

## SOCIETY IN CARIBOO DURING THE GOLD RUSH

Following Australian, Californian, and lower Fraser River gold rushes, the Cariboo district of British Columbia was opened to civilization by gold-seekers of 1862 and 1863. In 1859 prospectors had ventured from Yale as far north as the junction of the Quesnel and Fraser Rivers and had found gold at almost every bar. During the next year Keithley and Antler creeks, east of the Fraser, were discovered. Finally, in 1861, a party including William Dietz crossed Bald Mountain and found Williams, Lightning, and Lowhee, the richest of all creeks in the district.<sup>1</sup>

The discoverers of Cariboo were quickly followed by a gold-seeking throng, most of whom came by steamer from San Francisco to Victoria and Yale and then by rough trails into the mines from Quesnel. A party of one hundred and fifty, moreover, came by land from Quebec and Ontario in 1862.<sup>2</sup> Most of these pioneers were strong physically but unfortunately few of them had any scientific knowledge of mining. Thomas Elwyn, the Cariboo gold commissioner in 1862, records the case of a young man who actually expected to find gold lying on top of the ground.<sup>3</sup>

Williams, at first known as "Humbug," was soon shown to be the richest Cariboo creek. Billy Barker, an Englishman, and John A. ("Cariboo") Cameron, a Scotch Canadian, in 1862 struck paying shafts below the Richfield canyon on Williams creek. From that date, although every section of Cariboo was prospected for a placer or a deep digging, Williams was the centre of the "rush." The year of the largest gold production in Cariboo was 1864, but even after that date fabulous sums were mined in the district.<sup>4</sup> In 1865 the Ericson Company produced \$158,000 in seven weeks.<sup>5</sup> This, however, is an exceptional case for most men found mining in Cariboo a very difficult occupation. Machinery had all to be made by hand of lumber from near-by forests. Haste was necessary because of the short summer season. And success, even in Cariboo, was not assured. It is said that only one-third of the miners made fortunes, one-third made a living, and one-third were failures.

Besides mining, the only other profitable occupation in the Cariboo district in the '60's was storekeeping. There was little demand for professional men. In 1862, a returned digger gave his

1 *Vide*, F. W. Howay, *British Columbia*, Vol. II, Vancouver, 1914, Chap. V.

2 *Vide*, Margaret McNaughton, *Overland to Cariboo*, Toronto, 1896.

3 Thomas Elwyn to Col. Sec., June 15, 1862.

4 Amos Bowman, *Field Notes on Cariboo District*, B.C., 1885, Victoria, 1886.

5 *The Cariboo Sentinel*, Barkerville, July 29, 1865.

opinion that a doctor who would forget his professional manners might possibly find an opening in Cariboo but that in the main the outlook was not promising because the miners felt that the best cure for illness was "more work." He was emphatic in discouraging all lawyers from entering the gold fields because "the colonists and miners . . . are given to a kind of equal man-to-man settlement."<sup>6</sup> The land has never been particularly suitable for agriculture.<sup>7</sup> Lumbering was merely a temporary industry, successful while towns were being constructed. And fur-trading, which could have been pursued to advantage, was neglected for the glitter of gold.

Although the basis of society was mining alone, and although production in the mines declined after 1864, civilization in Cariboo became more complex until 1868. The largest population known on Williams Creek, 10,000, was present during the summer of 1864 but in that year few institutions of modern society existed on the creek. The number of stores and churches, the library, the theatre, the fire brigade and the newspaper all developed after 1864. Richfield and Barkerville were established above and below the Richfield canyon on Williams Creek in 1862, and Cameronton and Marysville grew up on the lower part of the same creek in 1863 and 1864. Van Winkle was a small town established at the junction of Van Winkle and Lightning Creeks in 1862.<sup>8</sup> Centreville was the name given to a cluster of buildings on Mosquito Creek in 1867.<sup>9</sup> The growth of institutions in these towns shows that society continued to expand in Cariboo until 1868 at least. On September 16 of that year Barkerville, the "metropolis" of Cariboo, was almost completely destroyed by fire and this date may be used conveniently to mark the highest development of society in Cariboo. After that date population declined steadily, businessmen closed their doors, and the mines showed no hope of revived prosperity.

