

*Geographies of sexual commerce in Victoria, British Columbia, 1862-1912**

Patrick A. Dunae
Department of History
Vancouver Island University

I.

In 1861, a resident of Victoria, on Vancouver Island, addressed a letter to the editor of a local newspaper on a topic that vexed some of his colonial compatriots: Prostitution. “I think you will allow that in a town containing a large predominance of men, and men who, by their mode of life...are precluded from marriage, it is almost, if not totally impossible, to prevent prostitution.”¹ It was a prescient comment. The colonial capital of Vancouver Island (and afterwards the capital of the united colony of British Columbia), was an entrepôt for the Cariboo goldfields and an important seaport. The miners and sailors who sojourned in Victoria accounted for its masculine character, a character that was conducive to sexual commerce. During the early colonial period, the sex trade involved aboriginal women and non-aboriginal men. Censorious clergymen and civic reformers depicted aboriginal prostitutes as “wretched women;” the white men who consorted with them were “dissipated” and “degraded.”² However, most commentators who were offended by the sex trade assumed that it was a temporary blight, something that would attenuate once Victoria shed its frontier image and developed into a more mature community. It was also assumed that prostitution would wither when native people embraced Christianity, when the number of white women increased, and when those women and erstwhile transient white men married, had children, and established homes and families. When those conditions were met, the moral tone of Victoria would

*The original title of this paper, when it was proposed for the CHA conference, was “Locating sites of sexual commerce: geography of the sex trade in a Victorian city.”

¹ *British Colonist* (23 December 1861), p. 3.

² Mathew Macfie, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia. Their History, Resources and Prospects* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1865), pp. 470-471; *British Colonist* (25 December 1861), p. 3.

be raised and vice would be extirpated. But that did not happen. Although the racial complexion of the sex trade changed, the trade itself continued, unabated. In fact, the sex trade burgeoned as Victoria developed into a modern North American city. By the 1880s, the metropolitan centre of British Columbia – Victoria – was one of the largest sexual emporiums in the Pacific Northwest. The sex trade continued to grow over the next decade and by the turn of the twentieth century it was a major component in Victoria's economy. The sex trade was not curtailed until just before the First World War, when a sequence of social, political and economic forces restricted sites of sexual commerce.

This paper considers the demography, geography and economic significance of the sex trade in Victoria during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. The paper is informed by recent scholarship that has been associated with a “spatial turn” in the Humanities and Social Sciences.³ It is part of a larger project involving the construction of an historical geographical information system [GIS] of nineteenth century Victoria. GIS is a computer application that enables researchers to collect, manipulate, analyze and display large amounts of data, often in the form of maps. Historical GIS is a relatively new field of historical enquiry; the methodology of GIS links attribute data – information about people, activities and events – to spatial data, that is, to points on the earth.⁴ With GIS, it is possible to represent sites of sexual commerce with geographical precision. But this paper is not simply an exercise in placing dots on a map.⁵

³ John Pickles, “Social and Cultural Cartographies and the Spatial Turn in Social Theory,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25 1 (1999), 93.

⁴ There is a growing literature on historical GIS. For an introduction to this field of historical enquiry, see recent books and journals edited by historical geographer Anne Kelly Knowles. In particular, see her books *Past Time, Past Place. GIS for History* (Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2002) and *Placing History. How Maps, Digital Data and GIS are Changing History* (Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2008). See also *Emerging Trends in Historical GIS*, thematic issue of *Historical Geography*, vol. 33 (2005) and *Historical GIS. The Spatial Turn in Social Science History*, thematic issue of *Social Science History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2000). Sherry Olsen and Jason Gilliland are leading scholars in the field of historical GIS in Canada.

⁵ I have borrowed the term “placing dots on a map” from David Bell and Gill Valentine who used it to describe the work of an earlier generation of geographers who, in their view, were not sufficiently critical, analytical or imaginative. Bell and Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995). With the advent of powerful GIS programmes and discourse theory, geographers and historians can extend their work and represent social and spatial concepts in ways that are more compelling than putting dots on a map.

I am interested in what Henri Lefebvre described as the “production of space.” “Space,” Lefebvre observed, “is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations, but it is also producing and produced by social relations.”⁶ In this paper, I consider the production of prostitudinal space. Further, the paper considers what Lefebvre called “the illusion of transparent space,” a notion that erroneously regards space simply as an unmediated point on the earth. Lefebvre argued that “the homogenizing tendency of transparent space is always threatened by the persistence of difference. There is always an ‘elsewhere’ that does not merely lie outside the centre but radically striates it.”⁷ That elsewhere, that ‘other,’ existed in spaces occupied by brothels, cribs and cabins. This paper will consider how and why space was demarked by the state for what Foucault calls “illegitimate sexualities.”⁸ As well, this paper considers the contradictions of place in a Victorian city and the juxtaposition of conflicting moral geographies. It alludes to Gillian Rose’s concept of paradoxical space and to the imagined space that Foucault called heterotopia.⁹ This study is a tentative step towards mapping moral geographies and placing them within a broader temporal, societal, spatial, and theoretical framework.

In addition to delineating these spaces, I want to populate them. This paper describes a preliminary effort to identify sex trade workers who inhabited sites of sexual commerce. I have deployed a variety of records to construct a statistical, prosopographical profile of sex trade workers during the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century. I have also incorporated records that allow us to put names and sometimes to put faces to the statistics.

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, OX, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991), p. 23.

⁷ Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds., *Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1994), pp. 45-46.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated from the French by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 116.

⁹ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 154; Michel Foucault, “Other spaces: The principles of heterotopia,” *Lotus International*, vol. 48 (1998): 9-17.

Sex trade workers comprised a sub-rosa community, one that was constantly under surveillance when it was flourishing, but one that has received very little attention from historians. Although Victoria has received close attention from geographers and historians, few studies have considered prostitution or the prevalence of the sex trade in depth.¹⁰ This study, accordingly, seeks to provide a new historical perspective on a city that has historically traded on an image of genteel respectability. Victoria has always been represented as a city of gardens; it's never been depicted as a city of dreadful night.¹¹

II.

Victoria was founded as an outpost for the Hudson's Bay Company in 1843. The community of a few hundred non-native settlers languished until the spring of 1858, when it was inundated with thousands of miners en route to the Fraser River gold fields on the mainland of British Columbia. Incorporated as a city in 1862, Victoria experienced another boom during the Cariboo gold rush in the early 1860s. The miners who sojourned in the city were important to the local economy. They liked to spend their time and money in the city's dance houses, where they could dance high-spirited reels with aboriginal women. Dance houses were not licensed to sell liquor, but booze was available illicitly in all of them. Neighbours sometimes complained about the raucous fiddle music resonating from the wooden halls, and about the "obscene and profane language" of

¹⁰ On the economic history of Victoria, see J. M. S. Careless, "The Business Community in the Early Development of Victoria, British Columbia," in J. Friesen and H. K. Ralston, eds., *Historical Essays on British Columbia* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Charles N. Forward, "The Evolution of Victoria's Functional Character," in Alan F. J. Artibise (ed.), *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina Press, 1981); and Peter A. Baskerville, *Beyond the Island. An Illustrated History of Victoria* (Burlington, Ont.: Windsor Publications, 1986). Baskerville does acknowledge the sex trade in his book and points to some interesting lines of enquiry. Based on an examination of hospital records, he notes that many male patients, who were permanent residents of the city and not transients, sought treatment from sexually transmitted diseases. *Beyond the Island*, p. 41. In popular histories of Victoria – such as Terry Reksten, "*More English than the English:*" *A Very Social History of Victoria*, (Victoria, B.C.: Orca Books, 1986) and Valerie Green, *Above Stairs. Social Life in Upper Class Victoria 1843-1918* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis, 1995) – the sex trade is presented as a novelty and aberration in a city best known for stately homes, gardens, and middle-class respectability.

¹¹ The reference here is to Judith Walkowitz's magisterial work, *City of Dreadful Night. Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992). Walkowitz takes the title of her book from the poem by John Thompson, "The City of Dreadful Night" (1874). In the United States, her book was published under the title, *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

revellers, as dance house patrons stumbled drunkenly into the streets at closing time.¹² But the dance houses, along with theatres, were nevertheless licensed as legitimate places of entertainment by the colonial government and municipal authorities. Proponents argued that if the dance houses were closed, miners would sojourn in Puget Sound ports or San Francisco.¹³

Dance houses were seasonal establishments. They opened during the winter when the miners were in town, and closed in the spring when the men headed across the Strait of Georgia to the goldfields on the mainland. Geographically, dance houses are not well documented, but the largest dance house in Victoria stood at the northern end of Store Street, near the municipal gas works. This was an industrial, sparsely-populated section of Victoria. The unidentified proprietor of this dance house located it there, considerately, so that it would not cause an “annoyance” to the neighbours. But critics, such as Amor de Cosmos, founding editor of the *British Colonist* newspaper and a future premier of British Columbia, were not impressed. “Remote from liquor saloons more liquor will be supplied clandestinely than ever before,” the editor wrote in a story about the new dance house. “We may consequently expect a proportionate amount of evil.”¹⁴

Prostitution was an adjunct or ancillary activity to the dance houses. De Cosmos and some of his readers were offended by the fact that white men cavorted and consorted with native women in these places. “A dance house is only a hell-hole where the females are white,” de Cosmos declared; “but it is many times worse where the females are squaws.” Thus, on “moral grounds” the dance houses were denounced as “dens of infamy,” “sinks of iniquity” and “hot beds of vice and pollution” in the pages of the *British Colonist*.¹⁵

¹² *British Colonist* (22 November 1864), p.2.

¹³ *British Colonist* (23 December 1861), p. 2.

¹⁴ *British Colonist* (28 November 1862), p.3; (1 December 1862), p. 3.

¹⁵ *British Colonist* (23 December 1861), p. 2; (25 December 1861), p.3.

As Adele Perry and Jean Barman have noted, negative attitudes towards aboriginal women may have been rooted in fears about aboriginal sexuality and concerns that the moral fabric of this outpost of empire would be undermined by miscegenation.¹⁶ Barman has also argued that missionaries, clerics and “other self-styled reformers” derived a “moral gratification” by chastising aboriginal women who attended dance houses and depicting them as sexual transgressors.¹⁷ However, there is no denying the fact that most of the women who traded sexual services for money in Victoria during the early colonial era were aboriginal. The documentary evidence is extensive, although interpretations of the evidence are open to debate. Some historians have noted that the exchange of gifts for sexual services was not taboo in aboriginal societies and so, what appeared to be prostitution to colonial newcomers, was not morally reprehensible to indigenous people; other historians have represented the exchange of sex for money as a legitimate form of entrepreneurial activity, one that empowered aboriginal women and enabled them to acquire material goods and advance their status within their traditional communities.¹⁸ Even contemporary observers were not quite sure how to interpret the situation. Some observers thought that aboriginal women who engaged in prostitution in Victoria were slaves, who were coerced into the sex trade by their Lekwammen (Songhees) captors. (The colonial enclave of Victoria was planted on Lekwammen territory.) Other observers suggested that aboriginal women who worked as prostitutes in Victoria came from Kwakiutl communities on the north end of Vancouver Island, Nuuchahnulth

¹⁶Jean Barman, “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900,” *BC Studies*, No. 115/116 (1997-1998), 243-244; Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire. Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 110-123. The topic is also explored by Perry in “Metropolitan Knowledge, Colonial Practice, and Indigenous Womanhood: Missions in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia,” in Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale, eds., *Contact Zones. Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), pp. 109-130.

¹⁷ Barman, “Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria,” in Pickles and Rutherdale, eds., *Contact Zones*, p. 217.

