

# WHAT CHANGED IN THE NORTHWEST AND PACIFIC COAST?

If you and your neighbour both wanted to own land nearby, how would you claim the land before your neighbour did? Britain faced the same challenge in the mid-1800s. It wanted to claim the land in the Northwest and on the Pacific Coast (see **Figure 1.1**) before the United States claimed it.

## POPULATION IN THE EARLY TO MID-1800s

During the first half of the 1800s, First Nations in the Northwest and on the Pacific Coast outnumbered the Europeans by more than a hundred to one. The **Métis**, the descendants of French and British traders and their First Nations wives, were also present in these regions. By 1857, Hudson's Bay Company estimated that there were 140 000 First Nations people and 10 000 people of European descent and Métis living in the Northwest and the Pacific Coast region. Look at the painting in **Figure 1.28**. What geographic aspects would make it appealing for Hudson's Bay Company to build a fort in this location?



**Métis** an Aboriginal person descended from a First Nations mother and a father of European descent

**FIGURE 1.28** This painting by Paul Kane from 1849 to 1856 shows Hudson's Bay Company post Fort Edmonton and a First Nations settlement. **Analyze:** What does this painting reveal about how the Northwest was changing?

## SETTLING OF THE RED RIVER AREA

By the mid-1800s, the Red River Settlement in Rupert's Land was made up of people of different cultures. They included Métis, some Scottish immigrants, and retired Hudson's Bay Company workers and their First Nations wives.

Many Métis families sent their children to European settler schools to receive an education. They also made sure that their children learned First Nations culture and skills. In summer, Métis worked on their farms; in autumn, they hunted and trapped; and in winter, they worked as merchants.

**Figure 1.29** shows a group of Métis traders. How would their work as traders influence their relationships with the First Nations and the European settlers in the region?

As the amount of fertile land in the East became scarce, more people moved to Rupert's Land looking for new opportunities. Starting in the late 1850s, settlers from Canada West began to arrive in the Red River area. Primarily of English and Scottish background, they envisioned creating a European and Protestant Rupert's Land. How might this migration affect the Métis and other people already living in Rupert's Land? Métis Louis Goulet spent his life trading and travelling to and from the Red River Settlement. His journals and memoirs have been collected and published as a first-hand account of life in Rupert's Land

in the mid-1800s. Read the excerpt from one of his memoirs in **Figure 1.30**. What changes is Goulet observing in the Red River Settlement?



**FIGURE 1.29** This 1872 photo shows a group of Red River Métis traders. **Analyze:** What do you see in this photo that shows the influence of European culture on the Métis way of life?

**FIGURE 1.30** This excerpt from a 1930 interview with Goulet describes some of the changes that were occurring during his childhood in Rupert's Land in the 1860s. **Analyze:** From what Goulet is describing, what can you infer life was like before this period of change?

“Something was missing in the Red River colony. There wasn't the same feeling of unity and friendship that had always been felt among these people of different races and religions ... Newcomers, especially the ones from [Canada West], were eagerly sowing racial and religious conflict, banding together to fan the flames of discord [disagreement] between different groups in the Red River colony.”

— Louis Goulet, Métis trader

## COLONIZATION OF THE PACIFIC COAST

Vancouver Island, in what is known today as the province of British Columbia, became a British colony in 1849. The first governor appointed to this new colony was named James Douglas. He tried to keep the peace between new European settlers who wanted to use the land and First Nations already living in the area such as the Songhees First Nation and the Esquimalt First Nation. He offered First Nations **Aboriginal title** to a small part of the island. This meant that some land was legally recognized as First Nations territory.

**Aboriginal title** the legal recognition that a particular territory belongs to a specific First Nations group



# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

To understand people of the past, historians take a historical perspective. They try to see the world from the point of view of those people from the past. There is a vast difference between our current worldviews and those of the past. Historians try to avoid imposing today's thinking on the perspectives of people of the past. Instead, a historian considers the historical context in which people lived and uses evidence to make inferences about their thoughts and feelings. This evidence may include multiple perspectives on the same event.

When you attempt to understand the people of the past, you can ask the following questions:

- What were the beliefs, values, perspectives, and motivations of people who lived at that time?
- How do those beliefs and values differ from today's beliefs and values?
- Did the people make understandable decisions based on the information they had available to them?
- What beliefs, values, and ideas do I already have that affect how I think about this event, period, or person?
- What inferences can I make about the person's thoughts, feelings, and motivations from the evidence I have?