From its discovery until confederation of British Columbia with Canada in 1871, Cariboo was governed by the system established by Governor James Douglas in his Gold Fields Act of 1859. Under this act, a gold commissioner was appointed for each district of British Columbia and to him each miner applied for a free-miner's certificate. This certificate was issued on payment of a fee of one pound sterling and was valid for one calendar year. The gold commissioner was also the judge who heard mining disputes and criminal cases. As for self-government, miners found themselves

<sup>6</sup> A Returned Digger, Cariboo, London, 1862, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Vide*, Abstracts from Reports on Cariboo District, Department of Lands, Victoria, 1929, pp. 130-131.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Elwyn to Col. Sec., July 13, 1862.

<sup>9</sup> *Sentinel*, Oct. 14, 1867.

severely handicapped in Cariboo. In 1864 and 1865 of the legislative council of fifteen at New Westminster only five were elected members. Cariboo's representatives were James Orr and Dr. Black in 1864, George A. Walkem and Walter Moberly in 1865, and Thomas Harris and George A. Walkem in 1866. After the union of the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia in 1866, Cariboo chose one of nine elected members in a council of twenty-three. George A. Walkem and Dr. R. W. W. Carrall represented the district in the sessions before confederation. Besides working through their minority of elected representatives in the legislative council of British Columbia, miners in Cariboo attempted self-government through an elected mining board. The first mining board was elected in 1862 but as its suggestions were not considered carefully by the authorities, it was discontinued in 1865 and direct petitions replaced mining board minutes. A mining board was again elected in Barkerville in 1866.

As well as protesting against insufficient representation on the legislative council, Caribooites complained that they were unfairly taxed. In view of the fact that in 1866 the miners of Cariboo directly contributed over two-thirds of the revenue of the colony of British Columbia,<sup>10</sup> and that in 1869 Cariboo provided \$42,000 to the treasury of the colony while only \$19,348 was expended on her,<sup>11</sup> it appears that the complaints of the miners were justifiable. In addition to the yearly miner's fee of one pound and the trader's license fee of one pound every three months, men in Cariboo contributed to the colonial revenues through high customs duties levied on practically all goods as they entered the colony in the south, the high gold export tax levied by Seymour in 1865, and the buying of town lots, chiefly on Williams Creek. The price was \$3.333 per foot for land at Barkerville or Richfield in 1867.<sup>12</sup>

## II

Cariboo was primarily a frontier society. It did not represent a "wave" of settlement from the east as did certain districts in the United States, for practically all the miners came to Cariboo from the west by way of the lower Fraser River. Only one important party, the overlanders of '62, journeyed into the gold fields of British Columbia over the pathless prairies from Canada. Nevertheless, Cariboo was an outpost of civilization in the far interior of Britain's possessions in northwest America at a spot hitherto unknown to white men. Institutionalized society in Cariboo was merely a tem-

<sup>10</sup> Government of B.C. Blue Book, 1866.

<sup>11</sup> Chartres Brew to Col. Sec., Jan. 18, 1869.

<sup>12</sup> H. M. Ball to Chief Commissioner Lands and Works for B.C., May 21, 1867.

porary condition of development. Cariboo was a frontier community.

That which contributed to the hasty and rough condition of society probably more than any other one factor was the isolation of the mines. During the period of the real gold-rush to Cariboo, 1862-1865, men "beat their own trail" from Yale to the mines. Travel was made easier in 1865 when the Cariboo Road was completed 380 miles from Yale to Barkerville.<sup>13</sup> Thereafter, regular lines of communication were established between the upper and lower colony and between different towns in the mining district. F. J. Barnard, at that time, also improved the postal service. In 1868 a telegraph line was extended into Barkerville from Quesnel but the business enterprise was entirely unsuccessful.<sup>14</sup> Although these various steps were taken to improve means of communication between Cariboo and the outside world, the district remained largely isolated.

