

# MAKING THE INSCRUTABLE, SCRUTABLE:

## *Race and Space in Victoria's Chinatown, 1891*

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I

THE FRONTIERS OF EMPIRE ARE often imagined as remote places, but in British Columbia the colonial frontier was mainly urban. Empire manifested itself most prominently in urban settings, especially in Victoria, British Columbia's capital city. Nineteenth-century Victoria – like Melbourne, Auckland, and Cape Town – was an entrepôt in a settler-colony linked to the larger networks of global commerce and racialized hierarchies. In such outpost cities, as the Australian geographer Jane Jacobs observed, and Renisa Mawani and Penelope Edwards have demonstrated, “the spatial order of imperial imaginings was rapidly ... realised” in distinctive racial patterns and morphologies.<sup>1</sup> Nothing symbolizes racialized spatial order and race relations as much as Victoria's Chinatown. This, Canada's oldest Chinatown, was established in the colonial era and, according to prevailing opinion, provided a haven for Chinese immigrants who were disliked by white residents in the host community. The geographer David Chuenyan Lai, who has written extensively on Chinatowns in Canada, described Victoria's Chinatown as a “Forbidden City” and interpreted it as a racially segregated enclave that provided comfort and security for Chinese residents away from the hateful glare of Westerners: “Largely ostracized from Canadian society, [members of Victoria's Chinese community] did not feel safe and secure once they were outside Chinatown; its Forbidden Town reputation

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 3; Renisa Mawani, *Colonial Proximities: Crossracial Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871–1921* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

insulated them from the hostility of the white public.”<sup>2</sup> To Caucasian outsiders, Victoria’s Chinatown was apparently a frightening, repulsive, and inscrutable place. Referring to the last decades of the nineteenth century, Lai wrote: “In those days, virtually no Caucasians strolled in Chinatown, which was perceived by them as an exotic, hellish, and mysterious enclave of ‘long-tailed, rice-eating aliens.’”<sup>3</sup>

Kay Anderson offers a similar picture. Her study of racial discourse focuses on Vancouver, but her analysis, she claims, is applicable to Chinatowns elsewhere in North America. She argues that Chinatowns were social constructs created by and for Europeans who “sought to confirm the ‘otherness’ of the Chinese” in North America. “For Europeans, Chinatown embodied all those features that seemed to set the Chinese apart” from the host society. Thus, Chinatown was “a set of absences (non-white, non-Christian, uncivilized, and amoral) that revealed the biases” of the dominant white Anglo settler society.<sup>4</sup> As a physical place, Anderson argues further, Chinatown was loathed by and closed to outsiders. In this respect, it was not unlike the “Forbidden City” described by her fellow geographer, Lai. Historians have conveyed a similar impression of Chinatowns in British Columbia. In their view, Chinatown was a defensive “ghetto” that was separated, because of racial imperatives, from the surrounding community.<sup>5</sup> The geographical distance between East and West was not great, but the social divide was, apparently, immense.

That’s not the way it looks to us. Our analysis of Victoria’s supposedly inscrutable Chinese quarter reveals a community that was extensively but not exclusively Chinese and a Chinese population that was not confined to Chinatown. In our view Victoria was more racially integrated, and the Forbidden City less forbidding, than the rhetoric of racism evident in traditional sources has led us to believe. Our research into the racial make-up of Victoria indicates that the boundaries of race were not as fixed as they have often been assumed to be.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> David Chueyan Lai, *Forbidden City within Victoria: Myth, Symbol and Streetscape of Canada’s Earliest Chinatown* (Victoria: Orca Books, 1991), 1.

<sup>3</sup> David Chueyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 197.

<sup>4</sup> Kay Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 24-25, 105 and *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989), 29; W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 49.

<sup>6</sup> This article is derived from a larger work funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). John S. Lutz (Department of History, University of

Here we focus on 1891, when Victoria was near its zenith and when anti-Chinese sentiment seemed to be particularly virulent and pervasive. We challenge the notion of racial space suggested by the “Forbidden City” trope and offer new insights into how race was lived in late-nineteenth-century Victoria – insights that differ from claims in much of the current literature. We do not dispute the existence of racial prejudice towards the Chinese during the period; rather, we seek to reassess the interpretations of historians and social scientists who have based their conclusions about racism and colonialism largely on narrative material. We have devised a new methodology for examining constructs of racism and colonialism, a mutual interpolation of geography and social theory that combines the use of geographical information systems (GIS) with discourse analysis. While acknowledging the relevance of cultural hegemony and the imaginary geographies that informed Kay Anderson’s important study, we unfold a theoretical framework derived from the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, the philosopher and sociologist best known for his work on the “production of space.” He argues that space is not an empty or inert entity but, rather, something that is determined by ever-changing social relationships. “Space,” Lefebvre writes, “is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations, but is also producing and produced by social relations.” He is especially interested in the evolution of cities and the dynamics of space in urban places. The city, he says, is “a space that is fashioned, shaped and invested by social activities” and within it are myriad spaces that are similarly affected by social “interrelationships.”<sup>7</sup>

Other scholars have also been interested in the production of space in colonial settings. Michel Foucault made a start in his essay “Space, Knowledge and Power,” and these ideas were taken up in a colonial setting in Timothy Mitchell’s *Colonising Egypt*. Even more germane to our research is the work of Michel de Certeau on the strategies of urban colonialism and the tactics of resistance. Of all the ways space is produced, the creation of a settler-colonial city in the midst of an indigenous homeland is perhaps one of the most visible. Likewise, the

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Victoria) is the principal investigator in this project, provisionally entitled “Turning Space Inside Out: Racial Space in Victorian Canada.” Jason A. Gilliland (Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario) and Patrick A. Dunae (Department of History, Vancouver Island University) are co-investigators. Donald J. Lafreniere (Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario) is co-researcher and technical assistant, and he created the maps for this article. In our ongoing SSHRC research project, we are studying racial space in Victoria, British Columbia, from 1861 to 1911.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 21, 73.

social production of “Indian Streets,” “Skid Rows,” “Red Light” districts, and “Posh” neighbourhoods all illustrate how urban space is permeated by class, gender, and race.<sup>8</sup>

In our view, the city of Victoria and its Chinatown reflected the dynamics that Lefebvre describes. The traditional image of Victoria, a place fractured and rigidly defined by race and social class, is problematized by the assessment offered here. The project described in this article, and the methodology that informs it, offers a new foundation for discussing race, colonialism, and urban space in British Columbia and other places.

## II

Victoria’s imperial character was shaped by many forces, including its status as a colonial and provincial capital and its proximity to the Royal Navy station at Esquimalt. Its place on the “all-red route” (so named because British-controlled railway and steamship lines were shown in red ink on contemporary maps) connected Victoria to the constituents of the British Empire.<sup>9</sup> Victoria was very much a settler-colonial city, having characteristic social-economic patterns of Europe overlaid on an indigenous set of social relations and environmental practices.<sup>10</sup> The impact of colonialism could be seen in the spatially delineated Songhees Indian Reserve, which was laid out for Aboriginal people on the western side of Victoria harbour, away from commercial and white residential neighbourhoods, and in Chinatown.<sup>11</sup> Like other modern,

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge and Power,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 239–55; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991 [1988]).

<sup>9</sup> J.F. Boshier, “Vancouver Island in the Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33, 3 (2005): 349–68.

<sup>10</sup> Penelope Edmonds, “From Bedlam to Incorporation: Whiteness and Racialisation of Colonial Urban Space in Victoria, British Columbia and Melbourne, Victoria, 1840s–1880,” in *Exploring the British World: Identity, Cultural Production, Institutions*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, Kiera Lindsey, and Stuart McIntyre (Melbourne: RMIT Press, 2004), 67. See also Penelope Edmonds, “Unpacking Settler Colonialism’s Urban Strategies: Indigenous Peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, and the Transition to a Settler-Colonial City,” *Urban History Review* (special issue) *Encounters, Contests, and Communities: New Histories of Race and Ethnicity in the Canadian City* 38, 2 (2010): 4–20; and John Lutz, “‘Relating to the Country’: The Lekwammen and the Extension of European Settlement, 1843–1911,” in *Beyond the City Limits: Essays from British Columbia*, ed. Ruth Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 17–32.

