

Rails to Ruin: The E&N and Settler Views of Vancouver Island

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Abstract

The construction and operation of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway (E&N) on Vancouver Island is a relatively understudied area of British Columbia history. This is despite the place of the E&N in effectively creating the current systems of industrial exploitation and recreational use on Vancouver Island. The E&N and its land grant shaped the legal, political, military, ecological, and geographic history of the region. Legally and politically, the construction of the E&N was the impetus for mass land seizure by the Provincial government. Militarily, the railroad was important in securing the British Empire's operations in the Pacific, supplying an important coaling station. Ecologically, the E&N opened much of the island to exploitation in the form of mining and logging, as well as settlement. Geographically, the E&N connected the island to Victoria by land, transforming the relationship of people to the island both temporally (it was faster to travel than on steamship) and conceptually (new stops along the line participated in placemaking for settlers and visitors). I examine the place of the E&N in these historical areas and contextualize the seizure of aboriginal title on Vancouver Island in terms of three competing views of landscape: pastoral, industrial, and recreational. These three views provide an excellent lens for understanding the transformation of Vancouver Island throughout the 20th century, including the displacement of Indigenous peoples, the development of industry, recreational uses, and even early conservationist views.

²⁴² This paper was written on the territories of the lək'wəŋən and WSÁNEĆ peoples, and directly concerns the history of land claims on Vancouver island. While I have tried my best to address this history with a decolonial mindset, I am a settler working with historical settler records, and this paper should be read as such.

Introduction

Railways are places of connection, tools of economic and demographic change, assertions of sovereignty, facilitators of control, and weapons on the diplomatic, political and geographic battlefield of colonialism and governance.²⁴³ Even if they are largely forgotten, railways often continue to shape the histories, conflicts, and development of land and sea.²⁴⁴ The Esquimalt & Nanaimo (E&N) Railway, an early railway initially between two burgeoning cities on Vancouver Island, is an example *par excellence* of the way railways can transform physical and ontological space, affecting people's relationship to the environment.²⁴⁵ As a railroad of empire, the railroad was designed to tie Vancouver Island and British Columbia more tightly to the new Dominion of Canada while strengthening the position of settlers in the often fraught circumstances of the Pacific coast.²⁴⁶ The construction of the railroad, accompanying attacks on Indigenous title, and waves of settlement not only changed the map of Vancouver Island and surrounding waters, but altered what that map *meant*. Examining the railroad as part of a multilayered borderland shaped by conflict, trade, and differing understandings of landscapes, we can better understand these changes on the land, to the land, and 'in' the land from the 1850s to the 1910s. These perspectives build a more comprehensive history of the railway, and in turn, Vancouver Island. Through this, we can see that the construction of the railway altered the complex web of relationships between settlers, Indigenous peoples, and landscapes.

While there is an extensive literature on the economic and colonial history of the E&N railway, discussion of the inseparable ecological and geographic changes (changes to the landscape) wrought by the railway and its relationship to the ontological erasure (colonial unknowing/unseeing) of Indigenous peoples is slim.²⁴⁷ Similarly, E&N authors tend to place emphasis on railway stories, colonial successes, resource extraction, and Euro-Canadian 'Canadiana' rather than the often uncomfortable narratives of

²⁴³ Michael Ekers, "Financiers in the Forests on Vancouver Island, British Columbia: On Fixes and Colonial Enclosures," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 19, no.2 (2018): 270–94; Donald G. Janelle, "Spatial Reorganization: A Model and Concept," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no.2 (June 1969): 348–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1969.tb00675.x>; Malcolm McLeod, ed., *The Pacific Railway: Britannicus' Letters from the Ottawa Citizen* (Ottawa: A. S. Woodburn, 1875); Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990); Randy W. Widdis, "Railways and Borderland Spaces: The Canada–US Case," *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien* 63, no.1 (March 1, 2019): 11–26.