## CASE STUDY: THE SMALLPOX EPIDEMIC IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1862

Smallpox was a contagious disease that killed about one-third of infected persons. In March 1862, cases of smallpox were reported in Fort Victoria, on Vancouver Island. The disease had been brought from San Francisco by an infected passenger on a steamship that stopped overnight at the fort. Over the next 18 months, about 32 000 people of the colony's population of 50 000 died. Almost all of the dead were First Nations people: their immune systems were extremely vulnerable to the disease.



**FIGURE 1.31** This lithograph of a drawing by Herman Otto Tiedemann shows Victoria Harbour in 1860. The Songhees First Nation reserve is in the foreground, and the European settlement is on the far side of the harbour. **Analyze:** What does the painting tell you about the community at the time?

Many First Nations communities were devastated; some disappeared entirely. Examine **Figure 1.31**, which shows the locations of the European settlement and the First Nations reserve. How might the locations of these groups influence their views of one another?

James Douglas, the governor of British Columbia at the time, called for swift action to stop the spread of the disease. He recommended setting up a hospital to treat smallpox and providing vaccinations for the public. In Fort Victoria, Songhees Chief Chee-ah-thluc and several other local chiefs and their families were immunized to encourage their people to do the same. Elsewhere, missionaries went to communities to vaccinate people and tend to the sick and dying.

“The most stringent [strict] regulations ought to be enforced, and enforced without a moment's delay. If a case occurs the parties ouaht [ought] to be placed beyond the reach of communicating the infection to others. Imagine for a moment what a fearful calamity [disaster] it would be, were the horde [large group] of Indians on the outskirts of the town to take the disease. Their filthy habits would perpetuate [spread] the evil; keep it alive in the community, sacrificing the lives of all classes. We ... believe there is ... great danger if the small-pox be allowed to spread through the neglect of the authorities.”

— *The Daily British Colonist*

**FIGURE 1.32** This editorial was published in *The Daily British Colonist* on March 26, 1862. **Analyze:** What can you infer about the perspective of the person who wrote the editorial?

Following the first reported cases in Fort Victoria, panic gripped the public. Read **Figure 1.32**, an excerpt from a newspaper editorial. What does the editorial tell you about the perspective of some people in British Columbia about the cause of the spread of smallpox?

Many First Nations peoples in Fort Victoria, such as the Haida and Tsimshian, had travelled from other parts of the colony and built camps near the fort to trade. Under pressure to act, politicians forced the non-local First Nations peoples away from the fort. **Figure 1.33** is an excerpt from an interview with a descendant of First Nations survivors of the epidemic. What does the interview tell you about the epidemic?

“These white people, they bring blankets, from people who die of smallpox.... Then he wrap them up and he sell them to these Indians, then the Indian, he didn't know, he just sleep on it, them blankets. Pretty soon he got them sickness, and pretty soon the whole camp got it.”

— *Henry Solomon, grandson of a survivor of the epidemic*

**FIGURE 1.33** Solomon was recounting the experience of his grandmother and great-aunt, who survived the smallpox epidemic in 1862, in a 1992 book called *Nemiah: The Unconquered Country* by Terry Glavin. **Analyze:** What does this quote tell you about the perspective of Henry Solomon's grandmother on the epidemic?

## TRY IT

1. Compare **Figure 1.32** and **Figure 1.33**. What beliefs and values of the time are revealed in each?
2. If a similar epidemic were to occur today, how might the government and the public respond? In what ways might their responses be different from or similar to those in the past? Why?