<sup>11</sup> On the Indian reserve, see Grant Keddie, *Songhees Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as Seen by Outsiders, 1790–1912* (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 2003); and Renisa Mawani, “Legal Geographies of Aboriginal Segregation in British Columbia: The Making and Unmaking of the Songhees Reserve, 1850–1911,” in *Isolation: Places and Practices of Exclusion*, ed. Carolyn Strange and Alison Basher (London: Routledge, 2003), 173–90.

settler-colonial North American cities, Victoria was transformed by industrialization in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The impact of new industrial technologies was evident in 1891 when Victoria was enumerated during the third decennial census of Canada. Styled the "Queen City" by local enthusiasts, Victoria was undisputedly the metropolis of the province. Victoria's "suzerainty," a commercial digest proclaimed in 1891, extended over an area of 365,000 square miles (945,000 square kilometres), a hinterland equal to the size of France and Germany put together.<sup>12</sup> Although the mainland city of Vancouver, established just five years earlier, was growing at a phenomenal rate and would surpass the provincial capital in size before the end of the decade, Victoria was British Columbia's premier city in 1891. Its economic strength was evident in its busy coastal and trans-Pacific trade and in a growing number of manufacturing, wholesale, and retail firms. Its confidence and prosperity were evident in new hotels and stately homes, and in the many churches and cathedrals erected between 1889 and 1892.<sup>13</sup> Victoria in 1891 was Canada's eleventh largest city and ranked tenth in manufacturing output. Per capita it had higher manufacturing output than any other city in Canada.<sup>14</sup>

When British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871, Victoria's population was about 3,600.<sup>15</sup> Ten years later, the city had almost six thousand residents.<sup>16</sup> The census of April 1891 placed Victoria's population

<sup>12</sup> *Victoria Illustrated* (Victoria: Ellis & Co., 1891). This lavish digest, published under the auspices of the Corporation of the City of Victoria and local Chamber of Commerce, was also issued under the title *Victoria, the Queen City* (1891).

<sup>13</sup> The social and economic development of Victoria is described in Harry Gregson, *A History of Victoria, 1842-1970* (Victoria: Victoria Observer Publishing Co., 1970); Derek Pethick, *Summer of Promise: Victoria, 1864-1914* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1980); Charles N. Forward, "The Evolution of Victoria's Functional Character," in *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, ed., Alan F.J. Artibise (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina Press, 1981), 347-69; and Peter A. Baskerville, *Beyond the Island: An Illustrated History of Victoria* (Burlington, ON: Windsor Publications, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Artibise, *Town and City*, 429; Canada, Department of Agriculture, Census of Canada, 1891, *Census Bulletin No. 12* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, July 1892), 39; John Sutton Lutz, "Losing Steam: Structural Change in the Manufacturing Economy of British Columbia, 1860-1915" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1988), tables 6-11.

<sup>15</sup> The municipal census of Victoria was taken by local officials in April 1871, a few months before British Columbia became a province of Canada (July 1871). In this census, the population of Victoria was recorded as 3,630. Although this census was not part of the first decennial census of Canada (which was also taken in April 1871), the Dominion government accepted the local enumeration as an accurate count of Victoria and published the results in the official *Sessional Papers of Canada* (vol. 16, no. 10 [1872], app. Z). The information was reprinted in *The Year Book of British Columbia and Manual of Provincial Information*, ed. R.E. Gosnell (Victoria, BC: Legislative Assembly, 1897), 418.

<sup>16</sup> Victoria's population in 1881 was 5,925. For a more extensive discussion of the 1881 census and its implications, see Cole Harris and Robert Galois, "A Population Geography of

at 16,841, but it was likely closer to the 23,000 captured in a municipal census carried out a few months later.<sup>17</sup> All commentators agreed that the substantial increase in population between 1881 and 1891 was due to the city's impressive economic growth. Victoria's economy benefited considerably from the Esquimalt & Nanaimo (E&N) Railway, which was completed in 1887. Its name notwithstanding, the southern terminus of this important regional railway was Victoria, not Esquimalt. An electric street railway, which began in 1890 and was one of the first in Canada, was also a catalyst in Victoria's growth.<sup>18</sup> Both enterprises, shown on the map in Figure 1, had an impact on racial space in Victoria.

Prior to the railways, Aboriginal people occupied shanties on the western end of Johnson Street near Store Street and the harbour; indeed, this block of lower Johnson Street was once known as "Indian Street" because of the large numbers of Native people who resided and congregated there.<sup>19</sup> The shanties were demolished and their occupants were displaced in 1888, when the E&N Railway built a bridge across Victoria harbour and placed its terminus on Store Street. The E&N Railway also disrupted the Chinese community located in this part of the city. With the new railway terminus, properties on lower Johnson Street increased in value and were subsequently redeveloped for commercial buildings. In a similar way, the electric tramway intruded on space that had been occupied by Chinese residents when tenements near Store Street were demolished to accommodate a power-generating plant and repair facilities for the street railway. These and related urban developments were the consequences of modernization and the features of settler-colonialism. Transportation infrastructure, particularly when

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British Columbia in 1881," *Canadian Geographer* 38, 1 (1994): 43–60, reprinted in Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> According to the federal government census office, Victoria's population had increased by an impressive 184.2 percent over the decade. See Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Census of Canada 1891*, Bulletin No. 1 (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1891), 7. But civic officials in Victoria were convinced that Dominion enumerators had undercounted and so commissioned a municipal check census. The check census determined the city's population to be nearly 23,000. The dispute is discussed in Patrick A. Dunae, "Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia," *Histoire sociale-Social History* 31, 62 (1998): 234–36.

<sup>18</sup> Donald F. MacLachlan, *Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway: The Dunsmuir Years, 1884–1905* (Victoria: BC Railway Historical Association, 1986); and Henry Ewert, *Victoria's Streetcar Era* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> On the Aboriginal presence in Victoria during this period, see John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 88–99. For references to Johnson Street's being the city's "Indian street" in the colonial period, see *Victoria Gazette*, 18 May 1860; and Dorothy Blakey Smith, ed. *Lady Franklin Visits the Pacific Northwest: Being Extracts of the Letters of Miss Sophia Cracroft, Sir John Franklin's Niece, February to April 1861 and April to July 1870* (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1974), 79.



Figure 1. Victoria's Chinatown and railway networks, 1891. Cartography by Donald J. Lafreniere.

its goal was to connect colonial resources with faraway markets, trumped residential use, especially that of the so-called "other." But while colonialism disrupted indigenous and alien communities in Victoria, it did not displace them completely. Native people were not pushed out of the city and over to the Songhees Indian Reserve, as some white Victorians hoped they would be. Having been displaced from Johnson Street, they moved to shanties and cabins on Herald Street, not far away. As for the Chinese, they, too, responded to industrial development by adjusting the geographical boundaries of their community. In this case, Chinatown

shifted a few blocks north, away from Johnson Street towards Cormorant Street and Fisgard Street.

During this period, the Chinese population increased substantially, from around 200 in 1871 to about 600 in 1881 and to at least 2,500 in 1891.<sup>20</sup> The dramatic increase in numbers between 1881 and 1891 was caused by an influx of labourers who had been employed in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the E&N Railway. Victoria's Chinatown was, not surprisingly, a magnet for these men and for a growing number of Chinese merchants and manufacturers.

This was a highly gendered space: in 1891, 95 percent of Victoria's Chinese residents were male. Many of the men were sojourners or seasonal residents. As for the female residents, outsiders assumed that most of them were prostitutes or concubines. In 1884, members of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration paid particular attention to the question of Chinese prostitution in Victoria and heard evidence about scores of prostitutes in the city's Chinatown. Women and children indentured in Chinese brothels were the focus of attention from local Christian missionaries and social reformers, who opened the Chinese Girls' Rescue Home in 1887.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, though, family units – comprising married couples and children – were taking root in Chinatown. According to the 1891 census, the Chinese community in Victoria included several dozen married couples and about one hundred children under the age of ten. Nearly all of the children had been born in British Columbia.<sup>22</sup>

The analytical capabilities of geographic information systems (GIS) have given us a relatively clear picture of how space was utilized in and around Victoria's Chinatown. The picture is striking on several counts: it reveals that much of the property inside Chinatown was owned by the white elite of Victoria; it shows that Chinatown was not occupied exclusively by Chinese; and it demonstrates that a substantial part of the city's Chinese population resided outside the Chinese quarter. In this view, Chinatown was a transactional space for social and commercial interactions between Victoria's Chinese and non-Chinese residents. We elaborate on and discuss the significance of each of these points

<sup>20</sup> Gosnell, *Year Book of British Columbia* (1897), 424.