¹⁸ John Lutz, “Gender and Work in Lekwammen Families, 1843-1970,” in Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell (eds.), *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 90-91; Barman, “Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria,” citing Carol Ann Cooper, “To Be Free on Our Lands’: Coast Tsimshian and Nisga’a Societies in Historical Perspective, 1820-1900” (PhD dissertation, University of Waterloo, 1993), 184.

communities on the west side of the Island, and Tsimshian villages on the northern coast of British Columbia.¹⁹

The motives, identities and origins of these women were irrelevant to colonial officials who regarded aboriginal prostitutes as a nuisance. On several occasions, Victoria's chief of police was instructed to disperse congregations of "Indian prostitutes" on Store Street, opposite the Songhees village site on the western side of the harbour.²⁰ Local newspapers frequently commented on the prevalence of aboriginal prostitutes in Victoria and the non-native men who consorted with them. In a leading article, the editor of the *Vancouver Times*, a Victoria newspaper, complained that "Indian prostitutes" and their customers had "polluted the moral as well as the physical atmosphere" of Victoria. "The hovels in the alleys and bye-ways of the town are filled by these wretches and their degraded male companions, whose filth and obscenity annoy the whole neighbourhood."²¹

The description was lurid, but the situation that offended editors of the *British Colonist* and the *Vancouver Times* was transitory. The aboriginal moment in the sex trade did not last long. As Barman and other historians have noted, a complex series of policies and circumstances created a social gulf between aboriginal women and non-aboriginal men in British Columbia, a gulf that grew ever wider as the colonial era came to an end. Native women were deterred from sexual relations with white men by native men, missionaries and government agents.²² The social and sexual space between natives and non-natives in Victoria also increased, as the Songhees Indian village was segregated from the city of

¹⁹ Macfie, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia*, pp. 470-471.

²⁰ Baskerville, *Beyond the Island*, p. 39; James E. Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia 1851-1871* (Victoria, B. C.: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1980), vol. I, p. 198.

²¹ *Vancouver Times* (4 April 1866), p.3.

²² Jay Nelson, "'A Strange Revolution in the Manners of the Country': Aboriginal-Settler Inter-marriage in Nineteenth Century British Columbia," in John McLaren, Robert Menzies, and Dorthoy E. Chunn, eds., *Regulating Lives: Historical Essays on the State, Society, the Individual, and the Law* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002). As Nelson notes, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century "Aboriginal women were increasingly deterred from relationships with white men by policies implemented by a shifting alliance of missionaries, local Aboriginal men, and Indian agents" (p. 46).

Victoria.²³ By 1871 – when British Columbia joined Confederation and Victoria became a provincial capital – the aboriginal complexion of the sex trade was not nearly as pronounced as it had been ten years earlier. In the years that followed, aboriginal participation in the sex trade receded steadily, as aboriginal prostitutes were displaced by non-aboriginal prostitutes from the United States, eastern Canada, and northern Europe. What is more, the sites of sexual commerce in Victoria shifted. By the 1870s, the sex trade was associated with brothels, not dance houses. Known colloquially as bordellos, bagnios and sporting houses, brothels were not banished to the edge of town, near the municipal gas works. Rather, brothels in Victoria – in common with brothels in other cities in western Canada and the western United States – were permitted to operate with relative impunity in a few well-defined points close to the centre of the city.²⁴ One point was Fisgard Street, in Victoria’s Chinese quarter. The other point was Broad Street, in the city’s business district.

Fisgard Street was, and is still today, the centre of Victoria’s Chinatown. The embryo of Victoria’s Chinatown was established in the early 1860s during the Cariboo gold rush. In 1871, it consisted of about two hundred residents.²⁵ The geographical perimeters of the

²³ Grant Keddie, *Songhees Pictorial. A History of the Songhees People as seen by Outsiders, 1790-1912* (Victoria, B.C.: Royal BC Museum, 2003); Renisa Mawani, “Legal geographies of Aboriginal segregation in British Columbia: the making and unmaking of the Songhees reserve, 1850-1911,” in Carolyn Strange and Alison Basher, eds., *Isolation. Places and practices of exclusion* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 173-190.

²⁴ The literature on prostitution in Western Canada is extensive. Useful works include James H. Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995); Judy Bedford, “Prostitution in Calgary, 1905 - 1914,” *Alberta History*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 1-11; Deborah Nilson, “The Social Evil: Prostitution in Vancouver 1900-1920,” in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (eds.), *In Her Own Right* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), pp. 205-228; and Charleen P. Smith, “Boomtown Brothels in the Kootenays, 1895-1905,” in Jonathan Swainger and Constance Backhouse, eds., *People and Place. Historical Influences on Legal Culture* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), pp. 120-152. Useful studies relating to the American West include Joel Best, *Controlling Vice: Regulating Brothel Prostitution in St. Paul, 1865-1883* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1986); Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery. Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-1890* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Jacqueline Baker Barnhart, *The Fair But Frail. Prostitution in San Francisco 1849-1900* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986); Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners. Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1981); and Jan MacKell, *Brothels, Bordellos, & Bad Girls. Prostitution in Colorado, 1860-1930* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

²⁵ The street is named after a Royal Navy vessel, H.M.S. *Fisguard* and in the nineteenth century it was spelled Fisguard. The modern spelling is Fisgard.

community expanded and contracted over the next fifty years, but generally it lay within an area bounded by Government Street on the east, Cormorant Street on the south, Store Street and the harbour on the west, and Herald Street on the north.²⁶ The population of Chinatown increased after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, a project that employed thousands of Chinese labourers. In 1891 the population of Victoria's Chinatown was about 2,000.²⁷ Nearly all of the residents were male. Of the female residents, many were concubines or prostitutes. In 1884, Victoria's superintendent of police, Charles Bloomfield, estimated that there were about one hundred female prostitutes in the city's Chinese quarter.²⁸ The plight of these women, who were recruited from impoverished rural families in China by Chinese procurers, was a concern for social reform groups in Victoria, including the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church and the Women's Christian Temperance Association [WCTU]. In 1887, after a series of sensational reports about the abuse of child concubines, they established the Chinese Girls' Rescue Home on Herald Street as a refuge for Chinese prostitutes.²⁹ The Girls' Rescue Home was later relocated to Cormorant Street. However, because prostitution on Fisgard Street was confined almost exclusively to the Chinese community, it did not receive much attention from authorities. As legal historian John McLaren has noted, "Chinese sexual vice" was not a concern or a priority for the Victoria Police Department.³⁰ Nor, with a few notable exceptions, did local newspapers devote much attention to the topic. Accordingly, considering the dearth of English-language historical

²⁶ David Chuen Yan Lai, "Socio-Economic Structures and Viability of Chinatown," in C. N. Forward, ed., *Residential and Neighbourhood Studies in Victoria* (Victoria, B.C. University of Victoria, 1973), pp. 102-103.

²⁷ Census of Canada, 1881, Victoria City Johnson Street Ward [census district 4-B-3]. Official census records for Victoria are available at the viHistory web site. <http://www.vihistory.ca>

²⁸ Canada. Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration. *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (Ottawa: Printed by Order of the Commission, 1885), Evidence of Police Superintendent Charles T. Bloomfield (12 August 1884), p. 48.

²⁹ David Chueyan Lai, *Chinatowns. Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), pp. 205-206.

³⁰ John McLaren, "Race and the Criminal Justice System in British Columbia, 1892-1920: Constructing Chinese Crimes," in G. Blaine Baker and Jim Phillips, eds., *Essays in the History of Canadian Law, Volume III, In Honour of R. C. B. Risk* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, for The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 1999), p. 422.

evidence on the extent of prostitution within the Chinese community, the sex trade in Victoria's Chinatown must remain peripheral to this study.³¹ Instead, this paper will focus on sites of sexual commerce elsewhere in Victoria, starting with Broad Street.

Broad Street is only four blocks long. It runs parallel to Victoria's principal north-south thoroughfares, Government Street and Douglas Street; and it connects the city's principal east-west thoroughfares, Pandora Avenue, Yates Street, View Street and Fort Street. The Driard Hotel, the most prestigious hotel in the capital city in the Victorian era, anchored one end of the street, while the Pandora Avenue Methodist Church anchored the other end. Victoria City Hall was just around the corner. Tax assessments on properties along Broad Street were among the highest in the city.³² By the end of the century, Broad Street was home to the Victoria Stock Exchange, the YMCA, and the city's two daily newspapers. Yet it was also the nexus of the sex trade.

One of the first references to sexual commerce here occurs in 1861, in a newspaper report about a fire on the roof of a "house of ill-fame on Broad Street." The report was more concerned with the decrepit state of the brothel's chimney, than with any moral turpitude, since the chimney endangered adjacent properties. The reporter noted approvingly that the (unidentified) proprietor of the brothel had commenced a brick chimney in the aftermath of the fire.

The indignant wrath that infused contemporary newspaper accounts about dance houses is notably absent in stories about Broad Street bagnios. Similarly, the vitriolic language sometimes deployed in descriptions of aboriginal prostitutes is rarely seen in reports

³¹ Prostitution in Victoria's Chinatown is discussed in Tamara Adilman, "A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia, 1858-1950," in *Not Just Pin Money*, pp. 57-58; Anthony Chan, *Gold Mountain* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982), pp. 80-85; and Lai, *Chinatowns. Towns within Cities in Canada*, pp 195-196. Prostitution in Victoria's Chinese quarter is also mentioned in the 1902 Royal Commission. Canada. *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1902), pp. 22, 38-41.

³² P. D. Floyd, "The Human Geography of Southeastern Vancouver Island, 1842-1891," M. A. thesis (Geography), University of Victoria, 1969, p. 172. Using city tax records, Floyd determined that the assessed value of properties of Broad Street was the second highest in the city. Only properties fronting Government Street were more valuable in Victoria.

about non-native prostitutes. On the contrary, Euro-American sex trade workers are described euphemistically and indulgently as ‘Cyprians,’ ‘sporting women’ or ‘women of gay character.’ Incidents relating to these women were often characterized by a bemused tone, rather than by expressions of moral outrage. Consider, for example, a newspaper report about an incident involving two angry female prostitutes who stormed into a saloon on Government Street, armed with horsewhips, intent on thrashing a male customer. The incident, which occurred in February 1865, occasioned “considerable amusement” to saloon patrons and readers of the *British Colonist*. The proprietor of the saloon, “not liking the belligerent appearance of his visitors,” declined their invitation to “take a drink” and “ordered the fair ones to leave in post haste.” According to the *Colonist* reporter, the “disappointed females” duly left the saloon, but were “evidently much chagrined at not having an opportunity of indulging in the anticipated manual exercise.”³³

The same tone appears in stories in the decades that followed. Non-native prostitutes and brothel owners are treated indulgently in Victoria’s newspapers, the *Colonist* and the *Daily Times*.³⁴ Newspaper publishers accepted the sex trade as an integral part of city life, although leader writers occasionally complained about the “flagrant” character of the trade. In June 1876, when longtime resident David W. Higgins was proprietor of the *Colonist*, an editorial in the newspaper remarked: “It is not the existence of the vice that we have found fault with: but it is with the spots it has selected for its abode, which shocks the moral sensibilities and offends the eyes and ears of decent people and lures the young to destruction.”³⁵ The editorial did not identify specific “spots,” but it was likely a reference to Broad Street. Even so, local police officials were blasé about the Broad Street bagnios, as long as the inmates were relatively well-behaved and did not abuse

³³ *British Colonist* (10 February 1865), p. 4.

³⁴ The nomenclature of Victoria newspapers can be confusing. The *British Colonist* (1858) became the *Daily British Colonist* (1873) and finally the *Daily Colonist* (1887). Amor de Cosmos founded the paper, but David W. Higgins was proprietor of the paper from 1862 to 1886. The *Victoria Daily Times* was launched in 1884. The two papers merged to become the *Victoria Times-Colonist* in 1980.

