. The resolution was defeated, in spite of the fact that the eight opposition members present voted in its favour.⁵⁷

Although Robson's actions during the election were somewhat abnormal he was not guilty of bribery.⁵⁸ It is likely that the incident was indicative of the opposition that the minister felt that he faced in his constituency and his desire to retain his cabinet post.

As Premier Smithe was taken ill, the legislative duties during the 1887 session were shared by Robson and A. E. B. Davie. Almost a week before the close of the session, while he was staying as a guest in the Robson home, Smithe died. Davie was named as the new Premier to replace him.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Ibid., March 11, 1887, p. 4.

⁵⁸Incidents which can be taken as parallel to Robson's action would be if a government during an election suddenly increased its advertisement for various public programs that had previously been started by the government, or the sudden increase of public works contracts being announced by the government. While such actions cannot be classed as bribery they are still looked upon as vaguely unethical.

⁵⁹Colonist, March 29, 1887, p. 3; March 30, 1887, p. 4, and March 31, p. 4.

Some opposition papers charged that Robson had been in reality the leader of the Smithe government.⁶⁰ It is quite likely that Robson influenced Smithe in many government decisions and was one of the strongest members of the cabinet. The Provincial Secretary would not have hesitated to make his opinions known in the Executive Council, but at the same time, the opinions of Smithe and the other members of the cabinet, particularly A. E. B. Davie, have to be taken into account. On occasion, Robson's colleagues could show opposition to him, as they did during the debate over the incorporation of Vancouver.⁶¹ If his opponents were correct in assigning to Robson the position of strongest man in the government it is curious that A. E. B. Davie should have been selected as the new Premier to succeed Smithe.

Throughout Robson's career as government minister he was subjected to the constant criticism of The Mainland Guardian and its editor James Kay Suter. Robson later claimed that Suter's hatred towards him was the result of Robson displacing him when Robson joined the Colonist. By the fall of 1869 Suter started The Mainland Guardian in New Westminster, a paper which expressed the same political views as held by Robson, particularly in opposition to the De Cosmos-Walkem government. After Robson bought The Dominion Pacific Herald,

⁶⁰Guardian, October 17, 1883, p. 2.

⁶¹Colonist, March 20, 1886, p. 1 and p. 3.

Suter's ideas gradually changed. Possibly Suter's promotion of Port Moody as the rail terminus, in opposition to Robson's choice of Coal Harbour, as well as the fact that government patronage was taken away from the Herald, and given to the Guardian, contributed to Suter's altered views. At least by the end of 1881 Suter was supporting Walkem, and in violent opposition to Robson.⁶²

In May 1887 the Victoria Daily Times reported a trial in which the brother of R. F. John, M.L.A. for Victoria District, was involved and noted editorially that Robson visited the court room inferring that the minister spoke to the Crown Prosecutor in an effort to influence the trial for political reasons. When Robson threatened to sue for libel, the Times apologized, but The Mainland Guardian, which repeated the Times' accusations, refused to offer an apology. Robson brought proceedings against Suter and in January 1888 at a libel trial in Victoria Robson obtained a verdict awarding him \$1,000 damages from Suter.⁶³

As the Judge pointed out, Suter's editorial on this occasion was libelous, but in a legal maneuver Suter attempted

⁶²Columbian, July 8, 1882, p. 3, and January 30, 1886, p. 2; Guardian, February 16, 1881, p. 2, and December 24, 1881, p. 2; and Colonist, October 3, 1869, p. 3.

⁶³The Daily Times (Victoria), May 19, 1887, p. 2, and July 5, 1887, p. 2. (Hereafter cited as Times). Columbian, January 26, 1888, p. 2; and Colonist, January 24, 1888, p. 4.

to evade the verdict in favour of Robson. He suddenly discovered that he had an agreement with his niece and that he owed her back wages for eleven years at \$50 a month for housework. As a result everything he owned belonged to her; he had no assets with which to pay Robson for damages. At a new trial the jury decided that Suter's agreement with his niece was valid. This verdict was later overturned by Judge Begbie, who claimed that the jury ignored certain evidence and in June 1888 a new trial was granted. There appears to be no report in the newspapers as to whether or not the new trial was held but The Mainland Guardian ceased publication in August 1889. Perhaps it was significant that the Guardian's final editorial was an attack on "The Robson Government".⁶⁴

With the end of publication of the Guardian Robson lost one of his more vehement newspaper critics, but there were others to take over the position. Robson on one occasion asserted that he was "the best abused man in the country."⁶⁵ There are several reasons why Robson was the

⁶⁴Colonist, May 20, 1888, p. 4; British Columbia, Law Reports, Part II, vol. 1, pp. 375-77. Colonist, June 13, 1888, p. 1; and Guardian, August 21, 1889, p. 2. J. K. Suter was born in Scotland, likely in 1823. After ceasing publication of the Guardian, Suter was editor of the short lived Daily Truth which continued to attack Robson. He died in New Westminster in December 1899. (Times, December 21, 1899, p. 6.)

⁶⁵Colonist, February 21, 1885, p. 3.

best government target for the opposition press. Through his previous political career, he was better known than his government colleagues. Recent arrivals, in particular, believed that Robson was a professional politician whose only source of income, other than his government salary, were his lands at Coal Harbour.⁶⁶ Perhaps the major factor for the excessive newspaper criticism was his own sometimes overbearing and seemingly overconfident personality.

With the death of Smithe and the advent of the Davie ministry it was necessary to reorganize the cabinet. Davie, in addition to being Premier, retained his position as Attorney General. Forbes George Vernon became Commissioner of Lands and Works and Robert Dunsmuir became President of the Council. Robson retained the post of Provincial Secretary but relinquished the post of Finance Minister, which he had reassumed after Simeon Duck's defeat in the 1886 election, to John H. Turner.⁶⁷

In spite of the fact that he was a fairly young man, Davie was plagued by illness, and it may have been partially for this reason that Robson was selected to travel to Ottawa in October 1887 to confer with Dominion authorities,

⁶⁶The voter's list for 1886 lists Robson's profession as "nil". Sessional Papers, 1886, p. 50.

⁶⁷Colonist, August 9, 1887, p. 2.

particularly in respect to British Columbia's Indian population.⁶⁸ In order to improve his health, Premier Davie travelled to south-western United States during the fall of 1887. He seems to have hoped that his health would enable him to attend the 1888 Assembly session, but by the end of year it was apparent that he would be unable to do so. Writing to Robson, Davie delegated him as government leader and recommended to him the assistance of his brother, Theodore Davie, another member of the Legislature. Davie notified the Lieutenant Governor of the temporary change in leadership and sent Robson a petition to be presented to the Assembly requesting permission to be absent from the House for the session. Robson was thus placed in the difficult position of assuming the leadership of another's government, a situation which might have resulted in antagonism between the two men. On the whole this appears not to have been the case, as Robson seems to have kept Davie adequately aware of events. When the 1888 session met at the end of January, Davie wished Robson "good speed in the Legislature".⁶⁹

⁶⁸Sessional Papers, 1888, Papers Relative to the Mission of the Honourable John Robson to Ottawa in October, 1887, pp. 327-330, passim.

⁶⁹Letters, A. E. B. Davie to John Robson, November 23, 1887; December 26, 1887; December 27, 1887, and January 17, 1888, John Robson Collection, PABC. Davie was perturbed when his brother Theodore was taken into the cabinet to fill temporarily the position of Attorney General claiming that in this important matter he was not consulted. (Letter, A. E. B. Davie to John Robson, January 21, 1888, John Robson Collection, PABC.) But Davie did recommend Theodore's

The tone of the session was set at its first meeting when T. B. Humphreys charged Robert Dunsmuir with treason, alleging that he proposed to annex British Columbia to the United States. Humphreys, who had recently won a by-election, seemed desirous of impressing the Legislature with his presence and in the process assumed the position of a one man disruptive force, even offering his sessional allowance if one government member would cross the floor to fight him.⁷⁰

During the session Beaven criticized Robson for not having the authority to lead the government. The leader of the opposition presented a resolution claiming that an order-in-council had not been passed to allow Robson to assume the position of Premier. Robson, on the other hand, contended that the position of Premier was not a statutory one, and that by Davie asking him to be temporary leader and then notifying the Lieutenant Governor of the circumstance, Robson's position was made valid. Beaven's resolution was defeated on a party division.⁷¹

As the session stretched into April, Robson faced another problem with a minor revolt among government ranks.

assistance to Robson and the post of attorney general had to be filled. Moreover Davie's lack of knowledge in this instance may have been attributable to a late delivery of mail. (Letter, A. E. B. Davie to John Robson, January 26, 1888, John Robson Collection, PABC.)

⁷⁰Colonist, January 28, 1888, p. 1, and March 6, 1888, p. 1.

⁷¹Ibid., March 9, 1888, p. 1.

On April 19 he sent a telegram to Davie warning of the difficulty, but on April 23 he was able to report that "the back of the thing is broken." In replying to Robson, Davie noted that he thought something of this nature was contributing to the length of the session. He also declared that he was not too surprised at the plot and expressed his belief that the delinquent government members had abandoned their intention more from fear of an election than from loyalty to the government.⁷² After a lengthy session of fifty-five sittings it was likely with some relief that Robson was able to telegraph Davie on April 28 that the House was prorogued. In reply, Davie congratulated Robson on the end of what Davie labelled as "the longest most acrimonious & blackguardly of any [session] in British Columbia."⁷³

It is probable that the Provincial Secretary agreed with Davie's description. In March Davie had written to Robson explaining that his health was not improving and expressing a desire to obtain the Yale County Court judgeship.⁷⁴

⁷²Letters, A. E. B. Davie to John Robson, April 23, 1888, and April 24, 1888, John Robson Collection, PABC. It is difficult to determine the nature or extent of the revolt. Its importance can be gauged from the fact that Robson deemed it significant enough to wire Davie informing him about the trouble and Davie responded by noting that he would leave immediately for Victoria if Robson felt he was needed.

⁷³Letter, A. E. B. Davie to John Robson, April 28, 1888, John Robson Collection, PABC.

⁷⁴Letter, A. E. B. Davie to John Robson, March 7, 1888, John Robson Collection, PABC.

To enlist support in Davie's request Robson wrote to J. A. Mara, federal member for Yale. Perhaps it was the work and length of the session which also prompted the Provincial Secretary to ask Mara's support in obtaining the position of Senator for himself. Mara's reply was to discourage Robson in taking such action.

Ever since I rec'd your letter I have been thinking whether you ought to leave the Local [House], & the more I think on it the less I like it. You are stronger now than you have ever been. You are virtually the leader of the Govt. as you are the leader of the House & you are in a position to dictate terms to your party. With "judicion" [sic] & tact you can hold as strong a party together in that House and are you wise with the leadership within your grasp to toss it away as you would a football?⁷⁵

If Robson did have serious intentions of leaving provincial politics, nothing came of them. In November 1888, as a representative of the provincial government, Robson again travelled to Ottawa to consider the outstanding problems with the federal government.⁷⁶

The 1889 session saw the return of Davie whose improved health permitted him to remain as Premier. While the opposition continued some of their opposition tactics, the session proved to be more mundane than its predecessor.