<sup>21</sup> Canada, *Report on the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (Ottawa: Printed By Order of the Commission, 1885), 45; Patrick A. Dunae, "Geographies of Sexual Commerce and the Production of Prostitutional Space: Victoria, British Columbia, 1860-1914," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (n.s.) 19, 1 (2008): 121-22 and notes.

<sup>22</sup> This information is derived from the 1891 nominal census of Victoria, available online at <http://www.vihistory.ca>. The *viHistory* website is a digital archive of records relating to Vancouver Island.

in the pages that follow. But since our conclusions derive from our GIS work, we first describe our methodology in detail.

GIS is a method of managing, modelling, displaying, and analyzing spatially referenced data. Historical GIS (HGIS) is a way of linking attribute data, about people and activities from the past, with spatial data and to points on the earth. Historical GIS is a means of representing and studying historical phenomena spatially.<sup>23</sup> To build a GIS for this project, we began by digitally scanning archival maps and fire insurance plans of Victoria, circa 1891, importing them into a GIS software program, and geo-referencing them – that is, defining their locations by assigning real-world spatial coordinates.<sup>24</sup> Geo-referencing is carried out by identifying and linking a series of ground control points, known latitude-longitude (X,Y) coordinates, on the scanned historical maps to corresponding control points on high-precision, modern GIS maps. On the archival maps, the boundaries of Victoria city lots are delineated and identified with letters and numbers that constitute the legal description of the properties. For example, the legal description of a property in the 500 block of Fisgard Street in Victoria is Block G, Lot 446. The property is identified as such, G-446, on our 1891 map. Since legal descriptions have not changed over time, we can identify this parcel of land on the property layer of our high-precision GIS of modern Victoria and use its boundary lines and corners as spatial reference points for geo-referencing

<sup>23</sup> The power and potential of GIS is evident in recent work by the American geographer Anne Kelly Knowles. See Anne Kelly Knowles, ed., *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship* (Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2008); and Anne Kelly Knowles, ed., *Past Time, Past Place: GIS for History* (Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2002). See also Ian N. Gregory and Paul S. Ell, *Historical GIS: Technologies, Methodologies and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For historical GIS in Canada, see Jason Gilliland and Sherry Olson, "Residential Segregation in the Industrializing City: A Closer Look," *Urban Geography* 33, 1 (2010): 29–58; Mathew Novak and Jason Gilliland, "'Buried beneath the Waves': Using GIS to Examine the Physical and Social Impact of a Historical Flood," *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique*, 1, 2 (2009): [http://www.digitalstudies.org/ojs/index.php/digital\\_studies/article/view/174/218](http://www.digitalstudies.org/ojs/index.php/digital_studies/article/view/174/218); and Jason Gilliland, "Modeling Residential Mobility in Montréal, 1860–1900," *Historical Methods* 31, 1 (1998): 27–42.

<sup>24</sup> We used the popular GIS software program from ESRI, ArcGIS 9.3 in this project. Geo-referencing is an intricate and exacting process, but it is also one that is highly rewarding to the historical researcher. When geo-referencing historical maps, control points are used to build a polynomial transformation that can shift points on the historical images from their existing location to a more spatially accurate location. A first-order transformation shifts the image up, down, right, or left, or rotates, shrinks, or enlarges it. Second- or third-order transformations fit high polynomial equations to the data, shifting points in a non-uniform manner, allowing the researcher to transform, or "warp," the historical images to permanently match the map coordinates of the more precise modern GIS dataset.

the historical maps.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, we can use the digital outlines of modern lots to establish GIS representations of historical lots.<sup>26</sup>

The task of geo-referencing historical fire insurance plans involves a similar process. Fire insurance plans were produced by underwriting firms to assist in assessing fire risk. Generally, the plans were drawn to a scale of one inch to fifty feet and so are very detailed. They provide information about the size, shape, and structure of buildings; they show the layout and width of streets, and the civic addresses (i.e., street numbers) of buildings on the streets.<sup>27</sup> Fire insurance plans for Victoria, published by the firm of Charles E. Goad & Company in 1891, and illustrated in Figure 2, were particularly helpful in this study.<sup>28</sup> By geo-referencing the fire insurance plans to a modern map, we now have the ability to link an extensive array of data on the historical built environment of Victoria in 1891 to nearly every city lot.<sup>29</sup>

The next stage is to link information about the city's residents – compiled from tax assessment rolls, nominal census records, and city directories – to these lots within a GIS. Tax rolls provide the names of property owners and the assessed value of city lots. They also provide the dimensions and legal descriptions of properties, information that enables us to locate them on our property layer. Nominal census records provide detailed socio-demographic information on individuals, including information relating to age, origin, religion, civil condition, and occupation. Also valuable for our study, the 1891 census includes information about the buildings inhabited by census families. Enumerators recorded the number of floors and rooms and indicated whether

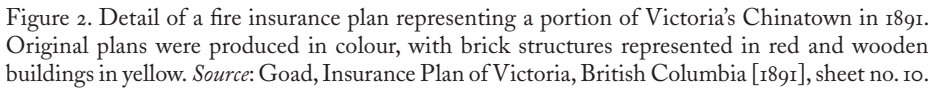
<sup>25</sup> We are grateful to the Capital Regional District of Victoria for providing us with a modern cadastral layer and GIS data for the City of Victoria.

<sup>26</sup> In cases where parcels of land have been subdivided or amalgamated over time, we have used GIS to add the former property lines visible on the historical maps (or to remove newer property lines that were not visible on the historical maps) in order to complete our GIS layer of historical properties.

<sup>27</sup> On the function and value of these spatially related records, see Diane L. Oswald, *Fire Insurance Maps: Their History and Application* (College Station, TX: Lacewing Press, 1997). See also Jason A. Gilliland and Mathew Novak, "Positioning the Past with the Present: The Use of Fire Insurance Plans and GIS for Urban Environment History," *Environment History* 11, 1 (2006): 136–40.

<sup>28</sup> See Charles E. Goad, civil engineer, *Insurance Plan of Victoria, British Columbia, including Esquimalt* (Montreal: C.E. Goad, 1891). Goad fire insurance plans, reflecting some of the racial assumptions and attitudes of the day, identified premises that were associated with the Chinese, as in "Chinese laundry," "Chinese tenement," and "Chinese theatre."

<sup>29</sup> The pronoun "we" is misleading. The exacting work of geo-referencing the fire insurance plans, digitizing the property layers, delineating polygons, and linking attribute data to 1891 parcels was done by GIS technician Kevin Van Lierop and graduate student Donald J. Lafreniere in the Human Environments Analysis Laboratory, Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario.



structures were built of wood, stone, or brick. With this information, we can determine the physical space of census households.<sup>30</sup> Regrettably for us, enumerators did not record the street addresses of census households, but that information was provided by the municipal check census, which was undertaken a few months after the official Dominion census. By linking names on the check census to individuals on the Dominion census, we can situate census families at civic addresses.<sup>31</sup> In addition, we have used published city directories to help determine the demographic

<sup>30</sup> We used nominal census records for Victoria City as transcribed by the Public History Group at the University of Victoria (1990) and the Canadian Families Project (1998) as a starting point. We are grateful to the project directors, Dr. Peter A. Baskerville and Dr. Eric Sager, for sharing their data with us. By comparing the manuscripts to the transcripts we were able to correct earlier transcription errors and add five hundred people who were missed in the earlier transcription.

<sup>31</sup> In 2008, the Victoria check census was transcribed by our research assistant Kathleen Traynor from a manuscript in the British Columbia Archives. It was a mammoth task. Student research assistants Shannon Lucy and Tylor Richards were instrumental in referencing the names from the check census to names on the Victoria portions of the official census. This, too, was a mammoth task, and we appreciate their good work.

and geographic landscape of Victoria in 1891. Alphabetical directories provide the names, addresses, and occupations of adult residents, and street directories indicate the location of businesses and residences relative to each other, according to their position on city streets. By using these sources in combination, we have been able to link over 90 percent of census families to civic (street) addresses.