³⁵ *Daily British Colonist* (21 June 1876), p.3.

their patrons. Testifying in police court in November 1876, William Bowden, Victoria's inspector of police, lamented the fact that unsuspecting miners were sometimes robbed of their possessions inside the brothels. Bowden told the court that:

surveyors and miners coming down from the Cassiar with their seasons earnings frequently come to me, saying "I was on a bit of a spree last night and got enticed into one of those houses on Broad Street, and this morning, when I woke up, I hadn't got a cent. Now, I haven't anything to keep me all winter."

The court heard that it was not sporting to rob guileless miners ("who, perhaps, had not touched liquor for several months and so became easily intoxicated") in these sporting houses. But there were no objections to the houses, *per se*.³⁶

Ten years later, Broad Street was still the nexus of the sex trade. According to a police report submitted to Victoria City Council in April 1886, at least seven brothels were operating on Broad Street; each of the brothels accommodated three or four prostitutes. The 1886 report locates sites of sexual commerce on adjacent streets.³⁷ On Broughton Street there were three brothels, one of which employed five prostitutes. Brothels were also identified on Johnson Street, Yates Street, View Street, and Trounce Alley. In addition, the report identified the owners of the properties where brothels were operating. Mrs. Margaret Doane, a widow, owned four properties on Broad Street. She had inherited the properties from her late husband, a sea captain. Louis Vigelius, a wealthy barber, owned another of the Broad Street brothels. From 1876 to 1897, Vigelius sat on Victoria City Council as the elected representative for Yates Street Ward, the constituency that included Broad Street.³⁸ Another Broad Street brothel was owned by Simeon Duck, a manufacturer, who was a member of the provincial Legislative Assembly and a cabinet

³⁶ *Daily British Colonist* (7 November 1876), p. 3.

³⁷ City of Victoria Archives. Report of Charles Bloomfield, Chief of Police, to D. W. Higgins, chairman, Victoria Police Committee, 7 April 1886,

³⁸ Vigelius, the proprietor of the St. Nicholas Hair Dressing Salon, was indeed a wealthy barber. In 1885 he commissioned John Teague, one of Victoria's most eminent architects, to design a house for him on Pandora Street, near Cook Street. The house was completed in 1889 at a cost of nearly \$3,000. "New Residences," *Victoria Daily Colonist* (19 April 1889), p. 4.

minister. In 1886, when the police report was compiled, Duck was Minister of Finance in the provincial government.³⁹ The brothel he owned in 1886 was located in a wooden structure of undetermined age, near the corner of Broad Street and Johnson Street. A few years later, in 1892, the structure was replaced with a handsome, three-storey brick building. The Duck Block, as the new building was called, accommodated a succession of brothels over the years.

Joseph W. Carey, a land surveyor and former mayor of Victoria, owned one of the brothels on Broughton Street. A. A. [Andrew Alfred] Aronson, a pawn-broker and curio-dealer, and a leading member of Victoria's Jewish community, owned a brothel on Johnson Street. In his obituary notice, Aaronson was described as "a man of sterling worth and ability, [who] enjoyed the esteem and personal respect of all who knew him."⁴⁰ The same might have been said of the other property owners. They were successful, well-respected citizens who, presumably, were not stigmatized by their association with the sex trade.

The social standing of the property owners may have enhanced the social status of the brothels they owned. Carey's place on Broughton Street was managed by Fay Williams, one of the most respected madams in the business. Stella Carroll's brothel in the Duck Block was regarded as one of the most fashionable sporting houses in the city. Moreover, sites of sexual commerce in this quarter were located close to some of the city's most venerated institutions. These institutions included St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (1890), on the northwest corner of Courtney Street and Douglas Street, and the Union Club of British Columbia (1885), on the southwest corner of Douglas Street and Broughton Street. The two buildings – one the spiritual home of Victoria's enterprising Scottish community, the other, headquarters of the province's patriarchy – stood side by side, in solemn splendour. The social stature and architectural merit of these buildings may have added to the caché of the brothels that were situated close to them. Fay

³⁹ British Columbia. *Annual Report of the Department of the Provincial Secretary, 1973* (Victoria, B.C.: 1974), Appendix A, pp. v54-v57.

⁴⁰ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (8 January 1912), p. 5.

Watson's brothel was located at 14 (now 828) Douglas Street; Jennie Morris's brothel was located at 19 (now 621) Courtney Street; and Alice Seymour's house stood at No. 11 Kane Street (now 715 Broughton Street).⁴¹ These brothels became institutions in their own right. Watson ran her house for over ten years, Morris was in business for twenty years, and Seymour operated a brothel from the same site for nearly twenty-five years.⁴²

The brothels run by Carroll, Seymour, Morris, and Watson catered to the so-called carriage trade; that is, their clientele consisted of middle-class and upper-middle-class men. These parlour houses, as they were sometimes called, provided sexual services to their patrons in comfortable surroundings. They offered food and drink and provided entertainment, in the form of piano music.⁴³ But of course there were also brothels that catered for working-class males. Some of these brothels were located at the north end of Broad Street, near Pandora Avenue. Others were located several blocks away, on the northern edge of Chinatown, in the industrial sector of the city. This part of the city was the site of the Albion Iron Works, the largest foundry north of San Francisco, and half a dozen lumber mills. Wharves for the city's sealing fleet were located in this part of Victoria, along with a number of residential hotels for working men. A streetcar line that connected downtown Victoria with the Royal Navy base at Esquimalt, where thousands of sailors were stationed, ran through this part of town. The demographic and economic character of the area was conducive to the sex trade and several brothels were operating here by the early 1890s. One of the brothels was located at No. 11 (now 539) Herald Street, in a substantial brick building known as the Hart Block. The building stood on the south side of Herald Street, between Store Street and Government Street. In a manner of speaking, it, too, had connections to the carriage trade. The top floor of the building

⁴¹ In 1907, the streets of Victoria were re-numbered, according to the Philadelphia System. Some of the streets were renamed. Kane Street became a continuation of Broughton Street.

⁴² An enduring and endearing urban legend in Victoria holds that these brothels were connected by tunnels to the Union Club, so that club members could frequent the brothels without being seen by passers-by. Reksten, "*More English than the English: A Very Social History of Victoria*," p. 124.

⁴³ See C. L. Hansen-Brett, "Ladies in Scarlet: An Historical Overview of Prostitution in Victoria, British Columbia, 1870-1939," *British Columbia Historical News*, vol. 19 (1986): 21-26. Piano players who entertained in brothels were known in the trade as professors of music.

consisted of a couple of apartments that functioned as brothels. The ground floor of the building was occupied by a carriage builder.

The area around Herald Street underwent a dramatic transformation during the Klondike gold rush (1898-1900) when thousands of men passed through Victoria en route to Dawson City and the goldfields. When the city's inexpensive hotels and rooming houses were filled to capacity, gold-seekers established temporary encampments on vacant lots near Herald Street. The sex trade burgeoned, as scores of prostitutes moved into the area. However, the newcomers did not reside in substantial brick structures like the Hart Block; rather, the prostitutes who came to this corner of Victoria during the Klondike gold rush lived and worked in hastily-built, one-room wooden cabins known as cribs. The north side of Herald Street, and the lower end of Chatham Street, located one block to the north, was soon crowded with cribs. [See the map on page 43.] Years later, Walter Englehardt, a Victoria old-timer, recalled the scene: "You never saw anything like it in your life! All sorts of houses here, all of them full of girls!"⁴⁴

In addition to brothels and cribs, the sex trade was conducted in premises attached to saloons and hotels. The Jubilee Saloon at 49 (now 571) Johnson Street is good example. It was the portal to a courtyard which contained a dozen small brick cabins. The cabins were arrayed in two rows, and were concealed behind a high brick wall. The Jubilee Saloon was erected in 1887, but the cabins were built in 1899, during the Klondike gold rush.⁴⁵ The cabins were not intended as residences, but simply as places for sexual commerce. Presumably, patrons would be directed by the bartender to the cabins behind the saloon. Whether sex trade workers were waiting in the cabins, or whether they mingled with customers inside the saloon, is not known. Similarly, details of exchanges between male customers and female prostitutes in the Grand Pacific Hotel are not recorded. Located on the north-west corner of Johnson Street and Store Street, only steps

⁴⁴ Recollections of Walter Englehardt (b. 1876) recorded by Imbert Orchard in 1962. Excerpts published in Janet Cauthers, ed., *A Victorian Tapestry. Impressions of Life in Victoria, B.C., 1880-1914* (Victoria, BC: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1978), pp. 14-15.

⁴⁵ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (6 June 1899), p.5. The courtyard was called Jubilee Court. The cabins can be seen on fire insurance plans of the period.

away from the Jubilee Saloon, the Grand Pacific Hotel was erected in 1884. The hotel (now 560 Johnson Street) was also retrofitted for the sex trade sometime in the 1890s. In the attic of the hotel, the proprietor constructed eighteen small rooms facing a small foyer. Access to the attic was gained by a stairway which led from the main floors of the hotel. Each attic room was fitted with a door and a window. The windows were covered by a screen, which could be opened or closed from within. Some of the rooms were also equipped with dumb waiters, to bring food and beverages up from the saloon on the ground floor of the hotel.

Given the plethora of brothels, cribs, cabins, and attic rooms – and the *laissez-faire* attitudes of the police and the local press – one might think that prostitution was a legal activity in Victoria. It was not. In Victoria, and everywhere else in Canada, prostitution was illegal. As Constance Backhouse has noted, between 1869 and 1892 legislation relating to the “evils of prostitution” burgeoned; by the end of the century, virtually “every aspect of prostitution except the actual and specific act of commercial exchange for sexual services” was prohibited.⁴⁶ This meant that “keepers of bawdy houses or houses of ill-fame,” “inmates [i.e. residents] of bawdy houses,” and anyone who supported themselves “by the avails of prostitution” could be prosecuted under the Criminal Code.⁴⁷ In many communities, including Victoria, “common prostitutes or street-walkers” and anyone who acted in a “lewd” manner in a public place could also be prosecuted under local by-laws.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See Constance B. Backhouse, “Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law. Reflection of a Discriminatory Society,” *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 18 (November 1985), 387-423. Backhouse summarizes the impact of late nineteenth century legislation on pp. 394-395. See also Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: Women’s Press, published for the Osgoode Society, 1991), chapter 8, “Prostitution.”

⁴⁷ Prostitution was also an offence under the 1907 *Immigration Act*. “No immigrant shall be permitted to land in Canada who has been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude, or who is a prostitute, or who procures, or brings or attempts to bring into Canada prostitutes or women for purposes of prostitution.” *Statutes of Canada*. 6 Edw. VII, Chap. 19, s. 29.

⁴⁸ See John McLaren, “Chasing the Social Evil: the Evolution of Canada’s Prostitution Laws 1867-1917,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 1 (1986), 125-166. In Victoria, prosecutions could be laid under the *Public Morals By-Law* (1888). Under this ordinance, authorities could prosecute persons who used “profane, obscene, blasphemous or grossly insulting language” and persons who committed “any other immorality or indecency in the City of Victoria.” Corporation of the City of Victoria, *Revised, Amended and Consolidated By-Laws* (Victoria, B.C.: T. R. Cusack, 1901), p. 255.