²⁴⁴ Ekers, "Financiers in the Forests on Vancouver Island, British Columbia"; Michael Ekers et al., "The Coloniality of Private Forest Lands: Harvesting Levels, Land Grants, and Neoliberalism on Vancouver Island," *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien* Early Access (August 16, 2020), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cag.12643>; Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, "Petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights" (University of Arizona Rogers College of Law Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program, 2007), <https://docslib.org/doc/10330514/hulquminum-treaty-group-petition>; A. A. Den Otter, *The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Widdis, "Railways and Borderland Spaces: The Canada–US Case".

²⁴⁵ Leslie Main Johnson and Iain Davidson-Hunt, "Ethnoecology and Landscapes," in *Ethnobotany* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2011), 267–84; Widdis, "Railways and Borderland Spaces: The Canada–US Case"; J.F. Bosher, "Vancouver Island in the Empire," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33 (2005): 349–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530500185845>.

²⁴⁶ Roger MacLean, ed., *Extracts From Debates in Dominion Parliament and British Columbia Legislative Council* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1880); Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*, 46–47.

²⁴⁷ Ekers et al., "The Coloniality of Private Forest Lands"; Glen A. Mofford, *Along the E&N: A Journey Back to the Historic Hotels of Vancouver Island* (Calgary: Touchwood, 2019), 226–230; Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein, "On Colonial Unknowing," *Theory and Event* 19, no.4 (2016), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633283>.

land seizure or even narratives of Vancouver Island as a multicultural or Imperial crossroads.²⁴⁸ Non-colonial narratives, especially Indigenous narratives, are often underrepresented or ignored, severing the historical connection between Indigenous peoples (and non-white peoples in general) and the environment. There has been some work on the effect of the E&N on forestry management, settlement, and its effect on Indigenous land title; however, in the context of how the railway transformed space and conceptions of space, the construction and conception of the railway has not been placed in a more complete environmental history framework that connects people to the environment.²⁴⁹

Fortunately, a large body of primary source documents survive that discuss in detail early colonial conceptions of the region, political and social conflicts over the ‘Indian Land Question’, legal and illegal settlement, and changing economic, social, and environmental circumstances on the Island. Firstly, we have access to provincial and Dominion government documents and transcriptions of the time. A disunited colonial legislature called for the publication of correspondence on the ‘Indian Land Question’ and an investigation into the unjust treatment of affected Indigenous peoples, giving us a view into competing visions of the surveyors and government officials, as well as Indigenous agency that shaped land policy in the colony.²⁵⁰ Speeches, editorials, and other texts of the time establish the political and economic value of the railway.²⁵¹ These primary sources will facilitate discussions of changing settler understandings of the Vancouver Island borderlands and landscape. These primary sources provide important insight into the changing relationships between settlers, Indigenous peoples, and the environment, and provide the basis of examining the E&N through a borderlands perspective.

Vancouver Island

Nineteenth-century Vancouver Island was many things: a homeland, a colony, a ‘wilderness,’ a place of refuge, and a place of trade. It was a homeland to many Indigenous peoples: speakers of Kwakwaka’wakw in the north, Nuu-chal-nulth speakers in the West, and Coast Salish groups in the South, and their tribes, villages, clans, and lineages who relied on and transformed the island and the sea around it for many thousands of years.²⁵² To the recent arrivals, Europeans, Asians, Polynesians, Africans, Indigenous Americans from far-flung places of Turtle Island, Vancouver Island was a colony and trading post at the edge of empire, the edge of ‘wilderness’.²⁵³ To free Blacks and escaped Black slaves, the Island

²⁴⁸ Boshier, “Vancouver Island in the Empire”; John R. Hinde, *When Coal Was King: Ladysmith and the Coal-Mining Industry on Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003); Richard Somerset Mackie, *Island Timber: A Social History of the Comox Logging Company* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 2000); Mofford, *Along the E&N*; Robert D. Turner, *Vancouver Island Railroads*, Second Edition (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1997); May Q. Wong, *City in Colour: Rediscovered Stories of Victoria’s Multicultural Past* (Calgary: Touchwood, 2018).