The census family was a construct first introduced in the 1891 decennial census and has been employed as a fundamental unit of enumeration in Canada ever since. A census family or household might comprise a traditional nuclear family or persons who were not blood relatives but were living under the same roof, such as a boarding house. The nominal schedule was designed so that one person would be identified as the head of the household and others would be assigned relative positions, such as wife of head, daughter of head, servant, or lodger. Census families were numbered consecutively within each census subdivision. In urban centres like Victoria, this usually meant that census family no. 2 was next door to census family no. 1 and so on. With this information, we can place census households in spatial relation to each other; that is, we can determine, with a fair degree of accuracy, who lived with whom and who their neighbours were even if we do not have a precise address. By deploying this attribute data with spatial data, we can uncover relationships between race and space and colonialism in the Queen City that previous studies were not able to determine.<sup>32</sup>

In the late nineteenth-century, Victoria's Chinatown consisted of three city blocks bounded by Herald Street on the north, Government Street on the east, Johnson Street on the south, and Victoria harbour

<sup>32</sup> We realize that historical census records are problematical with respect to race: the 1891 census is particularly vexing because it did not include questions specifically about race. (In Canada, individuals were not categorized by "race" until the 1901 census.) On the 1891 census, respondents were asked questions about their place of birth, the birthplace of their father and their mother, and their religion. We can only infer information about race from those questions. Thus, we assume that a person who (according to the nominal census schedule) was born in China, whose parents were born in China, and whose religion was Confucian was Chinese. But here we are relying on information entered by enumerators, who may have misunderstood answers provided to their questions. In 1891, the non-Chinese officials who enumerated residents in Victoria's Chinatown were accompanied by Chinese interpreters, yet still there were problems of accuracy and interpretation. The enumeration of Aboriginal people was also problematical. On that note, for a description of the changing ideas of race in the census, see John Lutz, "Making 'Indians' in British Columbia: Power, Race and the Importance of Place," in *Power and Place in the North American West*, ed. John Findlay and Richard White (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 61-86; and Michelle Hamilton and Kris Inwood, "The Aboriginal Population and the 1891 Census of Canada," in *Indigenous Peoples and Demography: The Complex Relation between Identity and Statistics*, ed. Per Axelsson and Peter Sköld (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 95-115.

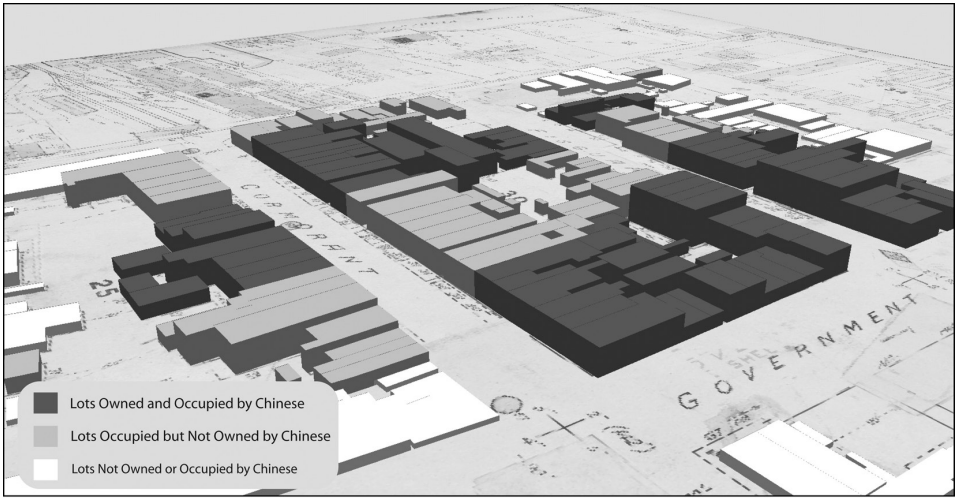


Figure 3. This 3-D image is derived from fire insurance plans (see Figure 2) and property tax assessment records. It shows property ownership in Victoria's Chinatown, 1891.

and Store Street on the west. Fisgard Street was then (and is still today) the cultural and commercial centre of Chinatown.<sup>33</sup> We might begin our examination of racial space by asking who owned property in this part of Victoria. That question arose during the hearings of the 1884 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration when the commissioners asked Victoria's mayor, Joseph W. Carey, whether the Chinese were "proprietors to any considerable extent of real estate" in the city. The mayor reported that Chinese holdings were "rather limited" and mentioned three large trading companies as the only Chinese property owners in Chinatown.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, most of the lots and buildings occupied by Chinese restaurant operators, launderers, merchants, and manufacturers in Victoria's Chinese quarter were owned by white Victorians. Tax assessment records for 1891 show that about 60 percent of the lots in Chinatown were held

<sup>33</sup> This street was named after a Royal Navy ship, HMS *Fisguard*. In the nineteenth century, it was spelled "Fisguard"; the modern spelling is "Fisgard."

<sup>34</sup> The mayor identified three firms – Kwong Lee & Company, Tai Soong, and On Hing – as property owners in Chinatown. They were large outfits based in Hong Kong and San Francisco. See Canada, *Report on the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, 44. Professor Lai, who has looked closely at land title records of the period, identifies Kwong Lee and the other firms mentioned by Carey as principal proprietors during the nineteenth century. He notes that ownership by local Chinese entrepreneurs in Victoria's Chinatown was not extensive until the early 1900s. Lai, *Forbidden City*, 19–20 and maps.

by non-Chinese individuals or firms.<sup>35</sup> The principal owners included Robert Porter, a retail butcher; Roderick Finlayson, a retired fur trader who helped found Fort Victoria; and the aforementioned Mayor Joseph Carey, who was a land surveyor by profession.<sup>36</sup> Amor de Cosmos, the Victoria journalist and politician who had campaigned vehemently against Chinese immigration in the 1870s, also owned property in Chinatown.<sup>37</sup> Property owners offered long-term leases and in many cases erected buildings to the specifications of their tenants.<sup>38</sup> Some of the larger buildings in Chinatown, including the Fisgard Street buildings pictured in Figure 4, were designed by prominent Victoria architects, such as John Teague, William Ridgeway Wilson, and Thomas Hooper.<sup>39</sup> (The locations of properties owned by, and leased to, Chinese residents are shown on the 3-D image in Figure 3 and map in Figure 6.)

This is not to say that Chinatown was a showplace of model homes and buildings. Behind the two- and three-storey brick blocks that faced on to the main streets of Chinatown a maze of alleys and narrow passageways connecting tenements, theatres, and gambling dens formed a veritable warren of cabins and shanties. The decrepit state of some

<sup>35</sup> Nineteenth-century property tax assessment records are held by the City of Victoria Archives. Records for 1891 were transcribed for this project.

<sup>36</sup> Porter and Finlayson also served as mayors of Victoria. Their tenure as civic officials is described in Valerie Green, *No Ordinary People: Victoria's Mayors Since 1862* (Victoria: Beach Holme, 1992). Finlayson was a major figure in the Hudson's Bay Company's operations on Vancouver Island during the colonial era. When he retired in 1872 he was one of the largest landowners in Victoria. The *Vancouver Daily World* described him as "a prominent figure amongst the business men in the Commercial quarter of the Capital." See Eleanor Stardom, "Roderick Finlayson," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 318.

<sup>37</sup> Property tax assessment rolls indicate that De Cosmos owned a parcel of land on the southwest corner of Cormorant Street and Government Street. In 1891 the lot was occupied by Chinese dwellings. After his death in 1897 his estate continued to derive an income from the properties. His opposition to Chinese immigration is described in Roy, *A White Man's Province* and in James Morton, *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1974).

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, a newspaper report about the erection of a two-storey brick building on Cormorant Street on a lot owned by an Italian merchant, Achilles Bossi. The building was leased to a Chinese merchant, Tye Chong, who intended to open a restaurant and grocery store on the premises. See *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 June 1883.