Authorities in Victoria did not tolerate street-walkers. Prostitutes who attempted to conduct business from street corners, side-walks or back-alleys were harassed and prosecuted. But brothels were tolerated, as long they did not cause disturbances and annoyance to their neighbours. In fact, on several occasions brothel owners were acquitted on charges of running a disorderly house on grounds that the establishments were not in fact disorderly. Inevitably, however, disturbances occurred and neighbours complained. The incumbent of St. Andrew's Presbyterian church complained that his parishioners were often shocked by the "sights and sounds" of brothels in the neighbourhood; trustees of the Methodist Church on the corner of Pandora Street and Broad Street complained when a "house of ill fame" opened next to church, "a situation that caused the minister's family and church members a great deal of annoyance." The rector of the Roman Catholic diocese complained to the mayor about brothels on the north side of View Street, close to the new (1892) St. Andrew's Cathedral.⁴⁹

When complaints were received, the brothels were raided by police. In the 1870s, brothel keepers had been fined \$10, but by the 1880s the fines had increased to \$50 for brothel keepers and \$25 for brothel inmates. "Frequenters," a term used to describe men who were found in the brothels when they were raided, were liable to a fine of \$10. The penalties were levied by magistrates after police officers had raided a brothel. When they were raided by police, the brothels were closed, but once the fines had been paid, the brothels would re-open. On some occasions, the whole process – from police raid to court appearance to resumption of business – was completed in a few hours. In September 1892, the *Victoria Daily Times* reported on a police raid on two brothels on View Street, near the Roman Catholic cathedral. "The court sentenced each of the keepers to *an hour's*

⁴⁹ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (18 December 1890), p. 1; United Church of Canada. British Columbia Conference Archives. Vancouver, B. C., "History of the Metropolitan Church, Victoria, B. C., by Mrs. Thomas H. Johns," [typescript, n. d.], pp. 83-85; Vincent J. McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard. A History of the Oblates and the Catholic Community in British Columbia* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2000), p. 225.

imprisonment and a fine of \$50.... The inmates were likewise sentenced to the same term of imprisonment and a fine of \$25.”⁵⁰

Newspaper reports make it clear that the Corporation of the City of Victoria benefited financially from penalties levied on the sex trade. In 1888, a reporter noted that “city coffers were enriched” when May Williams was brought before a police magistrate on a charge of “being the keeper of a bawdy house.” Williams, who ran a brothel on Trounce Alley, off Broad Street, was fined \$50. She paid her fine in cash, and with aplomb, tossing gold coins onto the table of the court clerk. “The clerk’s table then echoed back the clink of two double eagles and a tenner.”⁵¹

How much the city made is unknown. But in some towns in the Pacific Northwest, fines imposed on prostitutes and brothel-keepers constituted an important source of revenue. In Spokane, Washington, “prostitution brought nearly \$20,000 a year to the city’s coffers” in the early 1900s. Doubtless the sex trade was worth at least that much money in Victoria. Moreover, the sex trade was good for the local economy. Figures are not available for Victoria, but business leaders in Spokane estimated that the sex trade was worth “about \$80,000 in revenue a year.”⁵² The economic importance of the sex trade may help to explain why Victoria merchants, who were doing a brisk trade as outfitters during the Klondike gold rush, urged city council and the police authorities to be as lenient as possible in dealing with sex trade workers on Chatham Street. In terms that recalled debates over dance houses in the early 1860s, Victoria merchants argued that Klondike-bound miners would take their business to Vancouver or Seattle if authorities clamped down on the sex trade. Accordingly, the cribs on Chatham Street were allowed

⁵⁰ *Victoria Daily Times* (15 September 1892), p. 5. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (8 December 1888), p. 3.

⁵² Noel Rettman, “Business, Government, and Prostitution in Spokane, Washington, 1889-1910,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 89, no 2 (Spring 1998), 75- 82. See also Paula Petrick, “Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana, 1865-1900,” *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*, vol. 31, no. 2, (1982). Petrick notes that prostitution was “big business” in Helena. In 1890, eight of Helena’s leading madams owned property assessed at over \$100,000 and contributed “nearly \$1,000 to the city’s coffers in personal and property tax. Only a few of Helena’s most successful entrepreneurs and the Pacific Northern Pacific Railroad paid more tax than the demimonde.” 38.

to operate, although crib prostitutes were periodically charged and fined for being “inmates” of a bawdy house.⁵³

In the sex trade, fines were the cost of doing business. Those expenses were usually borne by the brothel-keepers and resident sex-trade workers. But there were other expenses, notably rent. Most brothel-operators had to pay some kind of rent to the persons who owned the building where they operated. People who owned brothels did not boast of the fact, but we can identify them from property tax assessment rolls. Tax assessment rolls for 1891 show many of the same names listed on the police report of 1886. But the rolls indicate some newcomers among the ranks of taxpayers who owned properties connected with the sex trade. In 1891, the ranks included Amor de Cosmos, the journalist and former premier who had railed against dance houses thirty years before. The picture is much the same when we look at the tax rolls for 1901. The people who owned brothels and cribs in Victoria came from a wide but respectable spectrum of society. Property owners included a carriage builder, a saw mill owner, a stable-keeper, a widow, a spinster, and an investment agent. It’s unlikely that they were unaware of the kind of commerce conducted on their properties.⁵⁴

A few brothel keepers owned their own premises. Alice Seymour owned her premises on Kane Street; Therese Bernstein owned the building operating as a brothel at 19 Courtney Street. Initially, Stella Carroll rented two floors in the Duck Block on Broad Street, but in 1907 she purchased her own property on Herald Street, between Government Street and Douglas Street. At a cost of \$5,000, she renovated a building that had previously been the home of one of Victoria’s leading medical doctors. When the renovations were completed, the brothel at 643 Herald Street consisted of a private apartment for Carroll,

⁵³ Cauthers, *A Victorian Tapestry*. 14. Newspaper reports throughout the period indicate an official policy of tolerance. At a public enquiry into the conduct of Victoria police officers, several officers testified that they were under instructions not to prosecute women in the area for prostitution; another officer testified that “prosecutions in the cases of bawdy houses [on Chatham Street] had not been instituted unless disturbances occurred.” *Victoria Daily Colonist* (11 November 1899), p. 2.

⁵⁴ Tax assessment records for 1881, 1891 and 1901 have been transcribed and are available online on the viHistory web site. Tax assessment rolls for other years are held in the City of Victoria Archives.

“dining and lounge areas, 12 small bedrooms and additional bathrooms.”⁵⁵ In addition to the fines that Carroll and her colleagues paid at the Police Magistrate’s Court from time to time, they paid property taxes, and so made further contributions to the city’s coffers.

The day to day commerce of the sex trade is not well documented, but scattered references help to suggest rates of exchange. Newspaper reports from the mid-1870s suggest that sex trade workers charged \$2 to customers.⁵⁶ At the turn of the twentieth century, sex workers in Chatham Street cribs apparently charged \$1 for their services, while prostitutes in Herald Street brothels charged \$3.⁵⁷ Three dollars would amount to a day’s pay for a labourer in 1900.⁵⁸ We have no records of the services provided for \$3, but the service obviously involved some kind of sexual activity. Prostitutes in the up-market bordellos – where food, drink and piano music were provided – may have asked more for their services. Without doubt, they earned more money than the women who toiled in Chatham Street cribs. Several prostitutes who resided in brothels owned by Alice Seymour and Stella Carroll reported earnings of between \$800 and \$1,000 a year on the 1901 census. To put these claims in perspective, women employed in non-professional, non-managerial positions in Canada only earned about \$200 in 1901.⁵⁹ Wages in British Columbia were generally higher than the national average, but not substantially higher. White domestic servants in Victoria earned between \$180 and \$240 a year; white women employed in merchant tailoring establishments earned, on average, \$288 a year, while typists and stenographers earned about \$300 a year.⁶⁰ Professional

⁵⁵ Linda Eversole, *Stella. Unrepentant Madam* (Victoria, B.C.: Touch Wood Editions, 2005), p. 88.

⁵⁶ *Daily British Colonist* (23 June 1876), p. 3.

⁵⁷ Harry Gregson, *A History of Victoria, 1842-1970* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1977), p. 126.

⁵⁸ R. E. Gosnell, *The Year Book of British Columbia and Manual of Provincial Information* (Victoria: Government Printer, 1901), p 421; Dominion of Canada. *The Labour Gazette, The Journal of the Department of Labour*, vol. I (1900-1901), *passim*.

⁵⁹ Peter Baskerville and Eric W. Sager, *Unwilling Idlers. The Urban Unemployed and Their Families in Late Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp 130, 205.

⁶⁰ Gosnell, *The Year Book of British Columbia* (1903), p 335.

women, such as school teachers, earned more than clerical workers, but they still earned less than the young women who lodged with Seymour and Carroll.⁶¹

The financial arrangements between brothel-keepers and resident prostitutes are not well known and probably varied between establishments. Carroll operated her brothel on a boarding house basis. That is, she rented rooms in her brothel to prostitutes who were permitted to keep their earnings. Carroll made her money from the rent the women paid, and from food and liquor sales to the punters who patronized her brothel. She prided herself on running a decorous establishment and for looking out for the welfare of the young women who lodged with her.⁶²

Despite the decorous image that Carroll projected, prostitution was a dangerous line of work. Although there are no homicides in the historical record, there are several cases of women who died under suspicious circumstances. One of these cases involved Mattie Smith who, the press reported, was “well known to the sporting fraternity and the police.” In 1895 she was found dead in her home. According to newspaper reports, her body was “scantily dressed” when it was discovered. Investigators readily determined that she had been strangled with a cravat she often wore; incredibly, however, a coroner’s jury was unable to decide whether her fatal injuries were self-inflicted or caused by some other person.⁶³ Then, as now, sex trade workers were in danger of being assaulted by the men who used their services. Bertha Baker had a harrowing experience on Yates Street, near the corner of Broad Street, in March 1889. On that occasion, she was involved in a violent altercation with a man who “knocked her down...and kicked her brutally in the face.” Although Baker “vowed that she would make her assailant answer for his cowardly assault in the police court,” no charges were ever laid.⁶⁴

⁶¹ The median salary for female school teachers in Victoria was about \$500 per year in 1901. British Columbia. Department of Education. *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Public Schools of the Province of British Columbia, 1900-1902* (Victoria, B.C.: King’s Printer, 1902), pp. lii-liii.

⁶² Eversole, *Stella*, p. 71. See also Valerie Green, *Upstarts and Outcasts. Victoria’s Not So Proper Past* (Victoria, B.C.: Touch Wood Editions, 2000) for accounts of some of Victoria’s most prominent madams.

⁶³ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (7 November 1895), p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (5 March 1889), p. 4.

Alcohol was prevalent and there were many reports of alcohol-fuelled incidents involving sex trade workers. For instance, in October 1888, Kitty Calvert was charged with “maliciously and unlawfully breaking ninety-eight panes of glass in a house of ill-repute.” The object of her wrath was a woman who operated a brothel on Yates Street, near the corner of Douglas Street. Calvert pleaded guilty, but explained that she was under the influence of alcohol when the offence occurred.⁶⁵ Addictive drugs and mental depression were also aspects of the sex trade, as a number of poignant accounts and tragic events reveal. In the 1880s, a number of sex trade workers died from accidental overdoses of drugs.⁶⁶ Several women – including Kitty Calvert and May Williams – attempted suicide with morphine.⁶⁷ In 1894, May Franklin, a resident in Jennie Howard’s brothel at 39 Broad Street, attempted to take her own life by drinking mercuric chloride.⁶⁸ A few years earlier, Edna Farnsworth, who worked in Della Wentworth’s brothel at 14 Broughton Street, died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Both Franklin and Farnsworth had attempted suicide on previous occasions.⁶⁹

Susan Johnston has scrutinized newspaper reports on coroners’ inquests into the suicide deaths of female prostitutes in British Columbia.⁷⁰ She describes the reports as “morality plays” composed in two distinct literary styles. In one style, reporters “utilized a dry

⁶⁵ Calvert was fined \$1 and \$4.50 in court costs and ordered to pay \$20 to replace the broken panes of glass. *Victoria Daily Colonist* (31 October 1888), p. 4.