²⁴⁹ Ekers, “Financiers in the Forests on Vancouver Island, British Columbia”; Ekers et al., “The Coloniality of Private Forest Lands”; R. W. Sandwell, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998); Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*; Brian Thom, “Reframing Indigenous Territories: Private Property, Human Rights, and Overlapping Claims,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 38, no.4 (2014): 3–28, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.38.4.6372163053512w6x>.

²⁵⁰ Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*, 47-48; Richard Wolfenden, ed., *Papers Connected with the Indian Land Question* (Government Printing Office, 1875), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0060734>; “First Provincial Legislative Assembly,” *Daily British Colonist*, April 14, 1875, <http://britishcolonist.ca> (accessed 2021-08-01).

²⁵¹ J. Friesen and H.K. Ralston, eds., *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, Second Edition (Ottawa: Gage Publishing Limited, 1980); MacLean, ed., *Extracts From Debates in Dominion Parliament and British Columbia Legislative Council*; Roger MacLean, “Speech of Mr. DeCosmos on the Pacific Railway Route in British Columbia” (Parliamentary and Departmental Printers, 1878), BC Provincial Library, https://archive.org/details/cihm_14908; McLeod, ed., *The Pacific Railway: Britannicus’ Letters from the Ottawa Citizen*; Matthew Macfie, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Their History, Resources, and Prospects* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865).

²⁵² John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk; A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008) 3-15.

²⁵³ Roderick Nash, “The Value of Wilderness,” *Environmental Review* 1, no.3 (1976): 12–25.

was a refuge from a law that would at best discriminate and at worst take them back into the hell of chattel slavery in a land only separated from the island by an 11 mile strait, the United States of America (US).²⁵⁴ By the 1880s, Vancouver Island was situated in the province of British Columbia (BC), in the newly confederated Dominion of Canada.²⁵⁵

The rugged physical geography of Vancouver Island made travel overland difficult, especially in comparison to travel by steamship or canoe between numerous natural harbours. Settlers established a coal mine near Nanaimo, a sawmill and a small community of around two hundred people in what is now Port Alberni, farms in the Cowichan Valley, a small timber operation in Fort Rupert, and the small town and provincial capital of Victoria by 1871.²⁵⁶ These settlers often lived alongside large Indigenous settlements, as despite massive depopulation the Indigenous population still significantly outnumbered the settler population and would for some time; in 1871 there were an estimated 45,000 Indigenous peoples on the mainland and only 20,000 settlers on the mainland and the Island combined.²⁵⁷ The small settler population didn't stop the BC government from engaging in brinkmanship and tough negotiation with the Dominion government; not least among the demands that the Dominion accepted was the construction of a transcontinental railroad, a railroad with its terminus on Vancouver Island.²⁵⁸

Legal Consequences

The terms of the contract for the construction of the railroad bore far-reaching consequences even before the construction of the railroad. The first governor of British Columbia, Governor James Douglas, followed a land policy of negotiating treaties with Indigenous peoples, in accordance with the legal principle that Indigenous title could only be extinguished by treaty. Although he tried to limit settlement in areas with no treaties, this was extremely unpopular with the growing settler population of British Columbia, who wanted cheap access to more land. The growing power of the BC Legislature, the province's legislative body, and Douglas' retirement marked a shift to a new land policy, a policy under which "Native title would not be considered and reserves would be small."²⁵⁹ This policy was implemented by the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Joseph Trutch. He ordered that reserves deemed "too extensive, and in some cases extravagantly so," should be shrunk often against the loud protest of Indigenous peoples who had agreed or acclimated to earlier negotiated boundaries, or in many cases held different understandings of what they had agreed to.²⁶⁰ Confederation with Canada completed the transfer of power from the colonial authorities to the civilian government, clearing the way for further violations of previously recognized Indigenous title.²⁶¹

This disregard for Indigenous title ties into the contract for the construction of the E&N. The province did not intend to directly fund the construction of the railroad; rather, the builder of the railroad would instead be rewarded, by an act of the Legislature of British Columbia, with:

²⁵⁴ Wong, *City in Colour*, 97-99.

²⁵⁵ Tennant, *Aboriginal People and Politics*, 44.

²⁵⁶ Macfie, *Vancouver Island and British Columbia*, 39-52.

²⁵⁷ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13.