<sup>39</sup> Teague designed the Chinese Benevolent Association building on Fisgard Street in 1885 and a building for Chinese merchants on Cormorant Street in 1888. In 1894, he designed a large two-storey tenement on Government Street for opium merchants Tai Yuen. Hooper designed several buildings for Chinese firms on Fisgard Street in 1890. A building designed by Ridgeway Wilson, to accommodate a number of Chinese shops and apartments on Fisgard Street, was completed in 1893. Many other architect-designed buildings were erected in Chinatown over the next decade, and many of them still stand. See Martin Segger and Douglas Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1996), 114-20; and Donald Luxton, ed., *Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003), 76, 133.



Figure 4. Architect-designed buildings on Fisgard Street in Victoria's Chinatown, c. 1890. Image D-04748 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

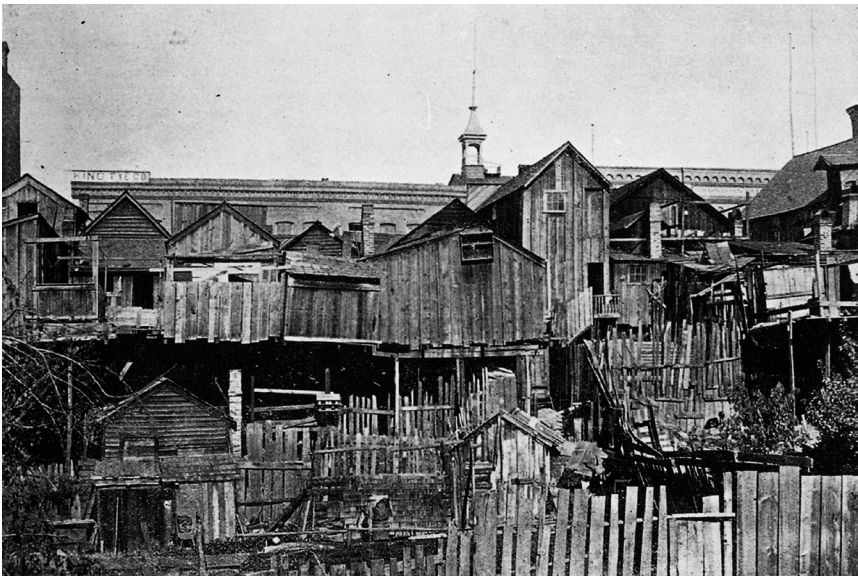


Figure 5. Back view of Chinese dwellings facing lower Cormorant Street (now part of Pandora Avenue), 1886, from a photograph by Édouard Deville. Image B-06853 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

Chinatown structures is evident in Figure 5, in a photograph taken by Édouard Deville, Canada's surveyor general, in 1886.<sup>40</sup> Municipal officials frequently complained about deplorable sanitary conditions in this part of the city. In 1890, Victoria's chief sanitary officer noted that "fully seven-eighths of the Chinese quarter was in a very filthy condition."<sup>41</sup> Many dwellings were poorly ventilated, overcrowded, and unsafe. The Victoria Fire Department was constantly attending to fires in Chinatown, and it is a wonder there was not a serious conflagration.<sup>42</sup> The fire department was also called on to demolish buildings in Chinatown that were deemed to be hazards to public health.<sup>43</sup> But not all of the deplorable structures were owned by Chinese persons. For example, Chinese dwellings on Cormorant Street, condemned as being "a danger to the public" and razed by the fire department in 1900, belonged to ex-mayor Joseph Carey.<sup>44</sup>

Census records undermine the "forbidden" and "inscrutable" image of Chinatown by revealing the relatively cosmopolitan character of the neighbourhood. In the third decennial census, Chinatown and vicinity was part of an enumeration unit known officially as Johnson Street Ward, B-2.<sup>45</sup> Enumerators identified about sixteen hundred Chinese

<sup>40</sup> This photograph was widely circulated and has often been reprinted. The original albumen print was made by Deville, who visited Victoria following an inspection tour of the newly constructed Canadian Pacific Railway. Deville was an accomplished photographer and a pioneer in the field of photogrammetry. He was also interested in town planning. See Richard A. Jarrell, "Édouard Deville," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 281-82.

<sup>41</sup> *Corporation of the City of Victoria: Annual Report (1890)* (hereafter cited as *Victoria City Annual Report*), Sanitary Officer's Report, 15.

<sup>42</sup> The *Annual Reports* include detailed records of incidents involving the city's fire department, many of which occurred in Chinatown. For example, at the beginning of 1890, several incidents were reported as follows: "4 January 1890, 11:30 a.m., fire at Ham Yick's, corner Government and Cormorant Streets, cause, hot ashes; 11 January 1890, 3:40 p.m., fire at Kwon Chung's, Cormorant Street, cause, defective flue; 15 February, 11:45 p.m., fire in Chinese store, Cormorant Street, cause, defective furnace," *Victoria City Annual Report (1890)*, 42. In his report for 1891, the city's fire chief drew attention to the dangerous condition of old wooden buildings. "During the dry season, a large conflagration is liable to occur, especially in the Chinese quarter," he wrote. "A stringent building By-law is required." See *Victoria City Annual Report (1891)*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Decrepit buildings occupied by Chinese and located near Victoria's City Hall were condemned by city officials in 1890. They were razed in a controlled fire by the fire department. A new municipal market building was erected on the site.

<sup>44</sup> In 1898, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* (which had been founded by Amor de Cosmos in 1858) described the wooden buildings at the corner of Cormorant and Government streets, on property owned by the De Cosmos estate, as "unsanitary shacks." The shacks were subsequently demolished and replaced by a handsome brick building erected for a Chinese business firm. See *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 October 1898 and 1 March 1899. The condemned buildings owned by ex-mayor Joseph Carey were located at No. 23 and No. 25 Cormorant Street. They were razed by the Victoria Fire Department in March 1900. See *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 8 March 1900 and 9 March 1900.

<sup>45</sup> In the 3rd decennial census of Canada, Victoria was divided into administrative units that coincided with electoral wards: James Bay Ward (A), Johnson Street Ward (B), and Yates



Figure 6. Map showing the location of Chinese-owned properties and Chinese-occupied premises in and adjacent to Victoria's Chinatown. Cartography by Donald J. Lafreniere.

residents in this part of Victoria when the Dominion census was taken in April 1891.<sup>46</sup> While the district was predominantly Chinese, it was not exclusively so. In round numbers, about six hundred people of European descent lived here, along with about one hundred Aboriginal people. In other words, Chinatown was about 70 percent Chinese by population. To some extent, the neighbourhood was divided along racial and ethnic lines. The Chinese occupied all of Figgard Street west of Government Street. Chinese also occupied nearly all of the adjacent block of Cormorant Street, yet even here we see diversity, as represented by

Street Ward (C). The municipal wards were subdivided into smaller census tracts, hence Johnson Street Ward B-1, B-2, and so on.

<sup>46</sup> Had the census been taken six months later, when men employed as seasonal workers in coastal canneries were back in town, the number would have been much higher. Chinese men were employed in various capacities in salmon canneries along the Fraser River, Skeena River, and at other coastal points. Each year, in February or March, they travelled to the canneries and commenced soldering tin cans. In the summer months they processed the fish; when the salmon runs were over, they helped to box, label, and load crates of salmon (called packs) for export. The workers returned to Chinatown in September or October. See Morton, *Sea of Sterile Mountains*, 172-73.

harness maker Peter Sinclair, who lived and worked in the middle of this block. He was located between Sam Kee, a tailor, and Tai Soong, general opium merchants. Caucasian residents were predominant on Chatham Street and Aboriginal people resided on Herald Street. But this was a very compact area and racial space was porous. We see evidence of this in the demographic composition of Store Street at the western end of Chinatown. In 1891, the block between Johnson Street and Fisgard Street accommodated the terminus of the E&N Railway, two hotels, and a dozen separate abodes or census households. Of the twelve households, four were occupied by Chinese men. Five households were occupied by residents from Continental Europe, one was headed by a male from the United States, and another was headed by an Aboriginal man. The remaining abode was occupied by an English man and his First Nations wife, one of several “hybrid households” in this part of Victoria.<sup>47</sup>

Although the Chinese were more concentrated geographically than was any other ethnic group in Victoria, they were not fully ghettoized. Our research shows that several hundred Chinese, comprising about 25 percent of Victoria’s Chinese population, lived outside the Chinese quarter. Figure 7 shows the distribution of Chinese households in Victoria.