⁶⁶They included Ruby Edwards (also known as Edna White), who died of an overdose of opium in a Broad Street brothel in 1880 and Jenny Willis, who died from an accidental overdose of morphine in 1885. *Victoria Daily Colonist* (15 July 1880), p. 5; *Victoria Daily Colonist* (9 May 1885), p. 3.

⁶⁷ The press reported that Kitty Calvert’s life “was saved by the strenuous efforts of a medical man,” who was summoned by one of her companions. *Victoria Daily Colonist* (27 March 1889), p. 4. May Williams was also saved by the intervention of a doctor, but according to one of her associates, she was “a slave” to morphine. *Victoria Daily Colonist* (23 May 1889), p. 4.

⁶⁸ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (1 September 1894), p. 5. Before the advent of antibiotics, mercuric chloride was used in the treatment of syphilis.

⁶⁹ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (23 May 1889), p. 4.

⁷⁰ Susan J. Johnston, “Twice Slain: Female Sex-Trade Workers and Suicide in British Columbia, 1870-1920,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 5 (1994): 147-166.

unemotional tone [and] scientific language...to give the effect of objectivity and accuracy." In the other style, they combined "melodrama and sermon, presented every stereotype ever applied to prostitutes and exaggerated the circumstances surrounding the deaths." The reports were often prurient, as journalists "expropriated the lives and deaths of these women." "The reporters' gaze," Johnston has said, "at times seems somewhat pornographic as if, in death, the prostitute was forced to service every member of the community, not just those who had contracted her services in life."⁷¹

Newspaper coverage on these and other tragedies – such as the trial of Belle Adams, a prostitute who killed her lover with a cut-throat razor in 1898 – may have gratified a salacious interest among middle-class readers in the lives of "fallen women."⁷² However, these reports provide historians with information about the sites of sexual commerce in Victoria during the period. From the inquest into the death of Edna Farnsworth we learn details about the physical layout of the Broughton Street brothel where she worked. It contained a kitchen, a parlour, several private rooms and a back garden. From the inquest into the death of Mattie Smith we learn that the geography of sexual commerce had extended to Discovery Street, a block north of Chatham Street. From reports on the trial of Belle Adams, we learn that she and her deceased lover roomed in the Empire Hotel at 38-40 (now 546) Johnston Street, opposite the Jubilee Saloon.⁷³ From these reports we can also glean some biographical data about the women who worked in the sex trade. We learn that Smith was from Winnipeg and Farnsworth was from San Francisco; Wentworth and Adams were from Seattle.

⁷¹ Johnston, "Twice Slain," 162, 165.

⁷² The circumstances leading to the trial of Belle Adams, a prostitute who killed her lover with a straight-razor, were reported in minute detail in the Victoria newspapers between 23 June 1898 and 13 October 1898. Adams was acquitted of the charge of murder and sentenced to five years' imprisonment for manslaughter. The trial of Adams and events surrounding the suicide of Edna Farnsworth are discussed in a web-site featuring research by undergraduate History students at the University of Victoria. See the essay entitled "Airing Victoria's Dirty Laundry" on *Victoria's Victoria* web site, <http://web.uvic.ca/vv/student/airingvictorias/home.htm>.

⁷³ Since Adams was not a brothel prostitute, she may have worked in the Jubilee Saloon, located across the street from the Empire Hotel, or the Grand Pacific Hotel at the end of the block.

More details of this sub-rosa community are revealed by census records. Many prostitutes and brothel owners – including Alice Seymour (b. 1863), Fay Watson (b. 1867) and Jennie Morris (b. 1866) – were enumerated in 1891, in the 3rd decennial census of Canada.⁷⁴ They were also enumerated in the 4th decennial census of Canada in 1901. Sex trade workers have not yet been identified in the census of 1881 or 1911, but their identities may be discovered in the course of further research. Meantime, a close analysis of nominal census schedules for 1891 and 1901 reveals a cohort of about one hundred female sex trade workers.

Although they co-operated with federal government enumerators, sex trade workers did not identify themselves as brothel keepers or prostitutes. The former usually described themselves as boarding house keepers. As for prostitutes, they appear in the census as actresses, dressmakers, seamstresses, florists, nurses, milliners and musicians, to cite some of their occupational disguises. Seeing behind the camouflage is a challenge, but by linking information in police charge books with other records, it's possible to identify women who resided in brothels and cribs on the census. The process is described in my recent essay, "Sex, Lies and Census Records."⁷⁵

One of the most striking things about the tenderloin of Victoria is the prominence of American-born women. In 1891, over 80 per cent of sex trade workers identified on the census reported the United States as their place of birth. The mean age of brothel prostitutes in 1891 was 24 years; the median age was 25 years. Brothel keepers were slightly older; their mean age was 29. Ten years later, the age difference between brothel prostitutes and owners was greater: In 1901, the mean age of brothel prostitutes was 21 while the median age of brothel keepers was 31. The increase in the age difference is due to the fact that brothel prostitutes in 1901 included some very young females. There were no teen-agers in the sorority of 1891. The age difference also reflects the fact that long-

⁷⁴ On the process of enumeration, see Patrick A. Dunae, "Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 31, no. 2 (November/novembre 1998): 223-239.

⁷⁵ Patrick A. Dunae, "Sex, Lies and Census Records: Locating Female Sex Trade Workers in Victoria, British Columbia, 1891-1901," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, forthcoming.

established brothel owners like Seymour, Watson and Morris were ten years older. At the turn of the century, American-born women still dominated the sorority of sex trade workers in Victoria brothels. Among the brothel prostitutes identified on the 1901 census, nearly 80 per cent were from the United States.

The demographic picture in the cribs on lower Chatham Street and Herald Street is slightly different. The women who occupied the cribs were generally older than the women who resided in brothels. Although the mean age was 24, the median age was 28. Over one third of crib prostitutes (38%) were 30 years of age and older. Only forty per cent of the crib prostitutes were born in the United States, while 45 per cent of the crib prostitutes were born in France and the French-speaking region of Belgium. The cosmopolitan character of this corner of Victoria may be a reflection of the cosmopolitan nature of the sex trade during the Klondike gold rush. In her study of community in the Klondike, Charlene Porsild found that prostitutes “represented an ethnic diversity of significantly different proportion to the general population.”⁷⁶ Using census data and jail records, Porsild found that “over half of the women [working as prostitutes] were European born, and a full 31 per cent of these were born in France.” She also notes the presence of “a large group of French-speaking Belgian prostitutes” who arrived in Dawson City in 1898.⁷⁷ Some of the Belgian women may have re-located to Victoria, where they were met by the census-taker in 1901.⁷⁸

The years 1900-1901 marked the apogee of the sex trade in Victoria. According to John Langley, Victoria’s chief of police, there were about 280 “known prostitutes” in the city

⁷⁶ Charlene Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers. Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), p. 124. For a related study, see Bay Riley, *Gold Diggers of the Klondike. Prostitution in Dawson City, Yukon, 1891-1908* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1997).

⁷⁷ Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, p. 124.

⁷⁸ Some of these women may have been “peripatetic prostitutes,” a term used by Ronald Hyam to describe an international sorority of sex trade workers who “moved around the globe to take advantage of labour opportunities cause by gold rushes and similar phenomenon” in the late Victorian and Edwardian years. Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 148.

at the time.⁷⁹ Whether they were all working is not clear from his statement, but the statistic he offered is striking. The population of Victoria was just under 21,000 in 1901.⁸⁰ Had sex trade workers been enumerated as a distinct occupational category on the 1901 census, they would, if we use Chief Langley's figures, constitute one of the largest occupational groups among young, white women in the city.⁸¹ But without question, sex trade workers comprised a large sector in Victoria's invisible economy, although they themselves were by no means invisible in the community. While sex trade workers were not permitted to solicit on the streets, they were not confined to brothels or cribs when they were not working. Like other residents of the city, they interacted with public space, and with commercial and recreational places. Some of the women were intentionally conspicuous in their dress and deportment. They wore brightly-coloured dresses and extravagant hats, and carried on in a flamboyant manner. And in this manner, a kind of sexualized space was created as they moved about the city.

From contemporary newspaper reports, we catch glimpses of them, relaxing in row boats on a scenic waterway known as the Gorge. Often they hired open air carriages, and drove around the main streets of the city in a social exercise called 'taking the air.' Frequently, they strolled to Beacon Hill Park, the city's main recreation ground, or drove their own carriages to the park. They attended Victoria's theatres and music halls, which were conveniently located close to Broad Street, and they perambulated along Government Street, between Fort Street and Yates Street. Generally, they were able to conduct themselves in public places without hindrance, although inevitably some observers were

⁷⁹ Testifying at the enquiry on Victoria Police Commissioners in 1910, Langley recalled, "in 1900, when [I] took office, there were some 275, or 280, maybe 300 known prostitutes in the city." *Victoria Daily Times* (5 April 1910).

⁸⁰ The population of the city of Victoria during the period examined in this study was 3,270 (1871); 5,925 (1881); 16,841 (1891); 20,919 (1901); and 31,660 (1911).

⁸¹ According to the 1901 census, there were 1,356 unmarried white females, between the ages of 17 and 31 years, in Victoria City. Of that number, 52% (706 females) were not identified with an occupation and so their occupation appears as "none or unknown" in the census data. However, in this demographic cohort, 650 females (48%) were identified with an occupation on the census. Occupational groups having twenty or more female workers are as follows: Dressmaker (86); Teacher (62); General servant (56); Domestic servant (49); Stenographer (47); Nurse (41); Clerk (32); Milliner (26). Source: 4th decennial census of Canada, Victoria City enumeration district. Online at viHistory.ca [<http://viHistory.ca>].

offended by their presence. In 1889, A. N. Richards, a Victoria lawyer who served as a police magistrate, complained that “women composing the demi-monde” occupied the best seats in the theatre. He was also offended by their manners in the city’s main park. “At Beacon Hill,” he fumed, “they were always to be found flaunting gilded vice in the face of respectability; while on the drives they dashed along in their carriages and smiled upon the respectable women whom they compelled, in a manner, to associate with them.”⁸² From Richards’ perspective, sex trade workers were intruding in respectable public space. Other residents may have shared his point of view, but if they did, they kept their opinions to themselves, because we see very few censorious comments about public women in public places in Victoria newspapers in the 1890s.

That being said, the liberal – or, critics would say, permissive – attitudes of the high Victorian era, the Gay ‘Nineties as this historical period used to be called, were replaced by less tolerant attitudes in the Edwardian years. *Laissez-faire* gave way to restrictive policies on the part of local authorities. A spectacular fire, which destroyed the city’s largest red-light district, also affected the sex trade significantly. All of these factors unfolded in a social and political environment that was increasingly dominated by the social purity crusades of the era.