## THE IMPACT OF THE FRASER RIVER GOLD RUSH ON FIRST NATIONS

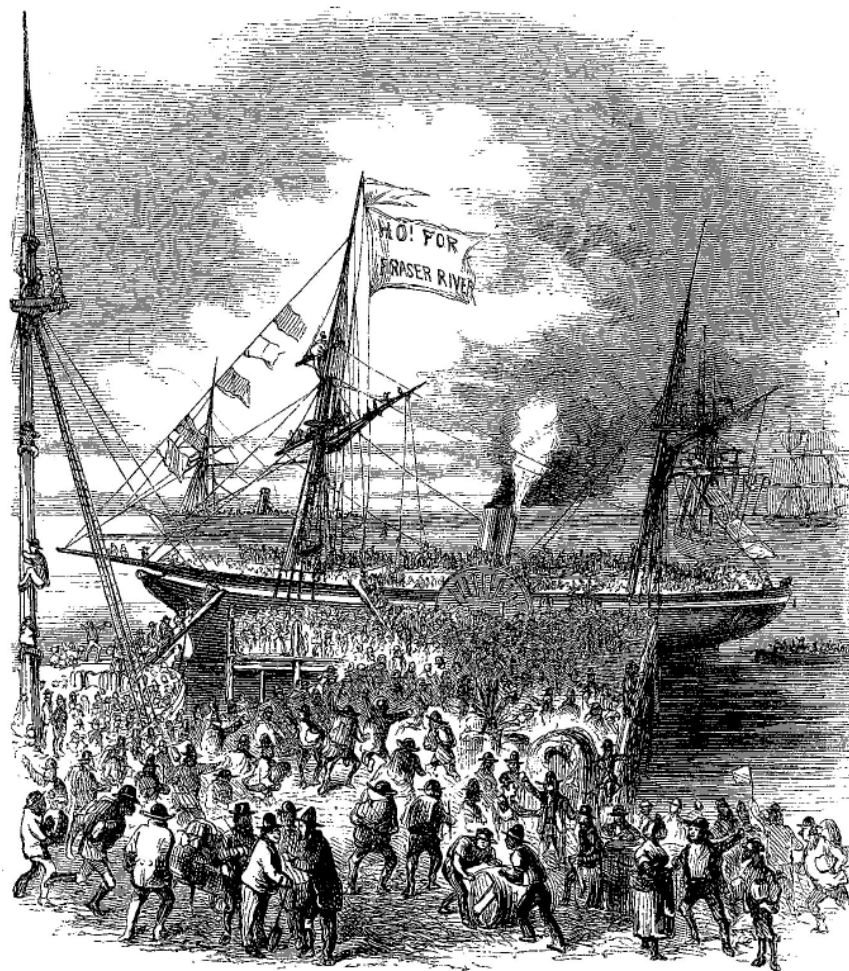
Prior to 1858, the Pacific Coast region was made up of Vancouver Island and New Caledonia (see **Figure 1.1**). In 1858, gold was discovered in New Caledonia. Governor James Douglas quickly declared New Caledonia a British colony to keep it out of American hands, and the territory was renamed British Columbia. Within months, the non-Aboriginal population grew from a few hundred to at least 30 000 as people came from eastern British North America, the United States, Europe, China, and elsewhere to prospect for gold. Examine the illustration in **Figure 1.34**. It shows the arrival of the first gold prospectors in Victoria, Vancouver Island. How does this illustration help you to understand the population boom of the gold rush? How would such a change in population and a new mining industry affect the Pacific Coast region and First Nations living in the area?

The thousands of miners intruding on First Nations territories disrupted their lives and polluted First Nations fishing waters. This resulted in several violent conflicts between the First Nations and the miners, including the Fraser Canyon War in 1858. Douglas instructed government agents to make deals with the First Nations to settle territorial disputes. His plan was to create reserves to protect First Nations land. Read the quote in **Figure 1.35**. It is a description by I.W. Powell, the superintendent of Indian affairs, of Douglas's policy on creating First Nations reserves. How could the vague terms of Douglas's policy be used to the government's advantage in future territorial disputes?

"I have also forwarded to you the statement kindly given me by Sir James Douglas ... showing that no basis of acreage had ever been established in respect to determining the quantity of land to be reserved for each Tribe, but on the other hand 'to leave the extent [size] and selection [choice] of lands entirely optional with [up to] the Indians.'"

— I.W. Powell, the superintendent of Indian affairs

After Douglas's term as governor was over, the new governor ceased the treaty process altogether and offered the First Nations no compensation for the takeover of their territories.