Because of these difficulties of communication with more highly developed groups, Cariboo maintained a frontier condition of society. Townsites were chosen, houses erected, and goods rushed in to settlers at any point which promised to yield plentiful gold. There was no real stability in urban settlement except on Williams Creek and even there, the centre of society moved from Richfield above to the Barkerville and Cameronton area below the Richfield canyon. Consequently, what buildings were erected (and those in Barkerville in 1868 had a value of \$673,300<sup>15</sup>) were little more than wooden shacks, although paint and windows were occasionally used to advantage. Plans were made by officials for well-ordered towns but street lanes were sold and houses erected hastily until Cariboo towns were solid masses of wood houses raised from the ground by three-foot log posts.

The existence of two institutions in particular reminds us of the undeveloped state of society in British Columbia mines of the 1860's. Had a town fire-hall been well-equipped and operated by well-trained firemen it would have been surprising, for no town in Cariboo was more than five, eight or ten years old. But fire brigades in Cariboo were "conspicuous by their absence." On the other hand, a characteristically frontier institution conspicuous by its presence, was the dance-hall and saloon.

During the years of the height of prosperity, largest population, and greatest gold production in the mines, there was apparently no

13 F. W. Howay, *op. cit.*, Chapter VI.

14 T. R. Buie to Col. Sec., April 16, 1869.

15 *Sentinel*, Sept. 22, 1868.

thought of organized protection against fire. Individual miners and storekeepers may have equipped themselves with leather fire-buckets. By 1867, having already suffered a depletion of their material goods, a few Caribooites under Robert Burrell and John Buie, fire wardens, collected \$676 in aid of Barkerville fire brigade.<sup>16</sup> Most of the inhabitants, however, felt that Cariboo was a charmed community, protected by God against fire and all other dangers, and therefore no precautions against destruction by fire were taken in that year.

A little over a year later, on September 16, 1868, the whole "metropolis" of Cariboo was destroyed by a fire originating in a saloon where a "hurdy" dancing girl was ironing. The frontier community was not charmed, then, and the precautions of civilization against destruction must be taken immediately! Subsequently, dances, private subscriptions of \$4,000, and a government grant of \$1,000 provided a large fund and the Williams Creek Fire Brigade became an important institution in the declining mining society.<sup>17</sup> Equipment was stored in the firehall which was part of the newly constructed Theatre Royal. Uniforms of scarlet and black placed the volunteer firemen among the most popular men in the community as they shouted:

"My shirt of wool, in scarlet dyed,  
And pants and belt agree—  
With helmet hat and badge on that,  
Of the W. C. F. B."<sup>18</sup>

The most characteristically frontier establishment in Cariboo was the hotel, dance-hall and saloon. Not that Cariboo night-life presented any repetition of so-described American mining town vices. Gunplay and drunken lawlessness were largely absent in British Columbia mining groups. A picture of Cariboo's saloons must be painted in definitely less vivid colours than one of Californian bars in '49. Nevertheless, the large number of drinking, dancing and gambling houses, their large clientele, and conditions therein, clearly demonstrate the standards of society in Cariboo from its discovery until 1871.

Every stopping place on the road, every creek store, and many restaurants and hotels in every town throughout Cariboo had its license to sell "wines, liquors, ale, port, cordials, and the best cigars." In them all miners were coaxed to "come and take a smile." Cari-

<sup>16</sup> *Sentinel*, May 6, 1867.

<sup>17</sup> *Sentinel*, Sept. 8, 1869.

<sup>18</sup> James Anderson, "I Belong to the Fire Brigade," Sawney's Letters & Cariboo Rhymes, Toronto, 1895.

boo was plentifully supplied with green tables, long bars behind which stood many brightly labelled bottles, and greasy dance-floors. In Barkerville, alone, in 1868, eighteen saloons as well as several restaurants and hotels, were destroyed by fire.<sup>19</sup>

Money "flowed very freely" in saloons. In 1868 at Barker-ville, brandy sold at nine dollars per gallon, rum and whiskey at eight dollars per gallon,<sup>20</sup> and consequently "business was good." At the green table as well as at the bar, miners congregated to forget the muddy shaft, the uncomfortable oilskins and the backache, and to "live fast, get drunk, an' a' that." Also at the green table (sometimes to the extent of \$800 at one time<sup>21</sup>) many of the hard-earned miners' nuggets disappeared—probably into the hands of a "dandy."