²⁵⁸ MacLachlan, *The Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway*, 13.

²⁵⁹ Cole Harris, "The Native Land Policies of Governor James Douglas," *BC Studies*, no.174 (2012) 101-122, <https://doi.org/10.14288/bcs.v0i174.182681>.

²⁶⁰ Tennant, *Aboriginal People and Politics*, 17-25; Wolfenden, ed., *Papers Connected with the Indian Land Question*, 46

²⁶¹ Peter H Pease, "Evolution of the Forest Tenure System in British Columbia" (Vancouver: BC Government, February 1992), <https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfd/library/documents/bib49592.pdf>.

one million nine hundred thousand acre (more or less) of public lands comprise within the area described by the following boundaries, namely:—on the south by a straight line drawn from the head of Saanich Inlet to Muir Creek [some 10 km west of Sooke Inlet], on the Straits of Fuca; on the west by a straight line drawn from Muir Creek, aforesaid to Crown Mountain [west of Upper Campbell lake]; on the north by a straight line from Crown Mountain to Seymour Narrows; and on the east by the coast line of Vancouver Island to the point of commencement. And including all coal, coal oil, ores, stones, clay, marble, slate, mines, minerals, and substances whatsoever, thereupon, therein, and thereunder.²⁶²

The Act assumes either that Indigenous title never existed, or that it had been previously extinguished. It also legitimised the rights of “bona fide squatters” and afforded them the right to buy up to 160 acres of the land grant at a dollar an acre.²⁶³ This “great land grab” set up the framework for legal conflicts of the next 150 years, many of which are still ongoing.²⁶⁴ It also transformed the east coast of Vancouver Island into an abstraction defined by lines on a map, an important process of settler colonialism that “turns land into fungible property, commodifies it, but also renders the land vacant by racialising the land holding of... indigenous people abstracted into savages.”²⁶⁵ The ownership and usufruct rights of Indigenous people could then easily be denied by implementing a racialised land ownership process of registration or purchase by which Indigenous people could not be land owners because they were not white.²⁶⁶ The legal implications of the E&N land grant bore many political, economic, and ecological consequences for Vancouver Island.

Political Implications

While the legal effects of the land grant were far-reaching, the most immediate implications of the railroad were political and were driven by one question: would British Columbia consider annexation into the United States? Vancouver Island in the latter half of the nineteenth century situated competing and conflicting ideas of national identity, and the Island itself was situated on the border of the Salish Sea, an area contested for most of the century between the US and the British Empire.²⁶⁷ The Terms of Union called for a railway “to connect the seaboard of British Columbia with the railway system of Canada... within ten years from the date of the Union”, and the complete lack of progress on the issue by 1873 drove the provincial government to represent to the Dominion “a feeling of anxiety and discouragement.”²⁶⁸ Editorials and political grandstanding on annexation into the US abounded. This was not an entirely empty threat. Fenians, American immigrants, and disenfranchised French Canadians had often advocated for US annexation, and in 1869 ninety-four prominent Victorians, including former HBC Chief Factor William McNeill, wealthy real

²⁶² “The Vancouver Land and Railway Company Act, 1882” (1882), <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/hstats/hstats/748458212> (accessed 2021-08-04).

²⁶³ “An Act Relating to the Island Railway, the Graving Dock, and Railway Lands of the Province, 1883,” No.51 (1883), <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/hstats/hstats/1003191769>.

²⁶⁴ Hul’qumi’num Treaty Group, “Petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights” (University of Arizona Rogers College of Law Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program, 2007).

²⁶⁵ Henry Jones, “Property, Territory, and Colonialism: An International Legal History of Enclosure,” *Legal Studies* 39, no.2 (June 2019), 187–203, <https://doi.org/10.1017/lst.2018.22>.

²⁶⁶ Jones, “Property, Territory, and Colonialism: An International Legal History of Enclosure”.