Chinese encampments were located at the lime kilns and pottery works in Victoria West and at the brickyards near Burnside Road at the northern end of the city. Chinese laundries were situated throughout the downtown core and in James Bay, a residential neighbourhood on the south side of the city. In most cases, Chinese laundrymen lived on the premises. Chinese laundrymen also tended drying racks that were dotted throughout the city. These racks consisted of large wooden platforms and wire frames for drying clothes and bedding in the open air. They were placed on empty lots in salubrious residential neighbourhoods free of the smoke and soot emanating from the iron foundries and saw mills that bordered on Chinatown. Market gardens also denoted a Chinese presence beyond Chinatown. The largest vegetable market gardens were located near the south end of Cook Street in an area known as Fairfield. The market gardeners leased the land from the estate of Sir James Douglas, the former colonial governor, and from prominent citizens such as former police commissioner Augustus F. Pemberton.<sup>48</sup> Josephine Crease, the artistic daughter of BC Supreme Court judge Sir

<sup>47</sup> Library and Archives Canada, 1891 Census of Canada, reel T2692, Victoria District 4, sub-district B-2, pp. 20–30.

<sup>48</sup> Ken Rouche, *A Fairfield History* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 51, 67.

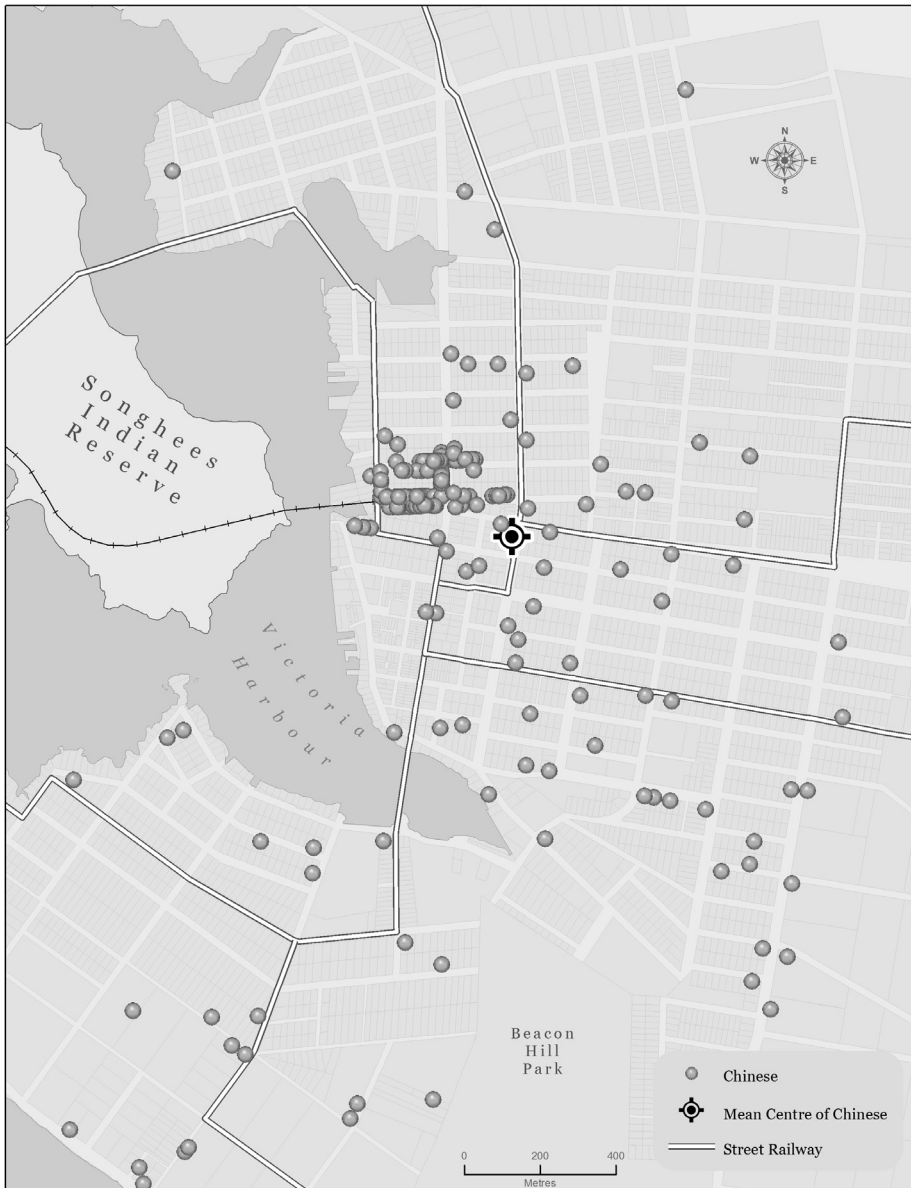


Figure 7. The distribution of Chinese census households in Victoria, 1891. Cartography by Donald J. Lafreniere.



Figure 8. A Chinese market garden in Victoria's Fairfield district. Detail of a painting entitled *Cook Street, Chinese Farm*, 1895 by Josephine Crease. Image PDP-02161 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

Henry Crease, depicted a Chinese market garden in the Fairfield area in one of her best known paintings (Figure 8). Chinese market gardens were also located on Queen's Avenue and Spring Ridge in the east side of the city and on Cedar Hill Road in the northeast part of the city. Beyond the city limits, in a jurisdiction then called Victoria District and now known as the Municipality of Saanich, Chinese market gardens were numerous.<sup>49</sup>

Chinese pedlars, or vegetable men as they were styled, would take their wares door-to-door around the city. As the postcard image in Figure 9 shows, they carried their produce in wicker baskets balanced on long bamboo poles. Victoria homemakers depended on the fruit and vegetable pedlars. Many homemakers also relied on Chinese pedlars for fabrics and threads. Winnifred Lugin, who was born in 1884 and was the daughter of a prominent Victoria newspaper editor, said that Chinese pedlars visited her home regularly when she was young. "There were pedlars who peddled clothes and spools of cotton and needles and scissors and things like that, you know. They would come into the dining-room [of our house] and spread all these things out

<sup>49</sup> Ursula Jupp, *From Cordwood to Campus in Gordon Head, 1852-1959* (Victoria: published by the author and printed by Morris Printing Co., 1978), 60; and Betty Bell, *The Fair Land: Saanich* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1982), 84.



Figure 9. Chinese vegetable vendor, Victoria, c. 1890. This picture was originally printed as a coloured postcard. Image courtesy of Ronald Greene, Victoria, BC.

and we'd take our pick of what we wanted, you see." Knowing that a favourite pedlar would be in their neighbourhood on a particular day, "we would govern ourselves accordingly," she recalled.<sup>50</sup> That is, she and her mother and sisters arranged their personal schedules to mesh with the routine of itinerant Chinese merchants.

Finally, there were the Chinese employees who resided in the homes of their white employers. The census suggests that about one hundred Victoria families (including the Henry Rhodes family, seen in front of their home called "Maplehurst" in Figure 10) had live-in Chinese cooks, servants, and gardeners. The families occupied large houses in Victoria's prestigious suburbs. Here, in elite European households, living space was rigidly segregated, with servants relegated to small rooms in the basement or attic, but social space was intimately interwoven. Male Chinese domestic servants worked in all rooms of the household and prepared and served food for their employers.<sup>51</sup> Many less affluent middle-class

<sup>50</sup> The interview with Winnifred Lugin was recorded in 1962 by oral historian Imbert Orchard and is preserved in the British Columbia Archives. Portions of the interview were transcribed and published in *A Victorian Tapestry: Impressions of Life in Victoria, BC, 1880-1914*, compiled and edited by Janet Cauthers, *Sound Heritage* 7, 3 (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1978), 25.