Professional gamblers and drinkers, Cariboo "dandies," were not numerous but even a few of them in a saloon carried away a large share of available nuggets. Their "flashy" persons, complete with "slick" black hair, bright eyes, stiff white collar, perfectly arranged tie, spotted velvet vest, huge buttons, and heavy gold watch chain, could be seen bending over the cards, poker chips, and cribbage boards every night of every month. One of the best known "dandies" on Williams Creek was Joseph Hough, a man who was a leader in preparations for Dominion Day celebrations, the man familiarly known as "Josiffius Hoffious of British Columbiae."<sup>22</sup>

The saloon, too, was the home of the German dancing-girls, known as "hurdy-gurdies" or "hurdies." These girls, brought from San Francisco by a "boss-hurdy," danced with any comer for the price of one dollar a dance, of which fifty cents went to the girl. For his dollar, the miner also received a drink at the bar. The hurdies, good dancers as they were, encouraged roughness in dancing, and therefore, the man who flung his girl the highest was considered the best dancer.<sup>23</sup> As far as dancing for pay is concerned, the hurdies were perfectly respectable. Old timers still living support the women as having been above reproach. But from suggestions recorded by inhabitants at the time of the hurdies' sojourn on Williams Creek, it appears that some few of them, but certainly not the whole group, were morally corrupt. Whether or not they were the victims of their environment and whether or not their conduct indicates the condition of the whole district are doubtful questions.

It is difficult to pass judgment as to the effect of saloons on Cariboo community life. They were certainly a *strong* force and

<sup>19</sup> *Sentinel*, Sept. 22, 1868.

<sup>20</sup> Chartres Brew to Col. Sec., Sept. 29, 1868.

<sup>21</sup> T. Marion, Conversation recorded in B.C. Archives, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>22</sup> A. H. Maynard, Conversation, Victoria, B.C., June, 1931.

<sup>23</sup> *Sentinel*, Sept. 6, 1866.

certainly a *frontier* force as contrasted to the characteristic institutions of more highly developed society. They frequently stole the miner's gold and sent him back to his claim penniless. They encouraged unhealthy drunkenness. On the other hand, there is no objective proof that life in the saloon strengthened immorality. Though friendships were the roughest, the saloon fostered a community spirit of comradeship and goodwill impossible elsewhere. Cariboo life was frontier life and the hours spent in the saloon were "just a happy trance."

### III

Thus far, care has been taken to point out that Cariboo was a frontier society, a hasty grouping of unstable institutions, a "boom" civilization. Now we shall show that while, because of geographic and economic conditions, Cariboo did not become a highly developed urban civilization, the district did adopt many characteristics of older societies. The choice of permanent townsites and erection of many business houses on those sites, the entrance of organized religion in the gold fields, the operation of a hospital, cemetery, library, theatre, and school, the organization of fraternal bodies, and lastly, the regular publication of a very fine newspaper at Barkerville; these things all show that an efficient system of government, the alertness and ability of the inhabitant, and the natural wealth of the country had combined to force the Williams Creek district quickly past the initial stage of development toward more intense and complicated social conditions. The existence of the above named institutions meant that Cariboo had passed the stage of tents, beans and bacon and had entered the stage of painted two-story houses and jam pies. But the conditions of their birth and the form in which these institutions existed indicate that Cariboo was still very near to the "age of discovery."

At first it was believed that Van Winkle would be the depot for the whole of Cariboo but by 1863 Williams was definitely the creek with the leading gold production. In that year, Richfield and Barkerville both drew merchants to their streets and the overflowing population formed a new town, Cameronton, one mile below Barkerville. As claims *below* the canyon continued to pay well, the lower towns continued to develop while Richfield lost some of its population. In 1866 the Bank of British North America moved its office from Richfield to Barkerville<sup>24</sup> and the Bank of British Columbia followed it the next year.<sup>25</sup> By 1868, after many changes in

<sup>24</sup> *Sentinel*, July 26, 1866.

<sup>25</sup> *Sentinel*, Feb. 15, 1867.

this direction, the area below the Williams Creek canyon had rapidly become the permanent urban centre of Cariboo with Barkerville, Cameronton and Marysville as the names of the three towns located there. Richfield, above the canyon, remained the centre of government.