⁷⁵Letter, J. A. Mara to John Robson, April 10, 1888, John Robson Collection, PABC.

⁷⁶Sessional Papers, 1889, Papers Relating to the Mission of the Honourable Mr. Robson to Ottawa, in October, 1888, pp. 159-166, passim.

Even the boisterous T. B. Humphreys seemed to have lost his belligerency and the government was able to proceed with its work in an orderly fashion. With the close of the 1889 session it had become apparent that Davie's decision to remain in Victoria during the winter and attend the session had contributed to the deterioration of his health. By the summer of 1889 it was evident that he would likely not recover from his illness. On August 1 he died, thus leaving British Columbia, for the second time in just over two years, without a Premier.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Colonist, August 1, 1889, p. 1.

CHAPTER VII

PREMIER, 1889-1892

John Robson, who had served as acting Premier in 1888, was the obvious person to succeed Davie. On August 1, 1889 the Lieutenant Governor called upon Robson to form the government. The following day the members of the reorganized ministry were announced. John Robson assumed the position of Premier and Provincial Secretary. Forbes George Vernon and J. H. Turner retained their posts of Commissioner of Lands and Works and Minister of Finance and Agriculture. Theodore Davie was appointed Attorney General and Charles E. Pooley was appointed President of the Council.¹

British Columbia had changed immeasurably since the new Premier, then gold seeker, first arrived. In the years since 1885 when the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed, uniting the province with the rest of Canada, the changes were particularly evident. Vancouver had quickly grown and was beginning to challenge Victoria as the most important city in the province. In addition, new areas, such as the Kootenays, were being developed. The changes were demonstrated

¹Colonist, August 4, 1889, p. 1.

in the doubling of the province's population between 1881 and 1891.² John Robson, whose political career had started almost a quarter of a century before, was one of the first Premiers to have to contend with the problems brought about by these changes.

The new Premier was aware that an election would have to be called during the summer of 1890. With this in mind, Robson spent part of the fall of 1889 in pre-election campaigning. In November he travelled to the interior of the province where in a speech at Kamloops he referred to some of the policies to be followed by his government. He pointed out that problems over the ownership of minerals in the Dominion railway belt were under negotiation and he expected to be able to announce that the provincial government was to administer all minerals with the exception of coal. The Premier noted his approval of the Kootenay and Columbia railway which was to connect Nelson with the Columbia river and Arrow Lakes, with the C.P.R. line at Revelstoke. According to Robson, ". . . it has almost come to be a race between us and our American neighbours for the trade of that great and promising district," the Kootenays,

²M. C. Urquhart and K. A. H. Buckley, eds., Historical Statistics of Canada (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1965), Table Series A2-14, "Population of Canada, by Province, census dates 1851 to 1861", p. 14. British Columbia's population in 1881 was 49,459; in 1891 it was 98,173.

and he felt it important that the trade be diverted to Canadian outlets. In the course of his remarks Robson also referred to the success of the provincial government in obtaining from the Dominion additional County Court Justices. Finally, in noting the need for redistribution of representation in the Legislature, the Premier recognized its importance, but he preferred to treat the subject "gingerly" and he would not elaborate on what his future plans towards redistribution might be.³

The policy of Robson's government was further indicated when the 1890 session of the Legislature opened. Recognizing the increased population in the province, the throne speech stressed a scheme of surveys to aid intending settlers, a proposal to give aid to the construction of railways and a redistribution bill.⁴ Commenting on this the Premier pointed out that his government's policies were similar to previous administrations although there were some differences. The first was "the intention of the Government to make extensive explorations and surveys with a view to utilizing the volume of immigration that was being attracted to the province. . . ." The government also intended to re-adjust the provincial constituencies and increase the representation in the House. A final point upon which Robson

³Colonist, November 19, 1889, p. 1.

⁴Ibid., January 24, 1890, p. 4.

asserted his government differed from previous administrations was his intention of "inaugurating a live railway era."

Up to the present railway development had gone little beyond the granting of franchises and locking up of land for the assistance of the different enterprises. It would [be] the policy of the government to legislate so as to induce active construction.⁵

The Premier's outline of his government's intentions answered opposition charges that the government possessed no set policies.

Another criticism that the government faced was over its education policy. The opposition claimed that the Premier was turning the education department into a political machine. The matter was brought into the House when it was proposed that correspondence dealing with various educational matters be printed. Robson's answer was to move instead for an investigation.⁶ The majority of the criticism against the government centered around the person of John N. Muir, who was forced to resign as principal of the Victoria High School in 1887, apparently because of actions which earned the mistrust of the school trustees. Muir continued teaching at other schools, but criticized the education department by writing letters to opposition newspapers. The climax came

⁵Ibid., February 1, 1890, p. 1.

⁶Times, January 17, 1890, p. 2, and Colonist, February 12, 1890, p. 1.

in 1889 when Muir deliberately failed to follow the correct procedure in sending his monthly report to the department of education. When warned by the Superintendent of Education that he must maintain proper procedure Muir replied that it was the department's fault.⁷

Muir's answer was taken as evidence that he was not willing to comply with the regulations of the department and his teaching certificate was revoked. In response to this, Muir published several "dodgers" which attacked the education department and specifically John Robson. He also visited a public school in Vancouver taught by Miss Rutherford under the impression that she was a niece of Robson, and reported that she was also not following the proper rules.⁸ Taken up by the opposition, Muir's case formed the basis for their charge that the education department was being run as a political machine, dismissing a teacher who was opposed to the government.

The investigating committee offered two reports. A minority report signed only by the opposition member.

⁷Journals, 1890, Report of Select Committee on Education, p. cviii. Sessional Papers, 1890, Return: Cancellation of Teacher's Certificates, 1889, p. 320. Superintendent of Education S. D. Pope listed the letters Muir wrote to the Victoria Times. (Journals, 1890, Report of Select Committee on Education, pp. cxiv-cxvii.)

⁸Ibid., Correspondence Respecting School Matters, p. x and p. xiv; and Report of Select Committee on Education, pp. cxiii-cxiv.

Charles A. Semlin, recommended that the cancellation of Muir's certificate was "ill-advised," and claimed that the education department was guilty in the granting of temporary teaching certificates. The majority report exonerated the education department from the charges laid against it suggesting only that Muir's certificate should have been cancelled at an earlier date.⁹

Another criticism raised by the opposition was over the claims of Samuel Greer. When the C.P.R. obtained the land grant at Burrard Inlet, the agreement provided that the rights of settlers in this area were to be respected. The company gradually compensated most of the settlers but refused the claims of others, including Samuel Greer. In considering Greer's claim a Legislative Committee in 1888 recommended that it be accepted and asked that the government take steps towards that end. The government failed to take any action and at the 1890 session another committee was formed to look into the matter. The Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, F. G. Vernon, informed the committee that the government considered Greer's claim false but refused to give the reason for the government's decision. In their

⁹Ibid., Report of Select Committee on Education, Minority Report, p. xcvi; and Majority Report, p. xcvi.

report the committee recommended that the government reconsider.¹⁰

The matter did cause the government some embarrassment, mainly because of the government's hesitancy to elaborate on why Greer's claim was refused. Vernon later did offer an explanation as to why the claim was invalid, but the whole matter was taken out of the realm of legislative concern by the passage of the Quieting Titles Act which provided that claims, such as Greer's, were to be decided in the provincial supreme court.¹¹

The opposition criticisms did not prevent the government from following the policies set out by Robson. In conformity with his proposal to "inaugurate a live railway era" the British Columbia Railway Act and the Railway Aid Act were passed. The first of these acts established the basis on which future railway companies were to receive their charters from the provincial government. The act's strength lay in the fact that it also provided for the regulations by

¹⁰Journals, 1888, Report of Select Committee, pp. cxiii-cxvii; and Journals, 1890, Report of the Select Committee: Claim of Samuel Greer, p. xix. See also Journals, 1888, Minority Report, p. cxxv.

¹¹Colonist, March 28, 1890, p. 3; and Statutes, 1890, ch. 38. The whole episode surrounding Greer's claim leaves considerable room for speculation. Robson apparently acted as a mediator between the C.P.R. and Greer. See Letter, William C. Van Horne to John Robson, February 12, 1891, John Robson Collection, PABC; Letters, John Robson to H. Abbott, February 19, 1892; John Robson to Samuel Greer, April 2, 1892 and April 5, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.

which railway companies were to be organized.¹² The second act provided an indication of the aid to be given to railways. To four railways¹³ the government granted 20,000 acres of land for each mile of railway constructed, and the authority to collect a 5% royalty tax on all gold and silver extracted from ores found on the granted lands for a total of 25 years. Both the land grant and the tax were to be turned over to the railway companies on completion of their respective railways.¹⁴

Robson's efforts marked the first concerted attempt to create some order and to facilitate railway construction. The Premier acknowledged that a 20,000 acres per mile grant was large, but pointed out that the land was worthless without the communication that the railways would provide. He believed that the method of granting the land in alternate blocks would ensure that any increase in the value of the railway land would also result in a proportionate increase in the value of crown land.

The 5% royalty to be granted to the railways was a new departure from previous attempts at aid. As Robson

¹²Statutes, 1890, ch. 39.

¹³The Crow's Nest and Kootenay Lake; Ashcroft and Cariboo; Okanagan and Kootenay; and a branch line of the C.P.R. from Farwell, via Nelson, to the Lower Kootenay River.

¹⁴Statutes, 1890, ch. 40. Acts were also passed to aid the Columbia and Kootenay Railroad (ch. 41) and the Shuswap and Okanagan Rail Company (ch. 42).

pointed out, the tax did not apply to those alluvial mines operated by the poor miner, but only to quartz mining which was carried on by companies. Moreover, it was expected that the tax would aid in the development of quartz mining. It was well-known that the interior of the province contained gold-bearing quartz, which lacked only transportation to make its working profitable. The Premier boasted of having discovered "a happy solution of the problem--that of making the quartz itself contribute directly towards creating the railways by means of which alone it could be successfully worked." In this manner the government would be creating both "a railway era and a quartz era."¹⁵

With the example of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the benefit that it brought to the province, Robson's optimism was to be expected. The belief that railways were the creators of prosperity was a widespread phenomenon during the last half of the nineteenth century. Its presence in British Columbia can be seen from the fact that both the British Columbia Railway Act and the Railway Aid Act passed in the Legislature with very little opposition.

The main reason for Robson's decision to aid the railways was to open up the interior and assist in the

¹⁵Colonist, April 11, 1890, p. 1.

economic development of the province.¹⁶ New railways would also act as colonizing agents. It was to their advantage to see that their rail routes were well populated, as additional population meant additional carrying trade.¹⁷

Unfortunately Robson's railway policy did not see the well meant results for which he had hoped. Few of the prospective railways that were granted charters were ever built, and although the land grants reverted back to the Crown within a certain length of time, a sizeable portion of the province's land was kept off the public market.