It’s difficult to indicate precisely when attitudes began to change, but changes were in the air and on the minds of civic reformers in December 1898. In that month, a group calling itself the Committee of Fifty was convened at a large public meeting held in Victoria’s City Hall. Members of the Committee had a wide range of objectives, including municipal tax reforms and the removal of the Songhees Indian village from the western side of the harbour. Social and moral issues were also on the agenda. Committee chairman Noah Shakespeare – a former mayor and MP for Victoria – demanded that local authorities be more aggressive in enforcing laws relating to prostitution. Shakespeare recognized that it would be difficult to eradicate prostitution, since it had flourished for so long in the city; however, he said, “the evil [is] getting beyond bounds and it was time

⁸² Victoria *Daily Colonist* (13 June 1889), p.4.

it was checked.” Several Committee members endorsed his view, although a few members demurred. One member, recognizing the importance of the sex trade and sojourning Klondike miners to the local economy, urged his colleagues “not to go to extremes” in enforcing laws against prostitution.⁸³

But once the Klondike rush was over, businessmen who took a lenient attitude towards the sex trade found themselves in an increasingly untenable position. From about 1906, the social purity crusade, already felt in many Canadian and American cities, gained momentum in Victoria.⁸⁴ Organizations like the WCTU, which had previously focussed on Chinese prostitutes, turned its attention to the mainstream sex trade. An alliance of the WCTU, the Local Council of Women and the Salvation Army organized a series of meetings to denounce the brothels and sent a succession of petitions to Victoria City Council, demanding restrictive measures against the sex trade. With members of the local Purity League, they deliberately disturbed and intruded into prostitutional space, by holding vigils outside Herald Street brothels and haranguing would-be frequenters.⁸⁵

The economy of Victoria was undergoing a major change at this time.⁸⁶ The sealing industry, which had employed hundreds of men who lived in residential hotels near the waterfront in Victoria, was shut down by an international treaty. The Royal Navy base at nearby Esquimalt closed in 1905, and with the closure, several thousand bluejackets, who used to spend their leave and their money in Victoria, were lost to the local economy. At the same time, Victoria’s manufacturing industries were declining in face of vigorous economic growth in Vancouver. In short, the economic base that had sustained the sex

⁸³ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (16 December 1898), p. 3.

⁸⁴ On the impact of the social purity movement, see Marian Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Social Purity and Philanthropy in Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991) and Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

⁸⁵ *Victoria Daily Times* (15 April 1908), p. 3; Lyn Gough, *As Wise as Serpents. Five Women and an Organization that Changed British Columbia* (Victoria, B.C.: Swan Lake Publishing, 1988), pp. 21-113; Derek Pethick, *Summer of Promise. Victoria, 1864-1914* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis, 1980), p. 172.

⁸⁶ Baskerville, *Beyond the Island*, pp. 55, 57, 70; Peter Murray, *The Vagabond Fleet. A Chronicle of the North Pacific Sealing Schooner Trade* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1988).

trade was thinner and more tenuous than it had been in the past. Moreover, and of no little importance, this was a period when civic officials and members of the local chamber of commerce were making a concerted effort to promote the city of Victoria as a genteel haven for retirees and an attractive destination for tourists.⁸⁷ The construction and opening of the landmark Empress Hotel in 1908 was part of a larger initiative to promote Victoria as a tourist destination. In the newly invented city of gardens, sex trade workers were regarded as nettles.⁸⁸

A conflagration also had a devastating impact on the sex trade. On a hot day in July 1907, a fire got out of control in a blacksmith's shop on Store Street. The fire spread rapidly to adjacent properties and before it was extinguished it destroyed all of the buildings on the lower (western) part of Chatham Street. In a front page story, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* reported: "Lower Chatham is occupied exclusively by cribs and there were many painful scenes among the terror stricken denizens. Women in scanty attire fled into the streets imploring aid, which was cheerfully rendered."⁸⁹ Fortunately, there were no deaths or injuries in the conflagration. But the sex trade was never the same afterwards.

In the wake of the 1907 fire, the Victoria Police Commission, acting on instructions from Victoria City Council and moral reform groups, established a "restricted district" where brothels would be permitted. Outside the district, brothels would not be permitted. This marked a change in local policy and a new way of defining prostitutional space. Previously, prostitutional space had been defined by function, and such spaces existed in different parts of the city. Subsequently, prostitutional space was defined by regulations.

⁸⁷ Victoria aggressively marketed itself as a tourist and retirement centre in the early 1900s. The city's genteel image is evident from promotional works with titles such as *An Outpost of Empire: Victoria, British Columbia, the Evergreen City of Canada* (1907), *Victoria, the Pearl of the Pacific* (1908), *Victoria, the holiday seekers' paradise* (1909) and *Victoria: City Beautiful of the Pacific North West* (1912). These pamphlets are available in the Research Library of the BC Archives.

⁸⁸ On the economic transformation of Victoria and growth of the tourist industry during the Edwardian era, see Kenneth Lines, "A Bit of Old England: The Selling of Tourist Victoria," (M. A. thesis, History, University of Victoria, 1972) and Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia. Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 15-37.

⁸⁹ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (23 July 1907), p. 1.

Regulators, who had simply gazed at sex trade workers in the past, were now expected to discipline them by enforcing policies intended to curtail sexual commerce. At this time, many cities in western Canada were establishing similar zones, and so Victoria's policy was not innovative or unusual.⁹⁰ However, the restricted zone in Victoria was proportionally smaller than other major cities. And certainly it was much smaller than it had been prior to 1907. It was limited to western end of Herald Street and Chatham Street, although unofficially a few houses on Discovery Street were allowed to operate, provided they were not conspicuous.⁹¹ Conspicuous was a relative term, but gone were the days when brothels announced their presence by posting oversized street address numbers on their front doors and installing red blinds in their front windows.⁹² Further restrictions were imposed in January 1910, when Herald Street was closed to the sex trade. Thereafter, officially-sanctioned prostitutional space was limited to the western end of Chatham Street.⁹³

The brothels on Broad Street were closed because of the new regulations. Stella Carroll was persuaded to vacate her premises in the Duck Block and encouraged by the authorities to re-locate to Herald Street, which she did. However the parlour houses on Broughton Street, Courtney Street and Douglas Street were not hampered by the new regulations. They had always done business with more discretion and decorum than the brothels on Herald Street and the cribs on Chatham Street. The women who operated the

⁹⁰ In Western Canada, the city of Winnipeg set the standard for establishing and regulating proscribed areas for sexual commerce. See Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914*, especially the chapter entitled "Red Lights in Winnipeg: Segregated Vice, Moral Reformers, and Civic Politics," pp. 246-264. See also Rhonda L. Hinthner, "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: The Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909-1912," *Manitoba History*, No. 41 (Spring/Summer 2001), 2-13.

⁹¹ *Victoria Daily Times* (30 March 1910), p. 9.

⁹² Previously, the Victoria Police Commissioners had adopted a resolution instructing the chief of police to "rigidly enforce the laws against prostitution in every case where a house is disorderly or is made conspicuous in any way whatsoever." When he was shown the resolution, the chief "asked how he was to construe the word 'conspicuous.'...It was explained that large numbers on doors [and] red blinds in windows...would be considered 'conspicuous.'" *Victoria Daily Colonist*, (30 December 1898), p. 6.

⁹³ *Victoria Daily Times* (5 April 1910), p. 3.

up-market brothels, and the women who worked in them, were rarely summoned to court on prostitution-related charges. Besides, their patrons likely had influence in City Hall.

In contrast, the women who worked on the north end of town, on Chatham Street and Herald Street had few champions, at a time when they were faced with new social and economic pressures. It was rumoured that brothel operators in this part of the city were compelled to pay protection money to corrupt police officers in order to stay in business. The rumours were published in the *Victoria Daily Times* and resulted in a provincial government enquiry into the conduct of Victoria police officers and police commissioners. The enquiry was held in March 1910 by provincial court judge Peter Lampman. After several weeks of testimony from nearly three dozen witnesses, Lampman said the evidence against the police officers and commissioners was inconclusive. He acknowledged the public's perception that police commissioners were countenancing a criminal activity, prostitution; but he also accepted that an activity "so deeply rooted as prostitution" and so closely tied to "human nature" was not easily eradicated. In fact, in the conclusion to his report, Lampman complimented the police commissioners on their forbearance and sagacity.⁹⁴

In Victoria [brothels] have always been allowed....The system [in Victoria] has the merit of being open – there is no secrecy about it – no deception. Everybody knows what these women [brothel keepers and resident prostitutes] are... These women are too old to be reformed, and even if they could be reformed, who is going to undertake the task? They cannot be imprisoned for the rest of their lives, and it would not be becoming for a Christian community to send them off to Seattle, Vancouver or Nanaimo or some other neighbouring city. They are here now, have been here for years and we must keep them here, and the Commissioners have decided wisely, I think, that they do less harm where they are now [in the restricted zone]....

Members of the Citizen's League, a newly-established moral reform society, were not convinced by Lampman's assessment; doubtless they were disappointed that criminal prosecutions did not flow from his enquiry. But the records of the enquiry are valuable for this study, since they illuminate financial aspects of the sex trade. The records show

⁹⁴ British Columbia Archives. GR 784. British Columbia. Commission on Victoria Police Commissioners (1910), p. 12.

that many of the properties within the restricted zone were owned by trading companies, such as the Hip Yick Company, controlled by Chinese merchants in Victoria.

Immediately after the fire of 1907, Chinese investors commenced buying up properties on Chatham Street and erecting small brick cottages, which were then rented as brothels. Properties on lower Chatham Street were also owned by a local developer, Lorenzo Quagliotti, and his wife Petronilla Quagliotti. They leased some of their properties to one Lorenzo Reda, a resident of North Vancouver. Reda erected five cottages, which he sub-let as brothels.

Because the restricted zone was geographically, socially and politically circumscribed, property owners were able to charge exorbitant rents. One brothel keeper reported that she paid \$150 a month to rent a house from the Hip Yick Company; another madam paid \$200 a month in rent for her property. Lorenzo Reda earned \$1,000 a month in rent from the cottages he had erected, of which he paid \$350 per month to Mr. and Mrs. Quagilotti. To put these prices in context, three-bedroom bungalows in respectable, residential neighbourhoods of Victoria rented for \$150 a year in 1910. The Lampman enquiry heard that brothel keepers were faced with additional overhead costs, including the cost of renting furniture, estimated at \$70 a month.

The extortionate rents and other high overhead costs were onerous to sex trade workers. The harassment they faced from moral reformers, and petty regulations aimed against them, may also have been vexatious. In particular, theatres in Victoria instituted a policy of segregating public women from other patrons. The historical records are unclear, but prostitutes were apparently relegated to blocks of seats in theatre balconies. It's not clear when the policy was implemented and whether it was initiated by theatre managers at the behest of local authorities, but Police Chief Langley referred to it approvingly in 1910 when he testified at a public enquiry on measures that had been taken to discourage prostitution in the city.⁹⁵ In any event, the policy of segregating sex trade workers in

⁹⁵ *Victoria Daily Times* (30 March 191), p. 9; Commission on Victoria Police Commissioners (1910), p. 12.

Victoria theatres is an interesting example of how a shift in social attitudes could create new moral geographies in spaces that had been unbounded previously.⁹⁶

Succumbing to social, political and economic pressures, many brothel keepers closed their businesses and left Victoria. And while some of the long-established carriage houses remained open, they were not insulated entirely from the new moral and economic climate. Fay Watson closed her brothel at 828 Douglas Street in 1909 and Jennie Morris closed her parlour house on 621 Courtney Street a year later. Both women operated their brothels in rented facilities and may have buckled under increased operating costs. But property prices were rising dramatically in Victoria at this time, and some brothel operators may have taken advantage of the soaring market. This may explain why Alice Seymour, who owned her brothel on Broughton Street (formerly Kane Street), closed it in 1912 and retired to California. Stella Carroll also moved to California, although her exit from Victoria was more fractious than Seymour's departure from the city. After being harassed in her Herald Street brothel by police authorities, who had previously promised her immunity from prosecution, she closed the brothel and opened another one a few miles away, in a stately home called Rockwood, in the leafy suburbs of the Gorge. But when her new brothel was raided, she decided to close her business and leave Victoria. She left the city in 1913 and resettled in San Francisco.⁹⁷

By the onset of the First World War, the sex trade in Victoria was, to use a cliché, but a shadow of its former self. The change can be seen in statistics compiled by the Victoria police department. In 1899, near the apogee of the sex trade, just seven charges were laid against brothel operators, despite the fact that dozens of brothels were doing business at the time. In 1908, as the crackdown on the sex trade got into full swing, the police laid

⁹⁶ Apparently, the policy was met by resistance by sex trade workers. Women relegated to the restricted seats in the balcony would whistle and shout down to men they recognized in the respectable dress circle of the theatre. One can imagine how uncomfortable the men felt when they were hallo-ed by women in the gallery. One can imagine the glares of their wives, and the mortified expressions on the faces of their daughters or sisters. BC Archives. Sound Recordings, T3247:0001. Walter Englehardt's reminiscences in "A Child's View of Old Victoria," interview recorded by Imbart Orchard for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1962.