As they noted the progress of the Williams Creek district, many business houses established themselves there. MacDonald opened a bank on the creek in 1863 but it ceased to exist in 1864.<sup>26</sup> The Bank of British Columbia in 1863<sup>27</sup> and the Bank of British North America in 1865<sup>28</sup> also opened offices at Richfield which were later moved to Barkerville. Mr. John Wark, trader, opened a Hudson's Bay Company store at Barkerville in 1867.<sup>29</sup> A government assay office was established in 1869.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile many private merchants had opened their doors to the miners. By 1868 the names of forty-one merchants at Barkerville and nine at Richfield were listed in the B.C. Directory. At least eighty-two business houses were destroyed in the Barkerville fire of 1868 of which twenty were occupied as general stores and eighteen as saloons.<sup>31</sup> At that time there were eight boarding houses, four shoestores, four carpenter shops, three barbershops, three butchershops, two banks, two private residences and two photographers on the main street. There was also one theatre, newspaper office, library and postoffice, Masonic lodge, doctor's office, church, painter's store, drugstore, stable, tailor's office, hardware, bakery, watchstore, blacksmith shop, tinsmith shop and express office in Barkerville in 1868.<sup>32</sup> We cannot be sure of the profit enjoyed by each of these merchants but there seems to be at least some degree of truth in the statement that the merchants, and not the miners, carried the gold away from Cariboo. Judging by prices charged, the merchants should have "made money." At Williams Creek, flour sold at 85c per lb. in 1862, 36c in 1864, 21c in 1868; butter sold at \$3.00 per lb. in 1863, \$1.50 in 1864, \$1.00 in 1868; and other goods brought similar high prices.

The growth of permanent townsites and of organized business firms shows how Cariboo became more stable economically. Likewise, the growth of the influence of religion in the mines indicates the merging of a new with older societies. For Cariboo was not opened up by missionaries. Rather did the church follow the miners

26 R. L. Reid, "The First Bank in Western Canada," *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. VII, 1926, Toronto, p. 294.

27 B.C. Directory, Victoria, 1863, p. 143. J. D. Walker to Col. Sec., May 21, 1863.

28 *Sentinel*, June 24, 1865, July 1, 1865. R. Shepherd to Col. Sec., July 24, 1865.

29 *Sentinel*, July 8, 1867.

30 Chartres Brew to Col. Sec., July 17, 1869.

31 Chartres Brew to Col. Sec., Sept. 7, 1868.

32 *Sentinel*, Sept. 22, 1868.



into the gold fields and in some cases not until after urgent requests from the gold-seekers. It was not until 1868 that there was any Sunday observance in Barkerville although from the first miners had shown a remarkably fine respect for religion. As early as 1863 they had chosen the site for the Cameronton cemetery and had since then kept it in good repair. But ministers had been slow in coming to Cariboo and had remained there only a short time.

"They canna live a year up here,  
But gang below for warmer cheer;"<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the permanent establishment of any denomination in Cariboo was an event to be well noted.

When the Roman Catholic Father Charles Grand(1)ier journeyed as far north as Williams Creek in 1861 he was the first Christian missionary in Cariboo.<sup>34</sup> His church did not formally enter the gold district until 1865 when Father Gendre celebrated mass at Richfield every Sunday.<sup>35</sup> In 1866 Father Magoggin bought a house to be used as a church at Richfield and in 1868 St. Patrick's Church was dedicated at the same town.<sup>36</sup> Thus the Catholic Church was founded in Cariboo.

The Angelican Church also sent two missionaries into Cariboo in 1861 and four in 1862, Reverend C. Knipe, Bishop Hills, Mr. Dundas, and Mr. John Sheepshanks.<sup>37</sup> In 1863 the Angelicans built the first church on Williams Creek<sup>38</sup> but apparently there was no regular preacher in the mines for several years. Reverend A. C. Garrett spent 1865 in Cariboo but James Reynard was the most important early Angelican preacher in Cariboo. He arrived in the summer of 1868 after a petition had been sent to the bishop by the inhabitants requesting a Protestant mission for the miners. Reynard immediately bought an old building in Barkerville to be used as a church but this was totally destroyed in the fire of September 16. Again, Reynard set out to establish the Angelican church in Cariboo, this time working on the building with his own hands. Finally, on September 18, 1870, St. Saviour's Episcopal Church was opened at Barkerville, a lasting memorial to the ardour of the Angelican missionary in Cariboo.<sup>39</sup>

33 James Anderson, "Second Letter to My Freend Sawney," *Sentinel*, July 23, 1866.

34 A. G. Morice, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia*, Toronto, 1904, p. 327.

35 *Sentinel*, Aug. 12, 1865.