Besides the legislation concerned with railways the government also dealt with numerous other matters. In connection with his desire to assist the development of the

¹⁶Although it formed part of Robson's policy to aid railways, he was hesitant in supporting the American capitalist, D. C. Corbin, who wanted to extend his rail lines northward from Washington State into the Kootenays. In 1890 Corbin applied for a federal charter to build the British Columbia Southern, a railway extending along the southern boundary of the province to eventually reach the coast. While Robson hoped to see the establishment of communication with the Kootenays, he was not prone to allow the area's trade to be diverted southward. In a legislative address, as well as in communications by Robson with the federal government, the British Columbia Southern did receive support, but only if such conditions were met as to retain the majority of the Kootenay's trade for Canadians. (Sessional Papers, 1890, Correspondence - Spokane Falls and Northern Railway, pp. 397-399.)

¹⁷In 1870, referring to the land grant to be given to the C.P.R., Robson pointed out that the policy of government should be to get the public lands into the possession of those who will turn them into "an effective Emigration or Colonization Agency." It is in the interest of the railway to bring settlers to their land. (Colonist, September 2, 1870, p. 2; and October 11, 1870, p. 2.)

province as well as to cope with the increased immigration the Premier also inaugurated his policy of surveying new lands.¹⁸ Of further interest to Robson was the passage of legislation for the establishment of a Juvenile Reformatory.¹⁹ The reformatory, which was to have as its objects "the custody and detention, with a view to their education, industrial training, and moral reclamation," of boys under the age of sixteen, coincided with the ideals held by Robson's own social conscience.

The Premier was also interested in an act providing for the creation of a university. The act provided that a convocation composed of the university graduates of Her Majesty's Dominions was to meet under the chairmanship of the Provincial Secretary to organize the institution.²⁰ This was done in August 1890. Robson's official function ended with his opening the meeting, but he used the occasion to address the convocation. Noting that there might be the tendency for mainland or island delegates to advance their community's own claims, Robson warned that if these sentiments

¹⁸In 1889 the Estimates provided for a total of \$7,000 for surveys in the province. (Statutes, 1889, chs. 27 and 34.) In 1890 the Estimates provided \$30,000 for surveys. (Statutes, 1890, ch. 46.) For the work done by surveying crews see Sessional Papers, 1891, Public Works Report, pp. 281-298; Sessional Papers, 1892, Crown Land Surveys for the year ending 31st December, 1891, pp. 347-410; Sessional Papers, 1893, 31st December, 1892, pp. 435-505.

¹⁹Statutes, 1890, ch. 21.

²⁰Ibid., ch. 48.

won, and "if the barque were wrecked on the rock of sectionalism, the enterprise would be thrown back for years."

"Let members of convocation," he urged, "be loyal to the province as well as to themselves. Let them advance their own claims; but let them subordinate them to the determination to have a university."²¹ The 1890 University Act was altered during the 1891 Legislative session, but the university movement collapsed later in that year. The immediate cause was a legal technicality²² but the underlying cause was sectionalism and particularly the rivalry between Victoria and Vancouver. An attempt was made in the 1892 session to save the university,²³ but Robson's warning unfortunately proved prophetic.

The last major legislation considered by the 1890 session was the Amendment to the Constitution Act, or the Redistribution Bill. Robson had given considerable thought to the problem of redistribution. The population growth in the lower Fraser Valley and the increased activity in the

²¹Colonist, August 27, 1890, p. 2.

²²An 1891 amendment to the University Act (Statutes, 1891, ch. 46, section 12.) stipulated that the first meeting of the senate would be called one month after its election. This was done but as the meeting did not have a quorum it was adjourned until after the one month deadline. The legality of this was questioned and it was decided that another meeting could not be held. The result was the collapse of the university movement.

²³See Colonist, February 20, 1892, p. 3; March 26, 1892, p. 6; March 31, 1892, p. 6; April 8, 1892, p. 5 and p. 8.

Kootenays necessitated their increased representation. It was also necessary that any alteration take place before the coming provincial election. Robson's own opinion, partly because he always probably remained partial to the claims of the mainland as well as the fact that he represented the district most affected, favoured additional seats for these areas.²⁴ The rest of the members agreed, but the island members, including those in the cabinet, maintained that the total population of Vancouver Island as compared to the population of the mainland was almost equal. They demanded that the present balance of fourteen mainland seats to thirteen island seats be kept. The problem that faced Robson was to solve this sectional conflict by finding a solution whereby the lower mainland and Kootenays would receive additional members without jeopardizing the balance between island and mainland.

The solution that Robson presented was in the Redistribution Bill. The legislation provided for six new seats to increase the legislature from 27 to 33. Vancouver City received two of the new seats and the Kootenay District an additional one, but in order to preserve the island-mainland balance, Nanaimo City, Alberni and Gulf Islands also each received a new seat. In introducing the bill for its second reading, Robson admitted as nearly as he could

²⁴Ibid., April 19, 1890, p. 5.

without violating cabinet secrecy that there had been considerable difficulty in framing the measure. He also admitted that the bill was a temporary compromise brought about by the force of circumstances. Next year, the Premier explained, after the Dominion census was taken and accurate figures obtained, a proper basis for representation would be provided and the government would pass further legislation resulting in more complete redistribution.²⁵

The bill received legislative approval but met public opposition particularly from the lower mainland. The Mainland Association, an organization with the object of acquiring for the lower mainland its proper representation, sent a delegation to Victoria to meet with the government. In receiving the delegation Robson repeated much of what he had previously stated. The Premier also noted that some claimed that he should have asked for his cabinet colleagues resignation if they refused to agree with the leader of the government over the granting of additional seats on the mainland. Robson conceded that he might have followed this course but a cabinet split would have resulted in the collapse of the government and an appeal to the electorate on the old system of representation wherein the lower mainland was inadequately represented. By achieving a compromise over redistribution such consequences were avoided. Although

²⁵Ibid.

this may have been the case, the Mainland Association delegation would not accept Robson's explanation of redistribution and the matter formed one of the issues in the subsequent election.²⁶

Soon after the close of the session and before the official election call, Robson began his political campaign by travelling to the interior to address the electors at Donald, Golden and Kamloops. Although the Premier later declared his visit successful he found some opposition to his government. Robson's plans did not include a stop at Revelstoke, but upon passing through he was persuaded to attend a miners' protest meeting.²⁷

The miners were upset by a provision in legislation regarding the Dominion railway belt which provided that prospectors were to pay \$105 for each mineral claim at the time of recording. In addressing the miners the Premier pointed out that the \$105 recording fee was part of an

²⁶Ibid., April 24, 1890, p. 1; April 25, 1890, p. 5, and April 26, 1890, p. 5. See Colonist, February 19, 1890, p. 1, for the Association's platform.

²⁷Ibid., May 15, 1890, p. 6. It is claimed that Robson was kidnapped and forced to attend a protest meeting. See article in Kamloops Sentinel, May 13, 1932. There may be some truth in this version. While it is overly dramatic, such circumstances are possible. Newspaper accounts of this time only note that Robson was met by "a large delegation of miners and citizens . . . at the depot on Sunday evening and persuaded him to remain on until Monday and hold a public meeting. . . ." (The Daily News-Advertiser [Vancouver], May 20, 1890, p. 1.)

arrangement between the province and the Dominion over the ownership of minerals in the railway belt, with the province administering the minerals and the Dominion receiving the fee, in lieu of its claims. When the legislation was in the Assembly no opposition was raised to it, and Robson claimed that he had not known of the miners' opposition. He admitted that it was not beneficial legislation and he would therefore repeal the recording fee provision and, if necessary, re-negotiate terms with the Dominion government. On his return to Victoria Robson repealed the recording fee provision with an order-in-council.²⁸ The difficulty was later amended by providing that the fee would be paid only after the mineral claim was proven workable,²⁹ but the necessity of Robson first apologizing and then repealing legislation was not an auspicious beginning for the election campaign.

With the election being called for June 13, Robson officially opened his campaign in front of a Victoria audience. In elaborating on the government's policy the Premier commented on two issues upon which he appears to have based all his election speeches. The first was redistribution, which he admitted "was not a measure he was particularly in love with himself", although it was the best solution that could

²⁸Times, May 22, 1890, p. 8, and Colonist, May 27, 1890, p. 4.

²⁹The Daily World (Vancouver), May 21, 1890, p. 1. (Hereafter cited as World.)

be found. The second measure was the Railway Aid Bill. Reviewing his previous arguments Robson supported the Act as the key to the development of the province.³⁰

From Victoria, Robson moved his campaign to the lower mainland, where it appeared that his government would face its major challenge. Led by the Mainland Association the feeling against the government's policy resulted in the nomination of independent candidates in opposition to the government. Curiously, the stand in the election that the Mainland Association eventually took on redistribution coincided with that held by Robson. The organization expressed the hope that the electors would support the candidate who pledged himself to gain proper redistribution after the census was taken.³¹ Still, opposition to Robson as the originator of the present redistribution bill remained.

The Mainland Association also proclaimed its opposition to "land and other monopolies". This was reflected in the address of Francis Carter-Cotton, one of the leading Independents and candidate in Vancouver city, and demonstrated that there were other points besides redistribution upon which the Independents expressed differences with the

³⁰Colonist, May 16, 1890, p. 1.

³¹The Daily News-Advertiser (Vancouver), May 23, 1890, p. 8. (Hereafter cited as News-Advertiser.)

government. In what amounted to criticism of Robson's railway aid scheme, Cotton opposed the necessity of miners paying royalties. He also expressed the belief that there must be protection for the public treasury in the matter of grants to private corporations or individuals. In addition, Cotton suggested that the land laws should be amended to assist settlement and prevent speculation.³²

Robson's first lower mainland address unfortunately proved to be a precedent for many of his other speeches. Speaking to a Vancouver audience, the Premier outlined his long residence in the province. First referring to the progress of education, Robson then moved on to defend redistribution and the Railway Aid Bill. As he was talking he was interrupted by the protest that his time to speak was exhausted. The cry was taken up by the audience and attempts by the chairman to maintain order and by Robson to resume his speech met with failure. Finally, with an unfinished address and amid confusion, the Premier was forced to leave the stage.³³

By nomination day, it was evident that the government's chances of victory on the lower mainland were rather slight. As an insurance move Robson requested that his name

³²Ibid., May 30, 1890, p. 1.

³³World, May 21, 1890, p. 1. In New Westminster the next night Robson fared little better. (News-Advertiser, May 22, 1890, p. 6.)

also be placed in nomination in the safe government constituency of Cariboo.³⁴ With his election thus apparently assured the Premier spent the remainder of the campaign in the New Westminster District. He continued to stress his defense of railway aid and of redistribution, although admitting its shortcomings. Robson's election card asserted that he would allow the past eight years to speak for him and pledged himself to bring forth a new redistribution bill after the census, if it was merited.³⁵

As the election returns came in Robson could congratulate himself with the fact that the government remained in power and that he was reaffirmed in his position as Premier. Personally, Robson was elected both in Cariboo and at the head of the poll in New Westminster District. The Premier was thus forced to choose between the two seats, eventually deciding to represent the Cariboo district.³⁶ On the other hand, the reduction of the government's majority in the House marked a defeat for Robson and his policies. Not only were the old opposition members returned, but the

³⁴Colonist, June 1, 1890, p. 1.

³⁵World, May 31, 1890, p. 2.