⁹⁷ Eversole, *Stella*, p. 145.

nearly fifty charges for offences relating to prostitution and public morals. In 1914, when the sex trade had largely been subdued, only six charges were brought to court. “The morals of the city,” Victoria’s mayor, Alfred J. Morley, boasted in his annual report for 1913, had attained a “high standard and everything possible has been done to prevent questionable characters from locating in the city.”⁹⁸ As a result of this policy, sex trade workers were subjected to an unprecedented surveillance. When they were arrested they were photographed, even before they were brought to trial. Their photographs, which *inter alia* provide a fascinating record of the sex trade, were kept on file. Copies of the photographs were circulated to police departments in Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, to assist officials in those cities in their campaigns against vice and immorality. Moreover, women from those cities who were suspected of being prostitutes were made to feel unwelcome in Victoria. Referring to sex trade workers in his report for 1915, George Perdue, the city’s Inspector of Detectives, remarked that that “class of offender did not give as much trouble as formerly.” He reported that eighty-three women had been interviewed by his officers that year, “and advised to leave the City, which, in nearly all cases, they did.”⁹⁹

III.

As David Lowenthal, the distinguished British historical geographer, has noted, memory, records and relics are the principal bridges we use in order to connect with landscapes and societies in the past.¹⁰⁰ Memories, conveyed in the recollections of Walter Engelhardt, have been useful in understanding how prostitutional space was produced in Victoria during the era of the Klondike gold rush. Records – notably street directories, maps and fire insurance plans – are essential in mapping sites of sexual commerce. Relics, in the form of the built environment, are also important in demarking sites of sexual

⁹⁸ *Annual Reports of the Corporation of the City of Victoria, 1900-1915*. City Police Reports, *passim*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, Report of the Criminal Investigation Department, 1915, p. 74. In 1912, the Victoria Police Department hired its first female detectives, who were primarily responsible for ensuring the moral welfare of juvenile girls in the city. It’s likely the female detectives also kept a watch on the sex trade.

¹⁰⁰ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 185-259; Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 105-126.

commerce and providing spatial data for an historical GIS of the sex trade.¹⁰¹ Attribute data is derived from tax rolls, police charge books, census schedules, and newspapers. With this data, it's possible to create a demographic and a prosopographical profile of sex trade workers, although the picture is far from complete. We have very little personal information about the aboriginal women who were involved with the sex trade in the colonial era; likewise, we have very little information about the men who engaged female sex trade workers and who frequented the brothels, cribs and cabins in Victoria. But future research may provide information about the females and males who are missing from the picture.

A more immediate task is to try to understand how prostitutional space was ordered and how it functioned. Prostitutional space was social space and, as Doreen Massey has observed, "Social space is something we construct and which others construct about us."¹⁰² For most of the nineteenth century, this social space was packed with economic values. That is, sites of sexual commerce were tolerated by local authorities because the sex trade was important to the local economy. We see evidence of this in the colonial era, during the Cariboo gold rush, in debates about allowing dance houses to operate in the city. We see economic interests at play during the Klondike gold rush, when the business community urged municipal authorities to go easy on the brothels on Herald Street and the cribs on Chatham Street. We see evidence of this on other occasions, at times when the city was not inundated with transient gold seekers. In December 1890, the mayor of Victoria, John Grant, rebuked a delegation of clergymen who had come before council to complain about the proliferation of brothels in the city. The meeting was open to members of the public. Far from sympathizing with the delegates, Grant charged that they were giving the city "a black eye" by representing Victoria as a "bad" and "immoral place." He accused the clergymen of being intolerant, and blamed them for discouraging

¹⁰¹ The Duck Block at 1314-1322 Broad Street and the Hart Block at 529-539 Herald Street are on the City of Victoria's Heritage Register. Stella Carroll's former brothel at 679 Herald Street still stands. The building that housed the Jubilee Saloon on Johnson Street is still standing, but the brick cabins in the courtyard behind it are gone. However, the rooms atop the former Grand Pacific Hotel have not yet been demolished. They are one of several structural reminders of the sex trade in nineteenth century Victoria.

¹⁰² Doreen Massey, "Space-Time and the Politics of Location," *Architectural Design*, vol. 68, nos. 3 & 4 (March-April 1998), 34.

investment in the city. Their allegations about immorality, Grant said, “have been detrimental to the best interests of the city.”¹⁰³ When the delegates protested, they were booed and hissed by some of the spectators in the public gallery.¹⁰⁴

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the sex trade in Victoria may also have owed its standing to a widely held view that prostitution was a necessary evil. In this construction,

The activities of prostitutes were seen to preserve the moral purity and integrity of “good” women by providing an outlet for men’s baser desires. Given its necessary function, prostitution was to be tolerated, isolated, and regulated rather than eradicated altogether.¹⁰⁵

A long-time medical practitioner, Dr. J. S. Helmcken, expressed this view at a meeting of the Victoria police commission in 1898. He was speaking against measures that would curtail prostitution around Herald Street and Chatham Street. His remarks were reported in the press as follows: “There is a necessity for such women [prostitutes] and he for one would rather see them here [in Victoria] than see the lunatic asylums crowded with young men.” Helmcken’s associates would have understood his meaning. If young men did have access to prostitutes, they would resort to masturbation, a practice which could lead to insanity.¹⁰⁶ Further, “He as a medical man could say that if those houses [brothels] were

¹⁰³ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (18 December 1890), p. 8. Louis Vigelius attended this meeting which was characterized by “some plain talk on both sides.” Councillor Vigelius, it may be recalled, owned one of the brothels on Broad Street. Although Vigelius did not make any comments during the meet, he probably endorsed the mayor’s remarks.

¹⁰⁴ The delegates’ petition was later summarized in a printed pamphlet: George H. Turner, *Before the Council; or, Social Life in Victoria* (n. p., February 1891).

¹⁰⁵ Marjolein van der Veen, “Beyond Slavery and Capitalism: Producing Class Differences in the Sex Industry,” in J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Rejnack, and Richard D. Wolfe, eds., *Class and Its Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 125. I am grateful to my colleague, Gordon Hak, for this reference.

¹⁰⁶ Alex Comfort, *The Anxiety Makers: Some Curious Preoccupations of the Medical Profession*, (London: Nelson, 1969); Lesley A. Hall, “Forbidden by God, Despised by Men: Masturbation, Medical Warnings, Moral Panic, and Manhood in Great Britain, 1850-1950,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Special Issue, Part 2: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe (January 1992): 365-387.

closed, there would be trouble for the young girls of the city.” Again, the commissioners would know what he meant. If prostitutes were not available in a seaport like Victoria, respectable females would be accosted by miners, sailors and other marauding males who comprised the “large floating population” of the city. Dr. Helmcken advised that it was better to “relax the law” [against prostitution] and “safer to have the bawdy houses, properly restricted.” Arguments like these were advanced to justify the allocation of prostitutional space. Moreover, when these patriarchal opinions were coupled with economic imperatives, such as those expressed by Mayor Grant, the rationale to produce and preserve prostitutional space in the city was compelling. Accordingly, space was duly allocated in Victoria for sexual commerce.

In Foucauldian terms, the spaces were “places of tolerance” where the state allowed “pleasures that [were] unspoken” to be rendered into “the order of things that are counted.”¹⁰⁷ But in the Edwardian years, the state, in its municipal genus, became less tolerant of these kinds of activities. The state became less tolerant when public opinion changed. Public attitudes towards the sex trade were altered to some extent by women’s organizations (notably the WCTU), religious organizations, and civic reformers who campaigned under the banner of social purity. Their crusade was effective and they were understandably pleased to see a marked decline in sexual commerce. Thus, in 1914, the British Columbia conference of the Methodist Church was moved to “place on record its gratification” that the campaign to close “houses of ill-fame” and abolish “segregated districts of social vice” in Victoria and other cities in the province had been successful.¹⁰⁸ But the social purity crusaders cannot claim all of the credit. As John McClaren and others have noted, the curtailment of the sex trade was part of a larger social phenomenon that gained momentum in the initial decades of the twentieth century. Along with moral

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, I, p. 116.

¹⁰⁸ United Church of Canada Archives: Toronto. Department of Temperance, Prohibition and Moral Reform, 33b, Minutes of the British Columbia Group of the General Board, 1914. I am grateful to John Lutz for this reference.

reform, the phenomenon involved increased social control and governmentality. In British Columbia,¹⁰⁹

...state authorities increasingly turned to the cultural realm in their struggles to recreate and discipline the populace. More and more, governance, law, authority, and rule became discursive activities, mediated in public and private life through semi-autonomous institutions like education, religion, social work, the academy, and the press. In the process, the state entered into new relations with civil society. The science and art of governmentality became a far more complex phenomenon than previously envisioned....These new thought forms, strategies, and methodologies were aimed not only at repressing deviant outsiders, but also at instilling new modes of logic and conduct among the citizenry at large.

The tendencies of moral reform, social control and governmentality, which have interested McLaren and others, were characteristics of twentieth century progressivism. In British Columbia, and elsewhere in English-speaking North America, progressivism was expressed in a wide range of social initiatives, which took the form of statutes and bylaws to ensure compulsory elementary education, combat a perceived increase in juvenile delinquency and promote public health.¹¹⁰ The social purity campaign against the sex trade was, consequently, part of a larger initiative to improve social efficiency. In addition, other factors diminished and to some degree undermined the unbridled sex trade of the high Victorian era. Paradoxically, in light of the ostensible objectives of social purity, one of the factors was a greater tolerance of premarital sex; other factors involved the advent of companionable marriages, the acceptance of consensual sexual intercourse within marriage, the increased use of contraceptives, and a shift towards earlier marriages.

¹⁰⁹ McLaren, Menzies, and Chunn, *Regulating Lives*, "Introduction," pp. 6-14; "Postlude," pp. 295-300.

¹¹⁰ The bylaws included measures to prevent the sale of tobacco to children and the imposition of curfews on youths under the age of sixteen. Victoria adopted a curfew in 1912 requiring all youngsters under the age of 16 to be off the streets and (presumably) at home by 9 o'clock. For a discussion of other state-mandated initiatives in British Columbia, see Norah Lewis, "Physical Perfection for Spiritual Welfare: Health Care for the Urban Child, 1900-1939," in Patricia T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell (eds.), *Studies in Childhood History. A Canadian Perspective*, (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1982); and Mona Gleason, "Race, Class and Health: School Medical Inspection and 'Healthy' Children in British Columbia, 1890-1930," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, Col. 19, No. 1 (2002): 95-112.

As Timothy Gilfoyle noted in his study of prostitution and the commercialization of sex in New York:¹¹¹

The ideals of emotional warmth, amicability, and affection replaced rigid Victorian authority and responsibility as the defining qualities of the American family. Equally significant, sex was increasingly seen as a legitimate physical function, a crucial part of married life, and a basic expression of love within marriage. The increasing acceptance and availability of artificial birth control contributed to this change. Heterosexuality was transformed, but within older, monogamous traditions restricting sex to marriage. Sexual intercourse was a positive good, the acme of love, and, most important, the hallmark of equality in marriage.