<sup>51</sup> So close was the relationship that it caused a certain amount of anxiety on the part of outside observers, who feared that Chinese "houseboys" might be overly familiar with the mistress of the house. In this respect, one of the most salacious rumours emanated from Victoria MP Arthur Bunster, who told a parliamentary enquiry in 1879 that the duties of male Chinese



Figure 10. The household of Sophia (Henry) Rhodes at “Maplehurst,” Victoria, with the Rhodes family and their Chinese servants, c. 1890. Image A-02794 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

households employed Chinese domestics on a daily or weekly basis, and these workers would travel from their abodes in Chinatown to their place of employment in white neighbourhoods. Other examples might be provided, to illustrate the diffusion of the Chinese population in Victoria and the day-to-day interactions between Chinese and white residents.<sup>52</sup>

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domestic servants included chores that “a white man is not supposed to do,” such as “scrubbing the woman of the house in a bath tub.” The allegations caused a sensation, and rumours were still circulating five years later when the Royal Commission of Enquiry into Chinese Immigration visited Victoria. One of the commissioners questioned the doyen of the city’s medical profession on the matter: “It is alleged ... that white ladies are scrubbed by Chinese whilst in their baths. Is it true?” “It is a lie,” the doctor replied. See *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (1885): testimony of Dr. J.S. Helmcken. See also Morton, *Sea of Sterile Mountains*, 69–70, 117.

<sup>52</sup> Since most homes in Victoria burned wood rather than coal, white householders dealt with Chinese cordwood dealers on a regular basis.

Clearly, they shared much of the city, and the physical distance between them was not great.

With GIS, we can determine physical space and the relative proximity of different racial groups in a precise way. Delineating social space is more problematic. We must turn to anecdotal and narrative records to attempt to determine interpersonal race relations during this period. The records suggest a rapport between white employers and Chinese employees in certain domestic places. At the 1884 Royal Commission inquiry, prominent Victorians who employed Chinese servants attested to their honesty and reliability. "I believe that two of the white servants I have had have pilfered more from me than any twenty Chinamen in Victoria stole from their employers," one of the witnesses averred. Said another patriarch: "It is not too much to say that without Chinese servants the privations in family life, [which were] extreme and of wearying monotony, would have been intolerable."<sup>53</sup> Obviously, experiences varied among different households, but in the main they were positive. "We had Chinese servants, gardeners and so on," a Victoria matron recalled. "They were excellent."<sup>54</sup>

Of course, racism was not absent from the streets or houses of Victoria, as the cartoon in Figure 11 illustrates. Unemployed white workers protested vociferously against the competition of Chinese labourers in the late 1870s and 1880s, using hateful and vicious epithets in their harangues against so-called Mongolians.<sup>55</sup> But the protests rarely involved physical violence. There were no provocative or violent incursions by anti-Chinese protestors in Victoria's Chinatown, as there were in the Chinatowns of Seattle and Vancouver.<sup>56</sup> In fact, during the largest anti-Chinese

<sup>53</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (1885): testimony of Chief Justice Mathew Baillie Begbie (p. 72) and Justice H.P.P. Crease (p. 142).

<sup>54</sup> Recollections of Nellie (née Todd) Gillespie (b. 1885), recorded in 1962 and transcribed in Cauthers, *Victorian Tapestry*, 24. An interesting, but supercilious, account of domestic relations between an English gentlewoman and her Chinese servants in Victoria is contained in William A. Baillie-Grohman's memoir, *Fifteen Years' Sport and Life in the Hunting Grounds of Western America and British Columbia* (London: Horace Cox, 1900). The concluding chapter, entitled "The Yellow and White Agony: A Chapter on Western Servants," was written by the author's wife, Florence Baillie-Grohman. Mr. and Mrs. Baillie-Grohman were enumerated in the 1891 Victoria check census.

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed discussion of one of the most vitriolic anti-Chinese organizations during this period, see Rennie Warburton, "The Workingmen's Protective Association, Victoria, BC, 1878: Racism, Intersectionality and Status Politics," *Labour/Le Travail* 43 (1999): 105-20.

<sup>56</sup> Anti-Chinese riots occurred in Seattle in March 1886 and Vancouver in February 1887. See Carlos A. Schwantes, "Protest in a Promised Land: Unemployment, Disinheritance, and the Origin of Labor Militancy in the Pacific Northwest, 1885-1886," *Western Historical Quarterly* 13, 4 (1982): 373-90; and Patricia E. Roy, "The Preservation of the Peace in Vancouver: The Aftermath of the Anti-Chinese Riot of 1887," *BC Studies* 31 (1976): 44-59.



Figure 11. This cartoon in the *Canadian Illustrated News* (26 April 1879) shows Amor de Cosmos, who was a Victoria MP at the time, trying to expel a “heathen Chinese” [sic] laundryman who allegedly would not assimilate with the host society.

demonstration ever held in Victoria, which occurred on the evening of 21 May 1885, about one thousand protestors marched from Campbell’s Corner on Yates Street to a rallying point at the south end of Blanchard Street, some distance from Chinatown.<sup>57</sup> Possibly they selected that spot because it was illuminated by an electric arc lamp, the only one in the city at the time. A newspaper report of the event was headlined: “Chinese Must Not Come / Grand Rally of White Working Men / Beneath the Rays of Electricity.”<sup>58</sup> In any event, when the demonstration was over, the protestors formed a parade to return to the city centre. Calls by a few agitators, who urged the protesters to descend on Chinatown, were ignored. Led by a brass band from a local temperance club, the anti-Chinese protesters marched back to Campbell’s Corner and dispersed

<sup>57</sup> Campbell’s Corner derived its name from Frank Campbell’s tobacconist shop at 343 Yates Street, near the southwest corner of Government Street. See *The British Columbia Directory for 1884–85* (Victoria: R.T. Williams, 1885), 25.

<sup>58</sup> *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 22 May 1885.

in an orderly fashion. One historian, James Morton, opined that the bellicose cry of "Through Chinatown!" would have ignited an explosive situation in most other cities.<sup>59</sup>

While unemployed white labourers demonstrated against the Chinese, other white workers benefited from the growth of Chinatown. These workers, including many skilled tradespeople, were employed by large contractors like McKillican and Anderson, which erected buildings for Chinese business firms like Kwong Lee and On Hing.<sup>60</sup> They and other Chinese firms advertised regularly in Victoria's daily newspapers. Middle-class Victoria men and their wives patronized Chinatown establishments routinely for comestibles, delicacies, and tailored goods; and since Chinese merchants held one-quarter of the city's retail liquor licences, they offered a good selection of wines and spirits for the discerning Victorian paterfamilias.<sup>61</sup> Also, many otherwise respectable middle-class white men gambled in Chinatown. They did not play protracted games like fan tan; instead, they bet on lotteries that were held throughout the day in Chinatown grocery stores. Roger Montieth, a lifelong Victoria resident who had worked in a real estate and insurance office near Chinatown, provided a description of the lotteries he played as a young man in the 1890s. One of the games was called Hong Kong:

Chinatown in those days was a thriving community ... They used to run a Chinese lottery there, which a lot of us white people used to patronize. You'd go down to these certain stores, if you knew them, and they'd give you a sheet of paper, sort of tissue paper with about, oh, 30 or 40 Chinese characters on it with about four or five different lines across it. You took a paint brush on the counter there and filled it in. [After every draw] the Chinaman you were dealing with, he'd say: "All right, 10 minutes now, Hong Kong, Hong Kong." So you'd be tempted to fill out another ticket for the succeeding one. This went on all day ... We very seldom won, but sometimes you could win, oh, maybe, 75 or 80 cents. But I say as far as I could see they were scrupulously honest.

As Monteith recalled, "having a flutter" in Chinatown was a common

<sup>59</sup> Morton, *Sea of Sterile Mountains*, 129. For a broader assessment, see David Goutor, "Constructing the 'Great Menace': Canadian Labour's Opposition to Asian Immigration, 1880-1914," *Canadian Historical Review* 88, 4 (2007): 549-76.

<sup>60</sup> The firm of McKillican and Anderson was founded in 1878 and erected many of the principal buildings in Chinatown. One of the partners, W.D. McKillican, was a long-time Victoria city councillor. See *Victoria Illustrated*, 75.

<sup>61</sup> Tylor Richards, "Business licences issued to Chinese merchants, c. 1871 - 1911, by Victoria City Council," unpublished research report, Department of History, University of Victoria, 2009.