³⁶Columbian, June 17, 1890, p. 2, and Colonist, October 10, 1890, p. 4. Robson's election in Cariboo was not as assured as he might have hoped and he was elected at the bottom of the poll. (Letters, Joseph Mason to John Robson, June 20, 1890; E. A. Martin to John Robson, June 14, 1890, John Robson Collection, PABC.)

government would also have to contend with a new loose grouping of Independents, generally linked in their advocacy of land reform and prevention of speculation and vaguely in opposition to the government, particularly over redistribution and grants to railways and corporations.³⁷

In examining the election results the Vancouver News-Advertiser, owned by the Independent Francis Carter-Cotton, suggested that the Premier should alter his policies.³⁸ Robson tended to agree. His railway aid policy had not received the sanction he expected. The electors had been more responsive to the proposals of land reform and the prevention of excessive grants to corporations. The government did not take long after the election to recognize the failure of Robson's proposed railway plan. On July 31 the government Gazette announced that "the alienation of any and all Crown lands by private sale will be discontinued from and after this date until further notice, pending contemplated legislation."³⁹

³⁷The lower mainland, with the exception of Robson, returned a full slate of Independent candidates. In Nanaimo and district in an election complicated by labour difficulties, two Independent candidates were returned together with an opposition member. (Colonist, June 14, 1890, p. 1.) In the interior, the West Kootenay district returned an Independent member, while in the East Kootenay district the government member narrowly defeated the Independent candidate. (Kootenay Star [Revelstoke], June 21, 1890, p. 2.)

³⁸News-Advertiser, June 17, 1890, p. 4.

³⁹British Columbia, Gazette, vol. XXX, No. 31, July 31, 1890, p. 667.

Robson's reasoning was that of a pragmatic politician. He recognized the defeat of his own policy and the merits, at least in the electorate's mind, of the Independents' proposals. Robson also felt that the adoption of the Independent's ideas would likely win support for the government side since many of them were not totally adverse to the government. Moreover, the Independents' proposals of land reform and the prevention of speculation were not inconsistent with Robson's own beliefs. He could rationalize his altered policy by remembering the fact that the purpose behind both railway aid and the prevention of speculation was to assist in the development and settlement of British Columbia.

When the 1891 legislative session opened in mid-January, the opposition hoped that the Independents would join them in opposing the government. During the throne speech debate, in a maneuver designed to attract the Independents, the opposition moved a want of confidence motion over the 5% royalty tax on ores on railway land. Robson reminded the House that the motion would not remove the 5% tax, and if successful the only outcome would be the defeat of the government. With Robson's promise to consider the tax later and their belief that it was best to allow the government to carry out its program without factious opposition, the Independents voted with the government against the censure motion.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Colonist, January 22, 1891, p. 2.

In this they demonstrated their policy for the remainder of the session. With the question of redistribution postponed until after the census and the government responsive to most of their ideas, the Independents gave the government general, if sometimes inconsistent, support.

The opposition's criticism of the government was largely ineffective. Throughout the session they made an effort to draw attention to the government's altered policy, declaring that it was stolen from them. The government's answer was to point out that the opposition had said nothing last session, and, if they possessed such a policy, it had just been discovered. C. C. McKenzie attempted to re-open the charge that the government was running the education department as a political machine, but failed. The opposition's attempts to condemn the government for incidents at the Wellington coal mines and the sending of the militia there were no more successful.⁴¹

The main legislation of the session was to control land speculation. The need for such legislation was evident. While the amount of land deeded in 1889 increased from the previous year, the number of pre-emption records and certificates of improvements, which indicated genuine settlers,

⁴¹Ibid., January 21, 1891, p. 2, and February 10, 1891, p. 2; and Sessional Papers, 1891, Correspondence - Sending Militia to Wellington, pp. 311-312. See also Journals, 1891, Report of Select Committee Wellington Strike, pp. ccxli-cccxxxvi.

decreased.⁴² In order to prevent speculation, a limit was placed on the land that could be bought at one time. The price of crown land was also increased and a limit placed on the amount of timber per acre the land could contain. The bill also provided that the buyer of the land, who was most likely to be the speculator, in contrast to the pre-emptor, must almost immediately pay for his land in full. In addition, he could not buy more land until the previously obtained land was improved.⁴³

In connection with the amendments to the Land Act the government also passed the Land Assessment Act. It provided that all wild or undeveloped lands were subject to a 2% tax on their assessed value.⁴⁴ As the area around wild lands was improved, the assessment tax on the undeveloped lands would increase. Thus, the government intended the speculator would be deterred.

The government's legislation did stop speculation and contributed to the establishment of real settlers.⁴⁵ In assisting settlement the amendments to the Land Act and the assessment act attempted to achieve the same end as

⁴²R. E. Cail, "Disposal of Crown Lands in British Columbia, 1871-1913" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1956), p. 88.

⁴³Statutes, 1891, ch. 15.

⁴⁴Ibid., ch. 45.

⁴⁵Cail, "Disposal of Crown Lands", p. 90.

Robson's policy of extensively surveying the province which he had initiated the previous session. The 1891 estimates provided for additional surveys and a bill was also passed providing for certification of provincial land surveyors.⁴⁶

In accordance with the Premier's promise at the start of the session the government also amended the Railway Aid Act. The 5% royalty to be paid to railway companies for ores found on their land was removed. While this demonstrated that Robson was willing to step down from his policies of railway subsidies, he may have hoped that he would still be able to assist railways. This was indicated during the debate on the land assessment act when Robson unsuccessfully attempted to have the railways exempted from taxation.⁴⁷

The 1891 session saw other legislation in which the Premier was involved. Employing the recommendations of a commission appointed by Robson previous to the session, the Mineral Act consolidated previous legislation and facilitated the methods by which the prospector and miner could operate.⁴⁸ Continuing a policy started in 1888, Robson also proposed amendments to the Public Schools Act. The 1888 legislation provided that one-third of the teachers' salaries in cities

⁴⁶Statutes, 1891, ch. 17.

⁴⁷Ibid., 1891, ch. 34; and Colonist, February 18, 1891, p. 2.

⁴⁸Ibid., March 14, 1891, p. 2. See Act Statutes, 1891, ch. 25.

were to be paid by the respective cities. At that time Robson noted that the expense of the schools was becoming too heavy a burden for the provincial treasury.⁴⁹ With the cost of education still rising the government at the 1891 session decided to require the cities to pay one-half of the teachers' salaries. In return, the city school trustees assumed various powers which previously rested with the provincial government.⁵⁰

Robson's religious ideals were demonstrated during the session when he presented a personal bill providing for "the better observance of the Lord's Day, commonly called Sunday." The bill specified that all businesses were to stop working on Sunday, that no one should carry fire arms, and that Sunday excursions by steamboats or trains, having as their sole purpose the amusement of Sunday passengers, were unlawful. Although the bill did pass second reading it was defeated in Committee of the Whole.⁵¹ In his attempt to promote religious ideals as well as temperance, Robson could find gratification in the "Liquor License Regulation Act." The act provided that liquor was not to be sold on Sunday and that a person could be classified as a "drunkard"

⁴⁹Statutes, 1888, ch. 32; and Colonist, April 17, 1888, p. 4.

⁵⁰Statutes, 1891, ch. 40.

⁵¹Colonist, March 4, 1891, p. 2; and Journals, 1891, p. 132.

by the Courts, with penalties provided for anyone giving liquor to such an individual.⁵²

The end of the 1891 session brought Robson the sad news that his son Frederick William had died in California where he had gone for his health.⁵³ Robson was affected by the news but he was perhaps partially consoled by the fact that, with the birth of two grandsons and a granddaughter to his daughter Fannie, he was now a grandfather.⁵⁴ Indeed, with his mustache and hair that was now more gray than not, he presented a grandfatherly figure. The Premier still appeared healthy, although there were hints that his health was declining. The Colonist suggested that one reason he retained the Cariboo seat was that his health would not permit him to handle the numerous duties related to the New Westminster District. In spite of this Robson still took part in various social activities. He became president of the Y.M.C.A. He was also an Elder in the Presbyterian Church, and contributed towards the construction of a new St. Andrew's Church in Victoria and other churches elsewhere.⁵⁵

⁵²Statutes, 1891, ch. 21.

⁵³Colonist, May 9, 1890, p. 4; August 22, 1890, p. 5, and December 9, 1884, p. 3.

⁵⁴Ibid., August 14, 1879, p. 3; September 1, 1881, p. 3, and December 9, 1884, p. 3.

⁵⁵Ibid., October 10, 1890, p. 4; September 10, 1891, p. 5, and January 14, 1890, p. 1. Also see Letters, Rev. P. McF. Macleod to John Robson, November 23, 1887; December 27, 1887; January 13, 1891; April 13, 1891, and September 17,

While his main interests were in the provincial political field, Robson also remained aware of federal political events. In 1879 he announced his intention "to stand true" to the Mackenzie party,⁵⁶ but circumstances were changed since then. Mackenzie was no longer leader of the Liberals and it was perhaps inevitable with the Smithe government's policy of general conciliation with the federal Conservative government that Robson would gravitate towards that party as well. In 1891, while he took no direct part in the federal election campaign, Robson was not willing to endorse the Liberal's plan of unrestricted reciprocity. Possibly influenced by the campaign cry of the Conservatives equating reciprocity with annexation, Robson leaned towards the Conservative viewpoint in the matter. Speaking at the opening of the Westminster Southern Railway joining New Westminster to Washington State he pointed out that he believed in a moderate reciprocity treaty on some goods, as opposed to a commercial union. Replying to the suggestion that the railway union presaged a national union, the Premier explained that he was not in favour of any type of

1891; and John Robson to Rev. Thomas H. Rogers, April 5, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC; and Rev. Thomas H. Rogers to John Robson, April 14, 1892, John Robson Collection, PABC. Robson seems to have spent a considerable amount towards the construction of the Victoria Church. (Memorandum, undated, unsigned, John Robson Collection, PABC.)

⁵⁶Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, April 17, 1879, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

political union. As he later noted: "I see much to admire in the United States, but nothing to covet. You have achieved nothing in the way of national success that we cannot achieve."⁵⁷

In the summer of 1891 Robson travelled to Ottawa to discuss a variety of matters including the difficulties which had arisen between British Columbia and American sealing ships in the Bering Sea, the definition of the Alaska boundary, the need for federal enforcement of the law to prevent illicit whiskey trade and the still outstanding problems in respect to the railway belt. In addition, Robson wanted to explain and seek support for his proposed plan of establishing colonies of fishermen on the west coast.⁵⁸

At the opening of the 1892 legislative session Robson's government explained that their main proposals were to improve existing legislation, particularly in relation to public lands and minerals. While land reform was to be continued, it was also proposed to deal with other new legislation, including municipal reform and the establishment of fishing colonies.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Times, February 16, 1891, p. 3; and Colonist, April 29, 1891, p. 7.

⁵⁸Ibid., June 10, 1891, p. 8, and August 15, 1891, p. 1.

⁵⁹Ibid.; January 29, 1892, p. 6.