36 *Sentinel*, July 13, 1868.

37 Records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, anonymous letter, June 8, 1861. Copy in B.C. Archives, Victoria, B.C.

38 J. Sheepshanks from Richfield to James Douglas, Aug. 26, 1863, quoted by Douglas from Victoria to Duke of Newcastle, Nov. 13, 1863.

39 *Sentinel*, Sept. 24, 1870.

Although the Methodists were among the first to enter the mining field by sending Reverend Arthur Browning in 1863,<sup>40</sup> they did not attempt to establish a permanent church until after the Barkerville fire of 1868. Thomas Derrick opened the new Methodist church on June 20, 1869.<sup>41</sup>

Through Reverend D. Duff's work in Barkerville in 1864 and 1865 the Presbyterian denomination may claim to have done its share in carrying religion to the miners.<sup>42</sup>

And, not content with these facilities, the Welsh congregated regularly at Cambrian Hall after 1866 to attend religious services that were "entirely unsectarian."<sup>43</sup>

Thus, practically every denomination of the Christian faith in the "old country" and in America had made an effort to establish itself permanently in Cariboo gold fields. The church did not attempt to colonize the district but it did follow the settlers immediately so that, as the *Sentinel* said, "the men working underground may go heavenward."

Although the religious lamp-posts of civilization had been brought into Cariboo mainly because of the interest of persons in the outside world, various other institutions were established in Cariboo because of the strenuous requests or demands of the inhabitants themselves. A hospital was demanded and granted to Williams Creek in 1863, a library in 1864, a theatre in 1868, and a school in 1871.

It is almost surprising that in an isolated "boom" town well supplied with dance-halls and saloons, there should be any marked effort to cultivate literary taste. Yet, on May 14, 1864, a petition was sent to the government from the miners and traders on Williams Creek requesting that a site for a library and reading room be granted them.<sup>44</sup> The library, erected at Cameronton by subscriptions, was soon opened with John Bowron as librarian. In 1867 the library was moved to Barkerville, largely at the expense of the librarian. Many of the books of all types, were contributed by the government and many by public subscriptions given through the Cariboo Literary Institute.

Caribooites again showed their desire for culture when they succeeded, mainly by their own efforts, in establishing a public school for children of the district. For several years they had been

40 John Evans, *Diary*, July 21, 1863. B.C. Archives, Victoria, B.C.

41 *Sentinel*, June 19, 1869.

42 *Sentinel*, Sept. 16, 1865.

43 John Evans to Chartres Brew, March 2, 1869.

44 Petition of Williams Creek inhabitants, May 14, 1864, enclosed by W. G. Cox to Col. Sec., May 14, 1864.

sending their children to private tutors when, in 1869, through "The Cariboo Sentinel," the inhabitants of Cariboo demanded that a school be opened for the twenty-five or thirty children in the district.<sup>45</sup> After the citizens had appointed a school board, the government granted them the usual \$480 for a school. The inhabitants themselves raised \$1,200 toward the erection of a school building and in June, 1871, the institution was opened for classes.<sup>46</sup>

Another step had been taken toward development into an urban community when men organized themselves into fraternal bodies. Of these two will be mentioned: the Caledonian Benevolent Society formed in July, 1867, and the Cariboo lodge of the Masons, No. 469, A. F. and A. M. consecrated on June 24, 1868.

When all these institutions had been established on Williams Creek the district was far advanced toward becoming settled in the regular channels of Anglo-Saxon communities. But had there been no newspaper the structure would have been obviously incomplete. On June 6, 1865 *The Cariboo Sentinel* was first published at Barkersville with George Wallace as editor. Its size was but four small pages. It appeared regularly from 1865 to 1875 with various editors and various days of publication at prices ranging from one dollar to twenty-five cents per copy. It censored the government and directed public opinion; it printed advertisements and filled up space with occasionally bright jokes. It was a real index of public opinion in Cariboo.