Gilfoyle argues that a combination of attitudinal changes, redefinitions of intimacy and marriage, and younger (and companionable) marriages undermined the late Victorian brothel and public prostitution. He also points to the fact that, as cities grew and urban development was intensified, spaces that had been given over to the sex trade became increasingly valuable for commercial or industrial development. All of these forces were significant in undermining the demimonde in Victoria.

IV.

The research project described in this paper began as an exercise in historical GIS. The research methodologies associated with GIS compel the researcher to be as thorough as possible, marshalling spatial data and organizing attribute data. Acquiring and assembling appropriate data takes time. As Ian Gregory has remarked, building an historical GIS is “a middle-to long-term process with long lag times before the full rewards of the initial investment are realized.”¹¹² But the investment will, it is hoped, pay dividends. When the historical GIS of nineteenth century Victoria is complete, data relating to the sex trade can be interpreted within a much larger geographical, social, and historical context. Researchers will be able to deploy spatially referenced analysis on complex demographic questions. With GIS, data can be displayed and represented in a variety of forms,

¹¹¹ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros. New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), pp. pp. 311-312.

¹¹² Ian Gregory, *A Place in History. A Guide to Using GIS in Historical Research* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), p. 15. (My thanks to Donald A. Debats for reminding me of this reference.) See also Ian N. Gregory and Paul S. Ell, *Historical GIS: Technologies, methodologies and scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

including choropleths and cartograms. But with the knowledge acquired from developing a GIS of the sex trade, we might also undertake a simpler exercise, one that does not require any computational power. We might look at historical photographs, particularly panoramic images that show city vistas. Victoria was documented in several panoramic photographs in the 1890s. One of these images shows the south-east quarter of the city, in the vicinity of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church [see page 44]. Once we know where to look, we can see brothels in the photograph. Structurally, the brothels appear to be rather ordinary and unremarkable. They are just buildings on the street. But the picture becomes much more interesting when we are cognizant of the moral and cultural geography of the landscape, when we have a better appreciation of the functional character of the space the buildings occupy. At this point, we are visualizing a Victorian city in new ways. We are seeing spaces that are invisible and yet discernible, spaces that Foucault called heterotopias.

Heterotopian space exists beside and in contrast to utopian space, which represents society's idealized image of itself. "There also exist in real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement of effectively organized utopia...a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable," Foucault said. "In contrast to utopias, these places, which are absolutely *other* with respect to the arrangements that they reflect and of which they speak might be described as heterotopias."¹¹³ Foucault posited several principles that governed heterotopias, one of which involved the juxtaposition of space: "The heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other."¹¹⁴ The brothels that stood on Broughton Street, Douglas Street, and Courtney Street, close to St. Andrew's Church and the Union, existed in heterotopian space.

¹¹³ Michel Foucault, "Other spaces: The principles of heterotopia," *Lotus International*, vol. 48 (1998), 12.

¹¹⁴ Foucault, "Other spaces," 14.

Those sites of sexual commerce also bring to mind the “paradoxical space” that Gillian Rose has described. She asserts that “paradoxical space” is an essential element in feminism and the subversion of patriarchy.¹¹⁵

The subject of feminism...depends on a paradoxical geography in order to acknowledge both the power of hegemonic discourses and to insist on the possibility of resistance. This geography ... allows the subject of feminism to occupy both the centre and the margin....It is a geography which is as multiple and contradictory and different as the subjectivity imagining it... [It is] a different kind of space through which difference is tolerated rather than erased.

The paradoxical geography that Rose describes is surely an apt metaphor for the parlour houses that Alice Seymour, Stella Carroll, Jennie Morris and Fay Watson operated. Sited on respectable streets and, in some cases, doing business for decades, they were places where difference was tolerated. In those sites of sexual commerce, women occupied both the centre and the margin of social space. The so-called carriage houses, and the less fashionable brothels on Herald Street, are also heterotopian, inasmuch as they represent physical and functional space that is both obvious and hidden. “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time.” To illustrate his point, Foucault evoked an image of American motels. Prominently sited on highways where everyone can see them, motels provide accommodation for travellers; but they are also places where lovers meet, “where illicit sex is totally protected and totally concealed at one and the same time.” Foucault also offered brothels as an “extreme example” of a heterotopia.¹¹⁶ Certainly, the brothels discussed in this study, and the other sites of sexual commerce considered here, manifest the characteristics of a heterotopia.

Having mapped and delineated prostitutional space, and having populated it to some extent, we should be able to consider the theoretical constructs and implications of the

¹¹⁵ Rose, *Feminism and Geography*, p. 154.

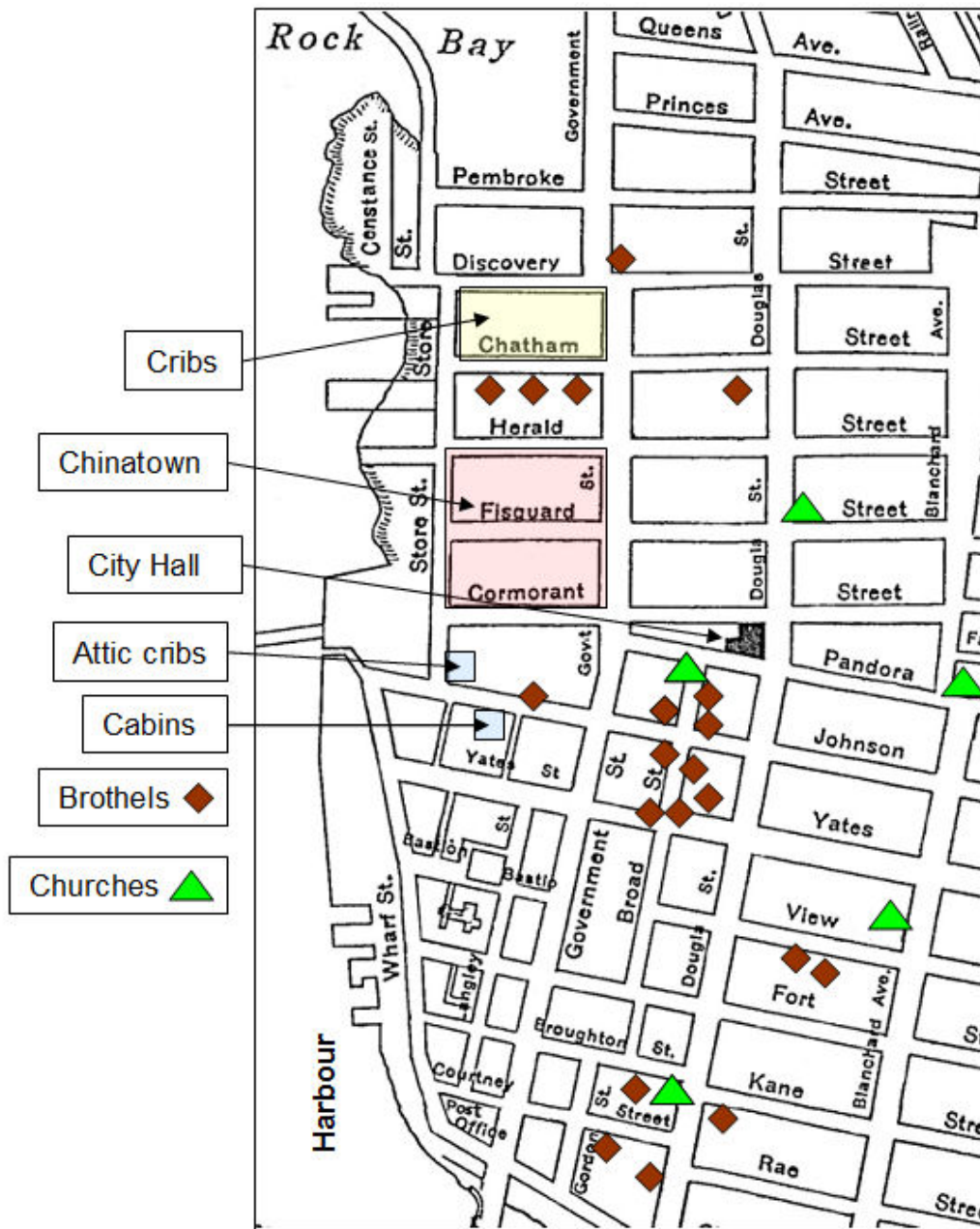
¹¹⁶ Foucault, “Other spaces,” 16-17. For a more extensive interpretation of Foucault’s heterotopias, see Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (London: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 145-163.

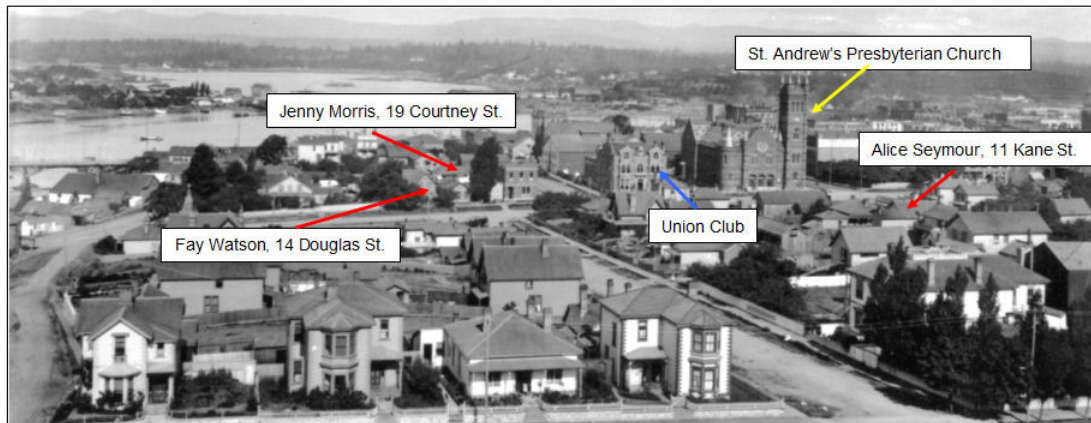
topic at more length. A meaningful consideration would require another study. The objective of this paper was to examine the social, economic, and political dimensions of sexual commerce and to outline the moral geographies of Victoria, British Columbia, during the city's formative years.¹¹⁷ The cultural geography offered in this paper problematizes the popularly-held version of Victoria as a city of gardens. But the garden metaphor is not entirely inappropriate. Complex ecosystems, gardens are fascinating places to explore. The untended parts of a garden, where there are nettles, are especially interesting.

- END -

¹¹⁷ This research paper was facilitated by two powerful research tools, the *viHistory* web site and the online index to the *Victoria Colonist* newspaper. The *viHistory* web site [<http://viHistory.ca>] is a digital archive comprising thousands of census records, directory listings, maps, and other historical documents relating to Vancouver Island, c. 1862-1912. The web site was developed with help from my colleagues in the Department of History at the University of Victoria: Peter Baskerville, John Lutz, and Eric Sager. The web site was created first by Alex Dunae in 2003; it was rebuilt in 2006 by David Badke at the University of Victoria Humanities Computing and Media Centre. The *Victoria Colonist* newspaper has been indexed by Leona Taylor and Dorothy Mindenhall. The index is accessible online at the *Victoria's Victoria* web site [<http://web.uvic.ca/vv/newspaper/index.php>]. I am also grateful to Sgt. Jonathan P. R. Sheldan of the Victoria Police Department for providing me with access to the police department archives.

Sites of sexual commerce in Victoria, British Columbia, c. 1900





Victoria, British Columbia, c. 1895

BC Archives G-04635