The opposition and the Independents, as was expected, again raised the issue of redistribution, claiming that the government was pledged to bring in legislation after the census was taken. Caught between the rivalry between island and mainland, each claiming that the census was incorrect and had underestimated the population in their area, the Premier responded by pointing out that he only promised to bring down a redistribution bill immediately after the 1891 census if it was justified. Writing to J. C. McLagan, editor of the Vancouver World, Robson explained that the recent Dominion census had proven disappointing "and does not show such a preponderance on the Mainland as would seem to justify redistribution, and the dissolution of the House." As it was believed that the census had not accurately reported the province's population, the provincial government had protested to the Dominion government and a reply was awaited. The Premier asserted that if the matter were considered "in the light of the census," it could be seen "that it would not be in the public interest to disturb the representation as it exists at present, and that the Government to refuse to do so would be no breach of the promise given at the last election."⁶⁰

The Independents seemed grudgingly willing to agree

⁶⁰Letter, John Robson to J. C. McLagan, January 27, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.

with the government. Even C. B. Sword, member for New Westminster District, who later in the session proposed a motion for redistribution, was forced to admit that no official census returns were as yet known and thus indirectly acknowledge the government's position.⁶¹ The result was that the question of redistribution was again postponed for the remainder of the session, but it was perhaps for this reason that the attitude of the Independents was changed from the 1891 session when they had shown general support towards the government. According to Robson, they were now "uniformly against the Government, even on trifling matters of detail." "During the last Session", Robson observed, "they did make some show at independence, but during the present we have come to regard them as out and out Oppositionalists."⁶²

As referred to in the government's throne speech, the program of land reform continued. The sale of all surveyed lands was prohibited excepting parcels of Crown Land not exceeding 160 acres, which could be pre-empted by settlers. In addition, it was provided that the pre-emptor himself, and not his agent, must occupy the land. The amendment also reorganized the method by which timber leases were

⁶¹Journals, 1892, p. 128, and Colonist, February 3, 1892, p. 6.

⁶²Letter, John Robson to John Laity, February 28, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.

to be obtained by making the government responsible for surveying timber lands which were then leased by auction. Linked to this legislation was the government's bill to reserve to the Crown all unrecorded and unappropriated water resources, thus preventing the alienation or destruction of the province's water supply.⁶³

The legislation which Robson regarded as among the most important of the session were bills providing for the establishment of fishing colonies in British Columbia. Such legislation had been under consideration for some time.⁶⁴ In the fall of 1887 Alexander Begg was appointed "Emigration Commissioner, without salary, . . . for the purpose of organizing a colonization scheme for settling Scotch [sic] Crofters upon the seaboard of this Province".⁶⁵ In England, Begg presented a proposal by the provincial government to the Imperial authorities.

⁶³Statutes, 1892, ch. 25 and ch. 47.

⁶⁴The 1887 throne speech noted that such schemes were attracting attention. (Colonist, January 25, 1887, p. 4.) The annual Dominion Fisheries report of the same year also recommended the establishment of a colony of immigrant fishermen to develop British Columbia's fisheries. (Canada, House of Commons, Sessional Papers, 1887, [No. 16], "Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries, For the Year 1886." Report on a Deep Sea Fishing Expedition Around the Coast of British Columbia, by Thos. Mowat, Inspector of Fisheries, p. 269.

⁶⁵Letter, John Robson to Alexander Begg, September 16, 1887, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC. Begg added the initials C.C. for Crofter Commissioner to his name to distinguish himself from the other Alexander Begg. (Madge Wolfenden, "Alexander Begg versus Alexander Begg." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. I, No. 2, [April 1937], p. 133.

The interest taken in Scottish Crofters was largely the outcome of a British Royal Commission inquiring into the destitution in the western Highlands and Hebrides. It recommended that the condition of the Crofters could be improved, among other things, by emigration. The result was that Begg's proposals met with general approval. His original proposal asked that £150,000 be loaned to the British Columbia government to pay for the Crofter's immigration to that province.⁶⁶ By the time the British government agreed to the loan the British House of Commons signified its intention of establishing a Select Committee on Colonization. The scheme was therefore postponed until the committee reported.⁶⁷

The committee's deliberations on the various colonization schemes and recommendations as to the best methods of promoting and carrying out emigration lasted until the 1891 legislative session. Begg appeared before the committee in 1889 to explain the British Columbian scheme,⁶⁸ and in the

⁶⁶Great Britain, House of Commons, Report from the Select Committee on Colonization; Together with the Proceedings of Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix. July 23, 1889, (London: Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, By the Hansard Publishing Union, Limited, 1889), pp. 164-65. Reprinted in Irish University Series of British Parliamentary Papers. Emigration, Vol. 9. (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1969.)

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 165; and Colonist, October 25, 1891, p. 1. Letter from Begg.

⁶⁸Report from the Select Committee on Colonization... July 23, 1889, pp. 163-183.

fall of 1890 Sir George Baden-Powell, a member of the Committee, travelled through western Canada and secured an interview with Robson.⁶⁹ Baden-Powell was informed by Robson that the provincial government was willing to assist in the settlement of immigrants in return for a £150,000 loan from the British government which the provincial government would repay at 3% interest with the first five years' interest deferred. The committee finally reported in March 1891 and among its recommendations advised, "That the proposals of the Government of British Columbia should be favourably entertained."⁷⁰

In addition to the difficulty of securing arrangements with the Imperial government, British Columbia also faced the problem of how the colonists were to be provided for once they did arrive. The solution appears to have been largely secured by Alexander Begg who hoped to see a joint stock company established which would assist in the marketing of the fish and fish products provided by the colonists, particularly from deep sea fishing.⁷¹ Begg's promotion of such a company attracted interest and in the summer of 1891

⁶⁹Colonist, October 10, 1890, p. 1.

⁷⁰Report from the Select Committee on Colonization... March 17, 1891, p. 16, and Summary of Conclusions, p. xvi.

⁷¹Report from the Select Committee on Colonization... July 23, 1889, pp. 169-70.

Colonel W. J. Engledue and Major William Clark visited British Columbia as representatives of a syndicate formed for such a purpose. In the company of Begg the two representatives visited the proposed colonization sites and conferred with Robson.⁷²

The legislation presented in the 1892 session concerned with the establishment of the fishing colonies therefore consisted of two bills. The first was to arrange the agreement with the Imperial government to bring out the colonists. The second was to assist in the establishment of the company which was to provide the colonists with their employment. The agreement with the British government provided that up to 1250 families of fishermen from the United Kingdom were to be brought to British Columbia and settled. The provincial government was to be assisted with a £150,000 loan to be paid in three installments of £50,000 each, as they were needed. The interest on the loan was to be 3% with the first five years interest deferred.⁷³

The second bill was entitled "An Act to encourage the Deep Sea Fisheries of British Columbia." The company, the Vancouver Island Development Syndicate, Limited, provided

⁷²Colonist, September 17, 1891, p. 6, and October 17, 1891, p. 1. See also Letter, John Robson to Colonel Engledue and Major Clark, Commissioners for the Vancouver Is. Development Syndicate, Ltd., October 16, 1891, Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC.

⁷³Statutes, 1892, ch. 28.

for in the act, agreed to co-operate with the government in settling the colonists, supplying them with fishing equipment and providing the facilities for the marketing of the catch. As a guarantee the company was required to deposit one hundred thousand dollars in the credit of the provincial government, to be refunded after a like sum was spent in the construction of permanent facilities. In return the company was to be granted land as required, not in the excess of 500,000 acres, from various sections of the province which were outlined in schedule A of the act. The company was also to be exempted from taxation for ten years.⁷⁴

The legislation was presented in the House by Finance Minister J. H. Turner who outlined the financial arrangements in more detail. By a partial re-investment of the Imperial loan at 4% interest and the eventual repayment by the colonists over 30 years of the money advanced to them, the immigration scheme was to cost the province nothing.

In speaking on the proposed bills Robson stressed the importance of the whole scheme in the development of the province. By these measures, the Premier explained, settlers would be brought to British Columbia who would be immediately settled and gainfully employed in developing the province's deep sea fisheries. The whole project was to cost the government little and yet increase the province's population

⁷⁴Ibid., ch. 15.

and create an entirely new industry. The fishermen would provide a national reserve coast guard and assist in civilizing the Indians. Moreover, as the colonists would be installed in new jobs, they would not offer any competition to the labour already in the province. In answering criticism, the Premier asserted that the scheme had been expanded to provide that the province could select any fisherman in the British Isles, not only Crofters, for colonists. He admitted that the scheme was experimental but the government proposed to proceed cautiously, and if it was not successful the scheme could be terminated. While the opposition criticized the government for lack of information in regard to the proposal and thought the land grant excessive, the two bills inaugurating the colonist scheme secured approval.⁷⁵

The 1892 session saw other legislation passed, including "An Act respecting the Legislative Assembly" in which that body's powers and privileges were defined.⁷⁶ This last piece of legislation was the result of a conflict between the Legislature and the editors of the New Westminster Columbian. In an editorial commenting on the Private Bills Committee the newspaper asserted that they acted in a corrupt manner.

⁷⁵Colonist, March 29, 1892, p. 6 and p. 8, and April 1, 1892, p. 8.

⁷⁶Statutes, 1892, ch. 28.

Regarding the editorial as libel Robson moved that the editors, Robert and James Kennedy, appear before the House, but they failed to do so. A Select Committee was appointed which discovered that the Legislature had no power to punish such libel. The result was the rapid passage of the act to define the Legislature's privileges. Under the authority of a Speaker's warrant the Kennedys were forced to appear before the House where they denied that their article was libelous. The Legislature, on basically a party vote, found the editors guilty of contempt and placed them in the custody of the Sergeant at Arms at the pleasure of the Assembly or until its prorogation or dissolution. As the legislature prorogued the day following, the two editors soon regained their freedom.⁷⁷

The opposition newspapers claimed that the proceedings against the Kennedys were motivated by political reasons. This was partially correct although the article did constitute libel and some opposition members supported the government.⁷⁸ After the Kennedys' refusal to appear, as Robson pointed out, the House was forced to take further

⁷⁷Columbian, March 17, 1892, p. 2; Colonist, April 22, 1892, p. 7, and April 24, 1892, p. 8; and Times, April 22, 1892, p. 7. David Robson had sold out his interests in The British Columbian to the Kennedys in 1888. (Ebenezer Robson, Diary, Monday, April 30, 1888, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.)

⁷⁸Notably John Grant.

action or it would suffer in dignity.⁷⁹ This was unfortunate as Robson and the government may have been forced to go beyond what they originally intended to do. The action of the government in condemning the editors and then proroguing the next day presented a solution in which the government did not back down, the editors were technically punished, but the whole matter was dropped.⁸⁰

Robson was pleased to see the end of the session, not only because it meant the end of the Kennedy affair, but also because the Premier found that his health was deteriorating. In March, after consulting with doctors, Robson wrote to his friend J. A. Mara saying, "I have learned that my health will not permit of my continuing in public life." The doctors recommended complete relaxation. It was partially in an attempt to ease his workload that the new portfolio of Minister of Education and Immigration was to be created in

⁷⁹Times, March 23, 1892, p. 4; March 25, 1892, p. 4; and April 11, 1892, p. 4, and Colonist, March 30, 1892, p. 6.