Figure 12. Chinese children preparing for Chinese New Year in Victoria, c. 1891. Image C-06728 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

diversion for male office workers in Victoria.<sup>62</sup> And every year white residents from all social classes and all parts of the city – men, women, and children – assembled in Chinatown to witness Chinese New Year celebrations. On those occasions, outsiders were treated to music, dances, and extravagant displays of exploding fireworks, and they were feted with gifts, cigars, and Chinese liqueurs.<sup>63</sup>

Far from being a forbidding ghetto, Victoria's Chinatown had become a tourist attraction by the early 1890s: "Immediately following completion of the railroad [white Victorians] had shown the community with the object of demonstrating its evils, but soon they found that visitors, on returning to their homes, wrote about Chinatown as a quaint attraction

<sup>62</sup> Recollections of Major Roger Monteith (b. 1885), recorded in 1962 and transcribed in Cauthers, *Victorian Tapestry*, 27–28.

<sup>63</sup> Cauthers, *Victorian Tapestry*, 28–29. Chinese New Year celebrations were usually reported in Victoria newspapers. An extensive report, with a respectful commentary on Chinese New Year rituals and detailed descriptions of the brightly decorated buildings in Chinatown, appeared in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* on 3 February 1886.

in their fair city.”<sup>64</sup> Although some parts of Chinatown were closed to outsiders, tourists from eastern Canada and overseas were able to walk its streets unhindered. A well-travelled British writer remarked that Victoria's Chinatown was more accessible than he had anticipated: “It is true that in Chinatown the posters on the walls are a vivid orange decorated with strange brush-mark characters. But the houses are not the high, narrow, many-balconied buildings that one associates with a Chinese quarter.” He visited several Chinese emporiums, including “a handsome shop that might belong to a tobacconist in the Strand,” a joss house (a Confucian or Buddhist temple), and an opium factory. He also visited a Chinese school and met children, like the youngsters seen in Figure 12: “The children were perfectly charming, dressed in all sorts of gaudy silks, and beautifully clean.”<sup>65</sup> At every point, he was treated cordially.

### III

The visits to Chinatown by outsiders, daily interactions between white residents and Chinese pedlars and laundrymen, and other activities described in this article took place in a historical era marked by racism. Referring to the Chinese experience in British Columbia, Timothy Stanley comments that “racism in BC was not an aberration. It was a sustained reality, part of the air that people breathed.”<sup>66</sup> Peter Ward, who has looked closely at anti-Asian sentiment in British Columbia, argues that racist attitudes “were broadly shared” by white British Columbians during this period.<sup>67</sup> Without question, the Chinese were subjected to a great deal of racial hostility and discrimination. Racist attitudes are evident in the anti-Chinese petitions that Victoria MPs routinely presented to the federal government and in the anti-Chinese legislation that emanated from the provincial legislature. The fact that most of the provincial bills were disallowed by the Dominion government did not deter anti-Chinese legislators from writing new ones. Race was one of the primary means in which British Columbia society

<sup>64</sup> Morton, *Sea of Sterile Mountains*, 160.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Hanbury-Williams, “Vancouver and Victoria,” *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. 173, March 1903, 377–78.

<sup>66</sup> Timothy Stanley, “White Supremacy and the Rhetoric of Educational Indoctrination,” in *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan, 144–66 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), reprinted in *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, ed. Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland, and J. Donald Wilson (Calgary: Detselig Press, 1995), 51.

<sup>67</sup> Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 3.

was stratified and rights allocated or denied. The Chinese were denied the vote, prevented from engaging in professional activities, and refused employment on public works projects because of their race. In Victoria, racism animated organizations like the Anti-Chinese League and accounted for references to the “Chinese evil” in newspaper editorials. Racist rhetoric was everywhere, or so it would seem. Nevertheless, and as this article endeavours to show, the vitriol of racism was not actualized on the ground, at least not on an everyday basis. While some Victoria businesses boasted they did not employ Chinese, white Victorians patronized Chinese businesses regularly. White labourers and Chinese labourers rode the same streetcars to work sites beyond Chinatown. In the working-class district that included Chinatown, Europeans, Asians, and Aboriginals were neighbours.

This study raises a number of questions. Is there a disconnect between rhetoric and reality with respect to race relations in Victoria? Is the historical moment scrutinized in our study different from other historical moments? Was the nineteenth century city more inclusive, in terms of racial space, than the twentieth century city? Perhaps it was. In their landmark work on the cultural geography of race, American sociologists Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton note that American cities north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line were not racially segregated in the late nineteenth century: “No matter what disadvantages urban blacks suffered in the aftermath of the Civil War, they were not residentially segregated from whites. The two races moved in a common social world, spoke a common language, shared a common culture, and interacted personally on a regular basis. In the north, especially, leading African American citizens often enjoyed considerable trust, respect, and friendship of whites of similar social standing.” Residential segregation along racial lines, Massey and Denton said, did not occur in American cities until the twentieth century.<sup>68</sup>

We do not yet know to what extent this was true in Victoria, but our examination of racial space in 1891 suggests that conventional interpretations of race and place in the Queen City need to be reconsidered. The rhetoric of racism that historians have documented in textual sources – notably Royal Commission reports, political speeches, and newspaper editorials – may be misleading. Census data and spatially referenced records reveal a racial landscape that was more complex than conventional sources have suggested. From the perspective we have

<sup>68</sup> Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 19.

taken, Victoria's Chinatown does not appear to have been a forbidden or even a forbidding place; rather, it was a transactional space where white landlords rented to Chinese merchants, where Chinese merchants sold their wares to settler housewives, where bourgeois family men came to gamble. The research reveals a gap between actual lived realities and discursive and often hyperbolic racial constructions of the period.

We hope the methodology utilized in this article will open up new avenues of study and contribute to the reinterpretation of racial space with respect to other non-white residents in nineteenth-century Victoria, including Aboriginal people. As Jean Barman, Adele Perry, and other post-colonial scholars have noted, relations between Native and non-Native people in colonial Victoria involved inter-marriage, sexual commerce, and other social and economic exchanges. The result was a "hybrid" urban population and a complex web of social interrelationships.<sup>69</sup> The interactions between Native and non-Native people, Renisa Mawani notes, created "inconsistent, contradictory, and ambiguous racial truths," which, in turn, involved multiple "colonial identities" and shifting "terrains of racial power." Those dynamics, Mawani asserts, "need to be more fully explored."<sup>70</sup> The GIS-based model described here may be useful in the kind of postcolonial exploratory work she envisions.

Our model is not limited to nineteenth-century Victoria or to relations between Caucasians and Chinese or between European and Aboriginal people in British Columbia's capital city. The contradictory constructions of racial space that we have observed in Victoria may be evident in other nineteenth-century settler-colonial cities. We expect to see ambiguous socio-spatial constructions when we focus on Victoria in the early decades of the twentieth century, a period during which the city's racial complexion was altered by immigrants from Japan and India.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, researchers who are interested in Nanaimo, New

<sup>69</sup> Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 110-23; and Jean Barman, "Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria: Rethinking Transgressive Sexuality during the Colonial Encounter," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, ed. Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 205-13.

<sup>70</sup> Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*, 4, 9. See also Minelle Mahtani, "Mixed Metaphors: Situating Mixed Race Identity," in *Situating "Race" and Racisms in Space, Time and Theory*, ed. Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz, 77-94 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

<sup>71</sup> We intend to add census and other attribute data from 1901 and 1911 to our historical GIS. We are painfully aware of the truth of Ian Gregory's remark that building a historical GIS is "a middle- to long-term process with long lag times before the full rewards of the initial investment are realized." See Ian Gregory, *A Place in History: A Guide to Using GIS in Historical Research* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 15.

Westminster, Vancouver, and other places in British Columbia may find that racial space was more porous and permeable than they had anticipated. But we would not be surprised to see complex contours in those places because we regard racial space in Lefebvrian terms. Urban space is determined by social interrelationships, which, Lefebvre reminds us, are complex and fluid.<sup>72</sup> That being the case, we would expect to see Protean demographic patterns when we examine historical urban landscapes. Seen through a GIS-enhanced lens, the historical picture appears with a high resolution. Certainly, the picture is clearer than it was before. The historians' task of analyzing, understanding, interpreting, and describing the picture is, of course, as challenging as ever.

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<sup>72</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 73.