²⁶⁷ Leonard J. Evenden and Daniel E. Turbeville, “The Pacific Coast as Borderlands and Frontier,” in *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

²⁶⁸ Order of Her Majesty in Council admitting British Columbia into the Union, dated the 16th day of May, 1871. May

16, 1871. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/pl1t41.html> (accessed 2021-08-05)

estate agent Leopold Lowenburg, and other prominent businessmen, signed a petition to US President Ulysses Grant asking for his assistance in annexation.²⁶⁹ Canadian concern over annexation was compounded by American Secretary of State William Seward's demands for the annexation of British Columbia.²⁷⁰ While the popularity of annexation waxed and waned with the economic and political fortunes of the US and the Dominion, it posed a serious enough threat to motivate Prime Minister John A. Macdonald to secure the completion of a railroad across the Rockies and along Vancouver Island, with a steamship connection to the mainland.²⁷¹ The construction of the E&N was situated in a complex political landscape where the stakes were nothing less than the American or Canadian future of British Columbia. The construction of the railroad quieted calls for US annexation and cemented Vancouver Island's place in the Salish Sea borderlands, firmly on the Canadian side of the border, a border that would have cascading influences on the people and the ecology of the Salish Sea.²⁷²

Military Geography

Vancouver Island was in theory well-defended. On the seas, this was true. Esquimalt Harbour was the home base of the British Navy's Pacific Station, and several formidable warships could be found in the harbour on a given day. However, despite the importance of Esquimalt as the only coaling station on British soil "between Esquimalt and the Falkland Islands," the Admiralty in the 1870s found the harbour to be "virtually unprotected."²⁷³ The harbour defences were inadequate, and the naval base depended on steamships to either bring high-quality Welsh coal around Cape Horn or lower quality coal from Nanaimo, made expensive by a perpetual shortage of labour (local labour had to compete with the prospective income of the gold fields in the interior).²⁷⁴ Both routes were vulnerable to piracy, sabotage, or attack.²⁷⁵ The solution was clear: a railroad connecting Esquimalt to the coal mines at Nanaimo.²⁷⁶ This would counterbalance the threat of invasion from the United States and the presence of American troops on San Juan Island that "seriously threaten[ed] Victoria."²⁷⁷ The clash of colonial ambitions forced the solidification of the border where it was possible, as British, Canadian, and American officials sought to define the Salish Sea in terms of national space, a form of tenure that would secure control over marine and terrestrial resources.²⁷⁸

Ecologies, Geologies, and Land Use

While the E&N played an important role in the legal, political, and military histories of Vancouver Island and the Salish Sea, it also drastically changed the ecologies and geographies of the region. As the railroad wended from Victoria and along Langford Lake, it transformed watersheds; when the rails reached the Malahat, it moved the boundary of wilderness.²⁷⁹ The farther the railroad reached, the

²⁶⁹ Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician, The Old Chieftain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 45, 408; Willard E. Ireland, ed., "The Annexation Petition of 1869," *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly* 4 (October 1940), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0190529>.

²⁷⁰ David E Shi, "Seward's Attempt to Annex British Columbia, 1865-1869," *Pacific Historical Review* 47, no.2 (1978): 217-38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3637972>.

²⁷¹ Donald F. Warner, *Idea of Continental Union: Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960), 148-150.

²⁷² Wadewitz, *The Nature of Borders*.

²⁷³ Gough, *Britannia's Navy on the West Coast of North America, 1812-1914*, 284-294.

²⁷⁴ John S. Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 166-178.

²⁷⁵ Gough, *Britannia's Navy on the West Coast of North America, 1812-1914*, 133, 294.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 279.

²⁷⁷ *Morning Oregonian*, 11-23-1872, <https://newspaperarchive.com> (accessed 2021-08-06).

²⁷⁸ Jones, "Property, territory, and colonialism".

²⁷⁹ Kristi Carter and Dawn Roumieu, "Langford Lake (1973-2004)" (BC Lake Stewardship and Monitoring Program, 2004).

greater the change. While Dunsmuir used the railway to transport coal from his Nanaimo mines, the railway swiftly became the backbone of a growing logging industry; the railroad built branch lines to facilitate the transport of quarried stone, lime, bricks, copper ore, cannery fish, logs, lumber, explosives, iron, consumer goods, and people.²⁸⁰ Additionally, the railway facilitated the expansion of settlers into many areas previously difficult to reach, such as Shawnigan Lake and the Cowichan Valley, and brought something relatively new to Vancouver Island—tourism. This transformation of how goods and people could move and live on the Island created two conflicting settler views of the Island: one in which land needed to be exploited and transformed via industrial processes, and one in which the land was to be enjoyed recreationally and protected.