⁸⁰Commenting on the affair at the time of the first call for the Kennedys to appear Robson noted: "I suppose it will be in order for that erratic community [New Westminster] to rise in its indignation and burn us in effigy, for having dared to call the Kennedy boys to account for their flagrant libel; and they, the Kennedys, of course will be the heroes of the hour. Well, I suppose it is the nature of the animal, anyhow." (Letter, John Robson to Thomas Cunningham, March 29, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.)

late May, 1892.⁸¹

The Premier was just turned 68, he complained of an unsteady hand, sometimes preventing him from writing and he wanted rest.⁸² As the term of Lieutenant Governor Nelson was coming to a close Robson therefore asked Mara, if he himself was not interested in the post, whether he could use his influence on Robson's behalf. Mara's reply expressed surprise at Robson's health but assured him of support and enclosed a copy of a confidential letter he sent to Prime Minister Abbott endorsing Robson for the position.⁸³

Having determined that the Lieutenant Governor's post would offer some security as well as rest, Robson, in writing to Henry Abbott, Western Manager of the C.P.R., also asked him if he could possibly bring any articles favouring his appointment to the attention of his brother, the Prime Minister. In replying to the offer of J. C. McLagan, the Vancouver World editor, to "run [Robson] into Cary Castle",

⁸¹Letter, John Robson to J. A. Mara, March 28, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC; and Colonist, May 29, 1892, p. 4.

⁸²See Letter, A. Campbell Reddie to Captain Newton H. Chittenden, March 9, 1892; Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards, PABC. Also Letter, John Robson to J. A. Mara, April 12, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.

⁸³Letter, John Robson to J. A. Mara, March 28, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC; and Letter, J. A. Mara to John Robson, April 5, 1892, John Robson Collection, PABC.

the executive residence, the Premier replied "Let her rip".⁸⁴ As was to be expected, the government organs, including the Colonist, supported Robson's bid, but curiously enough, so did the independent-opposition News-Advertiser.⁸⁵

While Robson was undertaking a campaign to achieve appointment as Lieutenant Governor, he still hoped to complete several things before he stepped down as Premier, particularly the establishment of the deep sea fisheries colonization scheme. In the fall of 1891 the Premier wrote to Charles Hibbert Tupper, Dominion minister of Marine and Fisheries, asking him to aid Engledue and Clark in their efforts to establish their company. Now Robson wrote to Tupper asking for the old steamer Sir James Douglas to assist

⁸⁴Letters, John Robson to H. Abbott, March 29, 1892; and John Robson to J. C. McLagan, March 29, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC. See also Letter, John Robson to William Van Horne, April 9, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.

⁸⁵Colonist, April 13, 1892, p. 1; and News-Advertiser, April 28, 1892, p. 4. Although an Independent, Francis Carter-Cotton and his newspaper the News-Advertiser were in opposition to the government, and the paper's support of Robson for Lieutenant Governor did not earn for it any kindness from the Premier. Together with David Oppenheimer, the Mayor of Vancouver, the Premier was attempting to gain control over Vancouver's press and thus oppose the News-Advertiser. The plan required a sum of \$20,000 to \$25,000 by which the Vancouver Telegram would be developed into the leading newspaper of that city. (Letters, John Robson to D. Oppenheimer, January 26, 1892; May 6, 1892, and April 11, 1892; and John Robson to William Van Horne, March 29, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.) The deal came to nothing and the Telegram moved to Nanaimo the following year. (Colonist, November 12, 1893, p. 5.)

in settling the colonists and providing communication. Tupper unfortunately took offense at Robson's letter which suggested that the federal government was delinquent in not surveying the fishing grounds and previously turning over the boat. He therefore refused a reply to the Premier's request. The difficulty was smoothed over by Mara who secured an interview with Prime Minister Abbott. After discussion, Mara was then able to report back to Robson that the request would be granted.⁸⁶

It was in connection with details of the colonization scheme, particularly as to which colonists were to be selected, that the British government invited Robson to come to England for discussions. While in London, Robson was also to attend the Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire as delegate from British Columbia.⁸⁷ In addition, he hoped the trip would improve his health.

Leaving with his wife at the end of May, Robson first proceeded to Ontario. In Ottawa he discussed several matters, including probably the colonization scheme and his bid for

⁸⁶Letters, John Robson to J. A. Mara, April 12, 1892; April 4, 1892, and April 13, 1892; John Robson to C. H. Tupper, October 17, 1891, and March 5, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC; and C. H. Tupper to John Robson, March 17, 1892, John Robson Collection, PABC.

⁸⁷Letters, John Robson to C. G. Major, May 19, 1892, and John Robson to David Robson, Secretary, Board of Trade, New Westminster, May 16, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.

the Lieutenant Governor's position.⁸⁸ Then, journeying by way of New York, the Premier and his wife, together with his private secretary, Kathleen Lizars, arrived in London in mid-June.

Among the first things done by the Premier upon his arrival in London was to visit the Treasury Department for an interview with G. J. Goschen, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was postponing the introduction of the British Columbia (Loan) Bill granting the £150,000 loan until Robson's arrival.⁸⁹ On June 20, in the company of Major William Clark, Robson travelled by cab to the Treasury offices. As they were approaching the offices the carriage swerved sharply and the right door of the front-door opening hansom cab closed suddenly. In doing so the door crushed the tip of the Premier's right-hand little finger which happened to be resting near the hinge. The injury was painful but it was thought insignificant and, after having it dressed, Robson and Clark saw Goschen.⁹⁰

The interview was apparently successful and that evening the British Columbia (Loan) Bill received its first reading. There was criticism of the bill, particularly by

⁸⁸Colonist, May 27, 1892, p. 5, and June 4, 1892, p. 1.

⁸⁹Great Britain, The Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Series 55 & 56 Victoria, Vol. V, June 21, 1892, p. 1739.

⁹⁰The Times (London), July 5, 1892, p. 10.

some members who thought that it was not necessary to remove people from the British Isles to become colonists. Other members expressed fears that the loan to British Columbia would not be repaid and complained that the bill was being rushed through the House at the end of the session. In spite of this the bill secured a quick passage with its third reading being approved on June 23.⁹¹

While the Loan Bill was proceeding through the British Parliament, Robson prepared for the Trade Conference which was to open on June 28 and whose major theme appeared to be a discussion of closer trade relations within the Empire. Robson favoured preferential tariffs and he expressed confidence that Canada would be willing to lower her tariff rates.⁹² As the Premier had noted five months previously in the Provincial Legislature, he did not believe in Imperial Federation but he did hope to see a free trade arrangement worked out between Canada and Britain.⁹³

Robson also likely took some time for rest. It was becoming apparent that the injury to his little finger was becoming seriously infected. On Sunday evening, June 26, six days after the accident, a doctor was called in to find

⁹¹Parliamentary Debates, June 20, 1892, p. 1644; June 21, 1892, p. 1739 and p. 1744; and June 23, 1892, p. 1739.

⁹²Colonist, June 5, 1892, p. 4; and Financial News, June 27, 1892, Clipping in Scrapbook, John Robson Collection, PABC.

⁹³Colonist, February 11, 1892, p. 6.

the Premier ill in bed with a temperature of 102°. Upon examination the doctor found that blood poisoning had set in and, after consulting with another doctor, decided to amputate the finger. This was done, but with Robson's generally poor health, the blood poisoning had already affected his entire system and his condition worsened.⁹⁴

In Victoria on June 29 there was disbelief when the telegram was received, "Accident finger aggravated already weak condition causing collapse. No hope. . . ." Later that same day another cable was received, "Passed peacefully away at six oclock what do you advise about disposition of body."⁹⁵

After services in St. Margaret's, the parish church of the British House of Commons, John Robson's body was brought back to Victoria. In Vancouver the train carrying the body was met by numerous persons and in Victoria, his casket was placed in state in the drawing room of his home. On July 28, 1892, after services at St. Andrew's Presbyterian church, the remains of John Robson found their final rest in the family plot in Ross Bay Cemetery.⁹⁶ The journey begun over sixty-eight years ago in Perth, Upper Canada, was ended.

⁹⁴The Times (London), July 5, 1892, p. 10.

⁹⁵Telegrams, Kathleen Lizars to Joseph Hunter, June 29, 1892, 12:01 P.M., and June 29, 1892, 4 P.M., John Robson Collection, PABC.

⁹⁶Colonist, July 6, 1892, p. 6; July 27, 1892, p. 8, and July 29, 1892, p. 3.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

All men are bundles of complexity and most are difficult to describe. John Robson is no exception. Those who met the man usually saw him as a hard-working individual, who was cold, blunt and impersonal, sometimes crude and often seemingly arrogant and self-righteous. These latter circumstances earned for Robson the distrust and hatred of his political opponents, expressed so vehemently in their newspaper editorials, and caused Robson to have few close friends, even among his own political followers. He was respected, but not well liked.

Beneath the veneer of sternness and aloofness there were strong emotions. As a youth Robson was adventuresome, and possibly somewhat romantic, in determining to join the gold rush to the west coast. Throughout his life the overlying coolness of his character would occasionally be broken by emotion and temper which in moments of crisis could burst forth. It was his temper which caused him to sometimes act rashly. Coupled with his confidence in himself and his self-righteousness, his temper would also bring him into personal clashes with other individuals. Robson himself

believed that his temper and other emotions were weak points in his makeup and he tried to control them. Even in his editorials he would postpone comment on a particularly emotional topic until "cool reflection had resumed its sway."¹

Much of the coldness and seriousness of the man was probably related to his religion. The influence of his parents' religion prompted the self-analysis of two of John's brothers and their decisions to enter the ministry.² Such influence also operated on John in his church activities and support of temperance and Sunday closing movements.

As for Robson's own philosophy of life, he came close to expressing it himself in discussing his hopes for his eldest son. Lamenting the boy's lack of "ambition and industry" Robson expressed the desire for his son to become "a scholar, a man and a Christian".³ With his stress on ambition, his desire to succeed and his strong adherence and contributions to religious and social institutions, it would appear that John Robson could be characterized as following the trends of the Protestant ethic.

¹Columbian, January 27, 1864, p. 3. The closure of the first Legislative Council to press and public. Another example is Robson's comments on the selection of McCreight as Premier. (Colonist, November 15, 1871, p. 2.)

²Ebenezer and George Robson.

³Letter, John Robson to Ebenezer Robson, October 28, 1872, Ebenezer Robson Collection, PABC.

Upon his entry into British Columbia, Robson's political ideals were those of an Upper Canadian Reformer. Seeing parallels between the British Columbian and Canadian situations, particularly concerning the autocratic rule of Governor James Douglas, Robson joined those in opposition to him. Most of the ideas stressed in The British Columbian, particularly responsible government and non-sectarianism, were related to Upper Canadian thought. While Robson became more conservative as he grew older and became a member of the government, his reform background always remained with him.