#### IV

The effect of this particular grouping of social institutions upon the 10,000 people on Williams Creek in 1864 and the smaller numbers in later years is largely a matter of conjecture.

Certainly the miners were a very honest group of men. Dump boxes were seldom robbed and although cabins and stores were only occasionally locked, few reports of burglaries were ever made. Certainly the miners were generous to their neighbors if we may judge by the large number of "standing treats" in the saloons and by the cash donations to public institutions. Certainly, too, the miners showed a reckless spirit by the way in which they threw away their gold at bars and card tables. And certainly they were a group not without sentiment. By naming their claims as they did, by remembering public holidays and anniversaries, and by requesting educational and religious facilities the miners showed a

<sup>45</sup> *Sentinel*, July 14, 1869.

<sup>46</sup> *Manual of School Law*, Victoria, B.C., 1901, p. 72.

praiseworthy and genuine desire to reproduce and perpetuate the customs and surroundings of their old homes.

The miners showed, too, a remarkable respect for law. Orderliness was a marked feature of Cariboo society. Gold commissioners found little difficulty in enforcing law and in punishing the few offenders.<sup>47</sup> Few prisoners were ever confined in the jails and, indeed, few arrests were even necessary.<sup>48</sup> The main reason for this condition, I think, was the admirably just and flexible system of government established for British Columbia by James Douglas and administered by Matthew Baillie Begbie and various gold commissioners. The system suited the condition of the country almost perfectly. Likewise, the attitude of the miners themselves, their desire to cooperate, and their direct and personal regulation of the actions of undesirable members of the community contributed a great deal toward maintaining order in the gold fields at a very critical period in British Columbia's history.

Moreover, Caribooites were characterized by their alertness to public affairs and by alertness to their own needs. No official could be appointed and no tax imposed or repealed without adequate discussion of the change in Cariboo mainly, of course, through the newspaper. The two great political movements occurring during the gold-rush age, union of Vancouver Island and British Columbia in 1866 and confederation of British Columbia with Canada in 1871, were both advocated strongly by the miners and store-keepers of Cariboo and by their representatives.

Two examples will be cited in regard to the alertness of Cariboo inhabitants to supply their own need. In 1863, because of the increasing number of accidents in the mines, a hospital was very necessary for Cariboo. Doctors had never been plentiful in the frontier settlement. And so, in that year, a petition sent to the government asking that a hospital be built was answered by the opening of the building at Cameronton.<sup>49</sup> For a year the hospital was supported almost entirely by the miners but in 1864 it was placed under government management, although still partially supported by public donations.

A theatre was also necessary to the life of the mining town. In such a building local talent as well as that of visiting minstrels, magicians or acrobats could be displayed. The Barkerville Theatre Royal was opened in 1868 by the Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association and fine concerts were given during the summer months.

47 W. G. Cox to Col. Sec., March 23, 1866.

48 Police Journals, Muniments Room, B.C. Archives, Victoria, B.C.

49 A. Browning to Governor Seymour, July 2, 1864.

After the fire, Caribooites built themselves another theatre and the Glee Club and Dramatic Association again presented their talent frequently.

V

Cariboo, then, was a hastily built community depending entirely upon gold production for its existence. It attracted men and a few women of many nationalities and while business houses, churches, a hospital, library, theatre and school were established on Williams Creek, the district developed from frontier toward higher social standards. But gold, the economic basis of society, disappeared and so the whole civilization crumbled between 1868 and 1871.

Nevertheless, the gold-rush of the '60's to Cariboo was not an isolated incident in history. At the time, it changed the unknown colony of British Columbia into a popular dreamland for thousands all over the British Empire, Eastern America, California and many foreign countries. It forced the union of colonies in 1866 and confederation in 1871. Not only did the miners use their personal influence in favour of these two changes, but the wealth of the district as a whole was an inducement first to Vancouver Island and then to Eastern Canada to value the western colony and province. And still today, the story of the Cariboo gold-rush is an enchantment for wealth-desiring or pleasure-seeking travelers in British Columbia.

ISABEL, M. L. BESCOBY