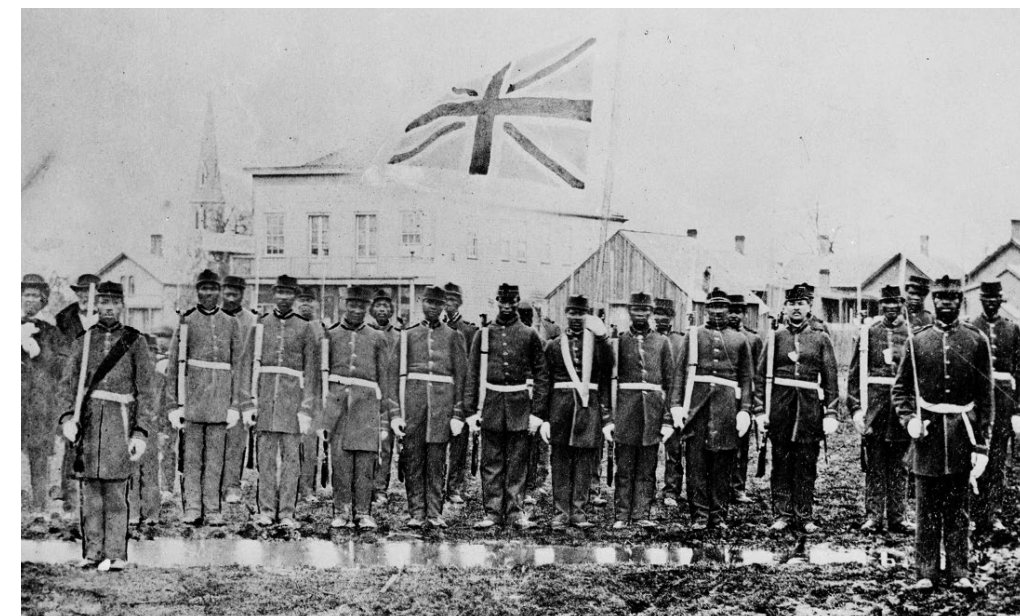
**FIGURE 1.34** This illustration by an artist named Stephens is entitled *Ho! For Fraser River*. It appeared in the American magazine *Harper's Monthly* in 1860. It shows the first gold rush ship arriving in Victoria. **Analyze:** What kind of mood is the illustrator trying to portray about the start of the gold rush?

**FIGURE 1.35** This passage is from an 1875 annual report by I.W. Powell, the superintendent of Indian affairs in British Columbia. **Analyze:** How did Powell interpret Douglas's policy?

## A COLONY OF MANY CULTURES

The Vancouver Island colony soon became home to a very diverse group of people. The thousands of gold prospectors and immigrants brought by the gold rush included diverse groups coming mainly from the United States. There were British and French immigrants, and significant numbers of people of different ethnicities and faiths, including Black people, people of the Jewish faith, and people from China. Some were well-received in the community. For example, Jewish merchants such as David Oppenheimer not only succeeded in business, but also became local politicians. Black merchants Mifflin Gibbs and Peter Lester established a store that rivalled Hudson's Bay Company as a supplier of goods. Governor Douglas also made an effort to bring Black Americans fleeing slavery to the colony and used government funds to do so. Look at **Figure 1.36**, which shows a company of Black American volunteer soldiers. What does their willingness to volunteer for military service suggest about their feelings for their new home?

In contrast, Chinese people were not welcomed into the community. By the 1860s, the gold rush was over and coal mining and lumber became the leading industries. Even these industries struggled to survive when the United States ended the Reciprocity Treaty in 1865 and began heavily taxing goods from British Columbia. To create less expensive products, business owners looked for cheaper labour. The thousands of Chinese people who became unemployed after the gold mines closed provided that labour. Many white people felt that the Chinese people were taking jobs away from them.



What were the long-term effects of the gold rush on the Pacific Coast region?

**FIGURE 1.36** This photo from 1860 shows a military company of Black American volunteers in Victoria, in the colony of Vancouver Island. **Analyze:** What can you learn from this photo about Governor Douglas's attitude toward Black American immigration to British North America?

## CHECK-IN

- INTERPRET AND ANALYZE** Compare the way of life of the Métis with the way of life of the people from Canada West who settled in the Red River area. What does this comparison tell you about the cultural identity of the Métis?
- HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** What impact did the gold rush have on First Nations who inhabited the Pacific Coast region?
- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** Why do you think some people in British Columbia were more accepting of some cultural groups than others?