Robson's support of Confederation, while it was based on various reasons, including his desire to achieve responsible government, also owed something to his background in Canada as well as to a belief in the British connection. In Robson's opinion the British possessions in North America were destined to become another Britain, or a "Greater Britain". Related to this he maintained the desirability of British immigration to Canada and particularly to British Columbia. Robson believed immigration would aid the mother country in placing her poor and surplus population in addition to assisting British Columbia in its development within Canada.⁴

⁴For example, see Columbian, February 28, 1863, p. 1; Colonist, January 12, 1870, p. 2, and February 11, 1892, p. 6.

Robson's wish for immigration was only part of his larger ideas for the development and growth of British Columbia, as was evidenced in his editorial writings. In his view, the proper preparations must be made before settlers came into the area. Surveys and explorations should take place to determine exactly what resources British Columbia contained and where the settlers should take up residence. Surveys would also assist in determining the manner in which the province's resources could be developed. To aid the settler, ready communication to the various parts of British Columbia should be provided as well as a lenient land settlement policy. In addition, the human resources of the area should be developed by a competent system of non-sectarian education.⁵

Such general ideas remained with Robson. Throughout his career he stressed various aspects of immigration, surveying and exploration, communication and education, leading towards the goal of British Columbia's growth and development. It is significant that a plank in Robson's first election platform suggested the establishment of a colony of immigrant farmers,⁶ and at his death in London he

⁵This agrees with Reid's interpretation of Robson's editorials for the 1861-1869 period. James Gordon Reid "John Robson and the British Columbian" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1950), pp. 141-149 and pp. 152-153.

⁶Columbian, September 8, 1866, p. 2.

was seeking the establishment of colonies of immigrants. One of the terms of British Columbia's entry into Confederation, providing for a Dominion geological survey of the province owed its origin to Robson. When he became Premier he helped establish a comprehensive system of surveying the province. Robson's policy of establishing a "railway era" in the 1890 session was related to his intention to offer adequate communication to the interior of the province and to assist settlement. His altered policy of land reform after the 1890 election, while influenced by the result of the election, had the same purpose in mind. Robson's conduct of the education department during his term of office was directed towards the establishment of an adequate and comprehensive system of education. The establishment by Robson of the new cabinet portfolio of Minister of Education and Immigration just previous to his death may also be taken as indicative of the importance he attached to those subjects.

Robson's contributions in the history of British Columbia are varied. One of the more important accomplishments during the early part of his career was his influence on public opinion. The attainment of representative institutions, responsible government and Confederation were largely assisted by Robson's editorial campaigns. His position as legislative councillor was also employed in the furtherance of those goals. In the first session of the

first Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, Robson is to be credited with his early support of the McCreight government. Such support facilitated the introduction of responsible government into the province. During the years after 1875 when Robson was out of the Assembly his political influence was lessened, but as a political observer and correspondent of Alexander Mackenzie, he likely contributed to the Prime Minister's interpretation of British Columbian events. While he sided with the Liberal Mackenzie administration against the policies of De Cosmos and Walkem, believing those policies detrimental to the province, Robson and his colleagues were later willing to work with the Conservative Macdonald administration in an attempt to create conditions conducive to the province's development. As cabinet minister, Robson's education and immigration schemes, although it is difficult to determine the influence of the latter, deserve mention. Even the opposition credited Robson with the day to day workings of his office as well as admitting that he was the ablest individual in the government.⁷ As Premier, Robson's proposed establishment of a "railway era", at least in its projected goals, does not perhaps deserve all the criticism it has received. His policy over redistribution may have averted other undesirable consequences. In spite of prompting from the Independents he

⁷News-Advertiser, April 28, 1892, p. 4.

also deserves credit for the instigation of his land reform policies during his last two sessions as Premier.

During Robson's career he also experienced various disappointments and failures. He was strongly opposed to the removal of the capital from New Westminster and may have always harboured some hope that it would eventually return there. Robson was also disappointed at his failure to become either Premier or a member of the cabinet during the first Legislative Assembly. As Premier, Robson failed to promote his railway policy. In respect to Robson's hopes for the establishment of fishing colonies, in spite of the fact that they may have succeeded, the Premier's death, a change in the British government, and opposition to the project in British Columbia all contributed to its abandonment.⁸

As has been seen, whether as a newspaper editor and correspondent of Alexander Mackenzie or as a colonial

⁸The government of W. E. Gladstone which replaced the administration of Lord Salisbury in July 1892 was not in favour of Crofter immigration and the scheme was forgotten. (R. E. Gosnell, Sixty Years of Progress: British Columbia, "A History of British Columbia", Part II "Being a history mainly political and economic, of the Province since Confederation up to the present time." (Vancouver and Victoria: British Columbia Historical Association, 1913), p. 140. There was some opposition in Robson's cabinet and prejudice among other M.L.A.'s to the project. (Letters, John Robson to W. J. Engledue, January 22, 1892, and April 1, 1892, Letterbooks, John Robson Collection, PABC.) Given the facts that there were an adequate supply of fish and a market for them, and if the company fulfilled its part of the plan, it is likely the scheme could have succeeded.

councillor, member of the Legislative Assembly, cabinet minister and Premier, John Robson was both a commentator and active participant in British Columbian life for more than thirty years. While John Robson's visions did not end with the boundaries of British Columbia, his practical influence did. He was a provincial politician, but not a parochial politician. It was his intention to see the development of British Columbia within Canada, and he worked continuously towards that end. Within this context, perhaps Robson was attempting to describe both himself and his philosophies when he named his newspaper, The British Columbian.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Manuscript Sources:

A) Theses:

Cail, R. E. "Disposal of Crown Lands in British Columbia 1871-1913." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1956.

Johnson, Patricia Mary. "John Foster McCreight, First Premier of British Columbia." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1947.

McDonald, Margaret Lillooet. "New Westminster, 1859-1871." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1947.

Mercer, Eleanor Brown. "Political Groups in British Columbia, 1883-1898." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1937.

Ormsby, Margaret A. "The Relations Between British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada 1871-1885." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1937.

Reid, James Gordon. "John Robson and the British Columbian." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1950.

Ross, Margaret. "Amor De Cosmos, a British Columbian Reformer." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1931.

B) Manuscript Collections:

John Sebastian Helmcken Papers, Public Archives of British Columbia.

Joseph Hunter Collection, Public Archives of British Columbia.

Alexander Mackenzie Papers, Public Archives of Canada.

Provincial Secretary's Papers, Correspondence Outwards,
Public Archives of British Columbia.

Ebenezer Robson Collection, Public Archives of British
Columbia.

John Robson Collection, Public Archives of British Columbia.

William Smithe Collection, Public Archives of British
Columbia.

C) Miscellaneous Manuscript Materials:

Robson, Charles George. "A Short Account of the Lives of
John, Ebenezer and David Robson, three British
Columbia pioneers." Unpublished term essay,
University of British Columbia, 1938. Public
Archives of British Columbia.

Robson, George. "History of the Robson Family." MS, no
date, (1860?). Public Archives of British Columbia.

Robson, John. Diary for 1878, in possession of Mrs. J. D.
Hunter, Victoria, B.C.

White, Edward. Diary. January 1, 1859 - December 31, 1866.
MS. Public Archives of British Columbia.

II. Printed Sources:

A) Government Publications:

British Columbia, Gazette, vol. XXX, No. 31, July 31, 1890.

British Columbia, Legislative Assembly: Journals, 1872-1892.
Victoria, Government Printer.

British Columbia, Legislative Assembly: Papers in Connection
with the Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway
between the Dominion, Imperial and Provincial Govern-
ments. Victoria, Government Printer, 1880.

British Columbia, Legislative Assembly: Papers Relating to
the Appointment and Proceedings of the Royal Com-
mission for Instituting Enquiries into the Acquisition
of Texada Island. Victoria, Government Printer, 1874.

- British Columbia, Legislative Assembly: Sessional Papers, 1872-1892. Victoria, Government Printer.
- British Columbia, Legislative Assembly: Statutes, 1872-1892. Victoria, Government Printer.
- British Columbia, Legislative Council: Debate on the Subject of Confederation. Reprint from the Government Gazette Extraordinary of March, 1870. Victoria, Government Printer.
- Canada, House of Commons: Sessional Papers, 1887. Ottawa, Government Printer.
- Canada, House of Commons: Statutes, 1885. Ottawa, Government Printer.
- Great Britain, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, Third Series 26^o & 27^o Victoria, 1863.
- Great Britain, The Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Series 55 & 56 Victoria, 1892.
- Great Britain, Public Record Office: Colonial Office 60: British Columbia Correspondence, 1858-1871. London. Microfilm, University of Victoria Library.
- Great Britain, House of Commons: Report from the Select Committee on Colonization; Together with the Proceedings of Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix. July 23, 1889; July 31, 1890; March 17, 1891. London: Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by the Hansard Publishing Union Limited. Reprinted in Irish University Series of British Parliamentary Papers. Emigration, Vol. 9. Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1969.

B) Books:

- Angus, H. F., ed. British Columbia and the United States: The North Pacific Slope From Fur Trade to Aviation. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1942.
- Bancroft, Hubert Howe. The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: History of British Columbia, 1792-1887. Vol. XXXII. San Francisco: History Company Publishers, 1887.
- Begg, Alexander. History of British Columbia, From Its Earliest Discovery to the Present Time. Toronto: William Briggs, 1894.

- Creighton, Donald. John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain. Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, L td., 1965.
- Fahey, John. Inland Empire, D. C. Corbin and Spokane. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965.
- Gosnell, R. E. A History of British Columbia. Victoria: Lewis Publishing Company, 1906.
- _____. Sixty Years of Progress: British Columbia. Vancouver and Victoria: British Columbia Historical Association, 1913.
- _____. The Story of Confederation With Postscript on Quebec Situation. n.p., 1918.
- Harkin, W. A., ed. Political Reminiscences of the Right Honourable Sir Charles Tupper. London: Constable & Company, Ltd., 1914.
- Howay, F. W. and Scholefield, E. O. S. British Columbia: From the Earliest Times to the Present. 4 vols. Vancouver: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914.
- Jackman, S. W. Portraits of the Premiers. Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1969.
- Johnson, F. Henry. A History of Public Education in British Columbia. Victoria: Morriss Printing Company Ltd., For University of British Columbia, 1964.
- Kerr, J. B. Biographical Dictionary of Well-Known British Columbians. Vancouver: Kerr & Begg, 1890.
- Lauriston, Victor. Lambton's Hundred Years 1849-1949. Sarnia, Ont.: Haines Frontier Printing Co., n.d.
- Lizars, Kathleen Macfarlane and Lizars, Robina. In the Days of the Canada Company: The Story of the Settlement of the Huron Tract and a view of the Social Life of the Period, 1825-1850. Toronto: William Briggs, 1896.
- Mather, Barry. New Westminster. Vancouver: Keystone Press Limited, 1958.
- Ormsby, Margaret A. British Columbia: A History. Vancouver: MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1958.
- Pethick, Derek. James Douglas: Servant of Two Empires. Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1969.

- Sage, Walter N. Sir James Douglas and British Columbia. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1930.
- Shelton, W. G., ed. British Columbia and Confederation. Victoria: Morriss Printing Company Ltd., for the University of Victoria, 1967.
- Thomson, Dale C. Alexander Mackenzie, Clear Grit. Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1960.
- Tupper, Sir Charles. Recollections of Sixty Years in Canada. London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1914.
- Urquhart, M. C. and Buckley, K. A. H., eds. Historical Statistics of Canada. Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1965.

C) Periodical Articles:

- Dobie, Edith. "Party History in British Columbia, 1903-1933." Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Vol. 27, (April 1936), pp. 153-166.
- _____. "Some Aspects of Party History in British Columbia." Pacific Historical Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1932), pp. 235-251.
- Howay, F. W. "British Columbia's Entry into Confederation." Canadian Historical Association Report, 1927, pp. 67-73.
- _____. "Coal Mining on Burrard Inlet, 1865-66." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 1, (January 1940), pp. 1-20.
- Lamb, W. K. "John Robson versus J. K. Suter." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 3, (July 1940), pp. 203-215.
- _____. "Letter from Charles Major, dated Fort Hope, September 20, 1859." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. V, No. 3, (July 1941), pp. 228-231.
- Norris, Leonard. "Robson and Begbie." Okanagan Historical Society 6th Annual Report, 1936, pp. 99-113.

- Pettit, Sydney G. "Dear Sir Matthew: A Glimpse of Judge Begbie." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, No. 1, (January 1947), pp. 1-14.
- _____. "Judge Begbie in Action: The Establishment of Law and Preservation of Order in British Columbia." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. IX, No. 2, (April 1947), pp. 113-148.
- _____. "His Honour's Honour: Judge Begbie and the Cottonwood Scandal." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, No. 3, (July 1947), pp. 187-210.
- _____. "The Tyrant Judge: Judge Begbie in Court." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, No. 4, (October 1947), pp. 273-294.
- Sage, Walter N. "Early Days of Representative Government in British Columbia." Canadian Historical Review, Vol. 3, No. 2, (June 1922), pp. 143-180.
- _____. "British Columbia and Confederation." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. XV, No. 1 and 2, (January-April 1951), pp. 71-84.
- _____. "Federal Parties and Provincial Political Groups in British Columbia, 1871-1903." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. XII, No. 2, (April 1948), pp. 151-169.
- _____. "From Colony to Province." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. III, 1939, No. 1, (January 1939), pp. 1-14.
- _____. "John Foster McCreight, The First Premier of British Columbia." Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Third Series, Vol. XXXIV, (May 1940), Section II, pp. 173-185.
- Saywell, J. T. "Sir Joseph Trutch: British Columbia's First Lieutenant Governor." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIX, No. 1 & 2, (January-April 1955), pp. 71-92.
- Waites, K. A. "Responsible Government and Confederation: The Popular Movement for Popular Government." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI, No. 2, (April 1942), pp. 97-123.

Wolfenden, Madge. "Alexander Begg versus Alexander Begg." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. I, No. 2, (April 1937), pp. 133-139.

_____. "Early Government Gazettes." British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. VII, No. 3, (July 1943), pp. 171-190.

D) Newspapers:

The British Columbian (New Westminster and Victoria), February 13, 1861-July 25, 1869; January 4, 1882-1892.

The British Columbian Examiner (New Westminster and Yale), November, 1866-December 1868.

The British Columbian Tribune (Yale), April 10, 1866-October 8, 1866.

The Daily Colonist (Victoria), 1860-1892.

The Daily News-Advertiser (Vancouver), June 1, 1886-1892.

The Daily Standard (Victoria), June 20, 1870-August 31, 1888.

The Daily Telegram (Vancouver), July 31, 1890-1892.

The Daily Times (Victoria), June 9, 1884-1892.

The Daily World (Vancouver), September, 1888-1892.

The Dominion Pacific Herald (New Westminster), October, 1880-December, 1881.

The Kootenay Star (Revelstoke), June, 1890-December, 1890.

The Mainland Guardian (New Westminster), January, 1880-August 21, 1889.

The New Westminster Times (Victoria and New Westminster), 1859-1860.

The North Pacific Times and British Columbian Advertiser (New Westminster), November 2, 1864-May 5, 1865.

The Port Moody Gazette (Port Moody), January, 1886-May 14, 1887.

The Times (London), June-July, 1892.

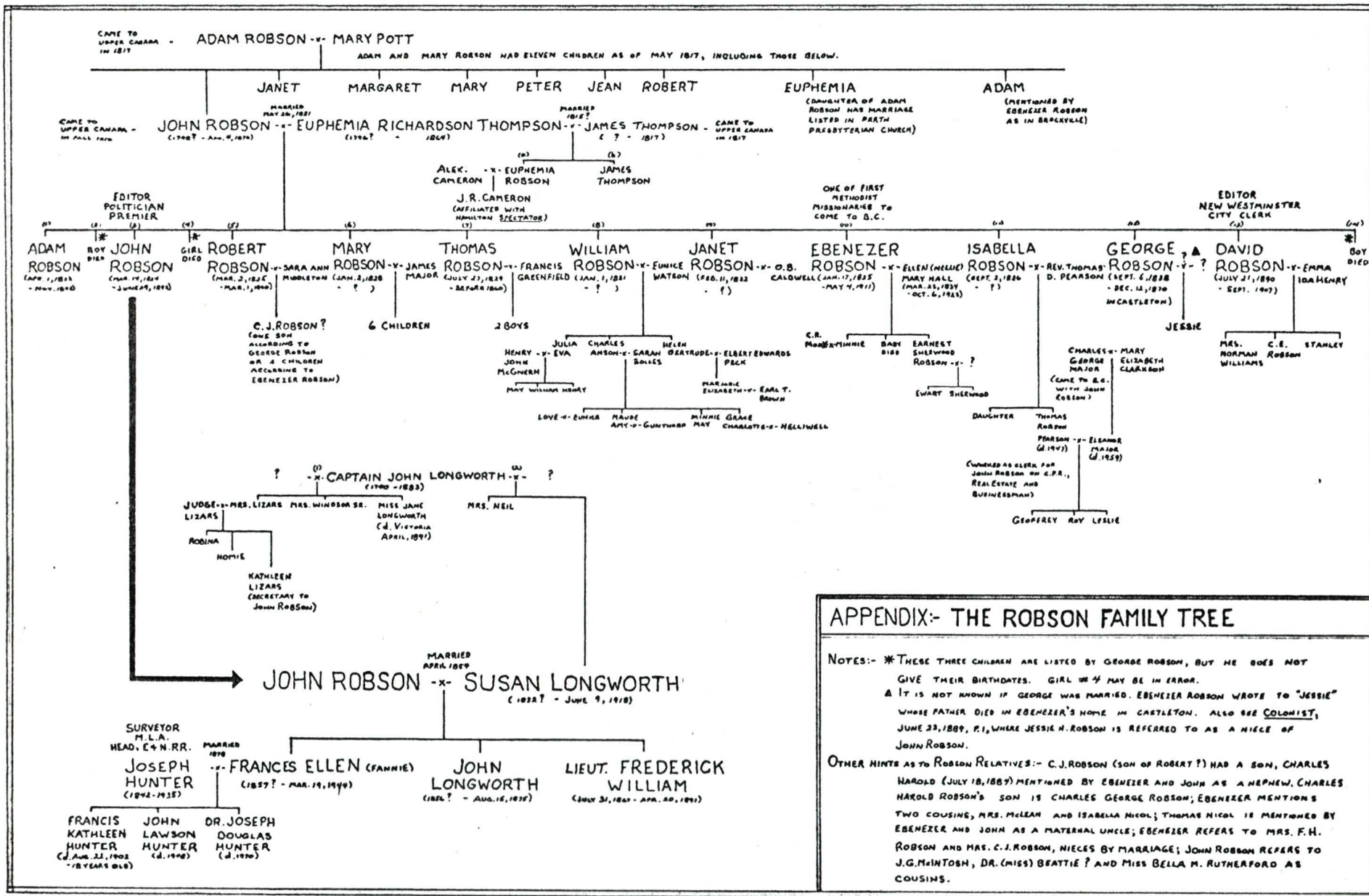
E) Pamphlets:

Desbarats, E. G. Lecture Delivered by The Hon. Malcolm Cameron to the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association. Quebec: n.p., 1865.

Texada Iron Mines. Montreal: Printed by Lovell Printing and Publishing Co., 1875.

III. Personal Interviews:

Hunter, Mrs. J. D. Interview with the writer. July 10, 1971.



APPENDIX:- THE ROBSON FAMILY TREE

NOTES:- * THESE THREE CHILDREN ARE LISTED BY GEORGE ROBSON, BUT HE DOES NOT GIVE THEIR BIRTHDATES. GIRL #4 MAY BE IN ERROR.
 & IT IS NOT KNOWN IF GEORGE WAS MARRIED. EBENEZER ROBSON WROTE TO "JESSIE" WHOSE FATHER DIED IN EBENEZER'S HOME IN CASTLETON. ALSO SEE COLONIST, JUNE 23, 1899, P.1, WHERE JESSIE H. ROBSON IS REFERRED TO AS A NIECE OF JOHN ROBSON.

OTHER HINTS AS TO ROBSON RELATIVES:- C.J. ROBSON (SON OF ROBERT?) HAD A SON, CHARLES HAROLD (JULY 18, 1887) MENTIONED BY EBENEZER AND JOHN AS A NEPHEW. CHARLES HAROLD ROBSON'S SON IS CHARLES GEORGE ROBSON; EBENEZER MENTIONS TWO COUSINS, MRS. MCLEAN AND ISABELLA NICOL; THOMAS NICOL IS MENTIONED BY EBENEZER AND JOHN AS A MATERNAL UNCLE; EBENEZER REFERS TO MRS. F.H. ROBSON AND MRS. C.J. ROBSON, NIECES BY MARRIAGE; JOHN ROBSON REFERS TO J.G. McINTOSH, DR. (MISS) BEATTIE? AND MISS BELLA M. RUTHERFORD AS COUSINS.

505 2nd Street,
Apt. 416,
Nelson, B.C.,
August 16, 1974.

Special Collections,
University of Victoria Library,
P.O.Box 1800,
Victoria, B.C.
V8W 2Y3.

Dear Sirs:

This statement authorizes the National Library of Canada to microfilm the thesis "John Robson: British Columbian".

The National Library of Canada is also given full authorization, in pursuing its normal functions, to lend or distribute any microfilm copies of the above thesis in any manner it sees fit.

Sincerely:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ivan E. Antak".

Ivan E. Antak.

THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA LIBRARY

MANUSCRIPT THESIS

AUTHORITY TO DISTRIBUTE

AUTHOR: This thesis may be lent or microfilm copies made available:

(signature of the author in one of the spaces below)

(a) Without restriction _____

(b) With the restriction that, for a period of five years

(until June 1977) the
DATE

written approval of the following is required:

(1) The Chairman, School of Graduate Studies _____

(2) The Author *Ivan E. Antik.*

(3) both the Chairman, School of Graduate Studies, and the Author _____

BORROWERS: The borrower undertakes, by signing below, to give proper credit for any use made of the thesis, and to obtain the consent of the author if it is proposed to make extensive quotations or to reproduce the thesis in whole or in part.

Signature of Borrower	Address	Date
<i>Anne Yandle</i>	<i>UBC Library</i>	<i>17/7/73</i>