The ecological impact of the E&N should not be understated. From the 1880s to the present, the railway fundamentally transformed the relationship between people and the environment. Beyond legal changes in land tenure that worked to separate Coast Salish and Kwakwaka'wakw peoples from traditional methods of managing, harvesting, and living on the land, the railroad brought extractive industries on a new and bigger scale, as well as a fresh influx of settlers and labourers. At the time, logging and mining were fundamentally tied to water and rail. There were realistically no other ways to move large loads inland than canal or rail; early Island loggers were confined to logging riverbanks and shorelines. As colonial policy drove railways west and north, they facilitated the profitability of mines and logging camps in previously inaccessible areas.²⁸¹ The ecological effects of the railway are immediately apparent from an overview of old growth on Vancouver Island: almost all old growth has been logged within the E&N land grant whereas a significant (but small) portion can still be seen outside of the grant.²⁸²

The industrial legacy of the railway—pulp mills, mines, factories, shipping—heavily polluted Vancouver Island waterways. Alberni Inlet, for example, was itself an early “model” case study of inshore pollution, heavily contaminated with human and animal carcinogens flushed from a pulp mill originally made possible by the railway.²⁸³ Coal mining in the Nanaimo region left heavy deposits of aluminium, antimony, arsenic, cadmium, iron, lead, selenium, sodium, and thallium in well water, likely contributing to ill health in the area.²⁸⁴ Ironically, Victoria Harbour, the railway terminus and now a major departure point for whale watching, is the most polluted harbour on the BC coast, with high levels of mercury, PCBs, lead, cadmium, and pesticides in marine sediment.²⁸⁵ The changes wrought by industry, made possible by the railway, are so ingrained in the landscape that they reach deep underground and deep underwater.

The industrial transformations of Vancouver Island created geographic changes in how colonial governments and settlers experienced land and sea. Beyond new and fast-growing colonial settlements in the late nineteenth century, the newfound accessibility of Vancouver Island introduced new and often conflicting ideas of how land should be used. Early views of the island as represented by James Douglas and his superiors focused on a vision of small freehold landowners who would be virtually self-sufficient and who would come from a section of Victorian society that could afford to purchase land and undertake the relatively expensive journey from the metropole. The arrival of thousands of poor miners and speculators in the gold rushes of the 1850s and 60s made any such elite vision increasingly unlikely; the assertive popular government that was ascendant by the time of BC's entry into Confederation in 1871 buried any possibility of such a pattern of settlement. Instead, a new industrial view of nature prevailed,

²⁸⁰ Turner and MacLachlan, *The Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway: The CPR Steam Years: 1905-1949*, (2012), 23-37; MacLachlan, *The Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway: The Dunsmuir Years: 1884-1905*, 95-109.

²⁸¹ Mackie, *Island Timber*, 32-64; Otter, *The Philosophy of Railways in British North America*, 3-31.

²⁸² Ekers, “Financiers in the forests on Vancouver Island, British Columbia”.

²⁸³ Arn M. Keeling, “The Effluent Society: Water Pollution and Environmental Politics in British Columbia, 1889-1980” (The University of British Columbia, July 2004), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0091830>; Jan Peterson, *Port Alberni: More Than Just a Mill Town* (Victoria: Heritage House Publishing, 2014), 17.

²⁸⁴ Karla Joy Biagioni, “The Negative Impact of Abandoned Coal Mine Workings on Drinking Water Quality and the Health of Residents on Vancouver Island” (University of Victoria, 2006), <http://hdl.handle.net/1828/1760>.

²⁸⁵ Ocean Wise, “Pollution Tracker,” December 2020, <https://pollutiontracker.org> (accessed 2021-08-06).

one where “nature’s sole function was to provide for man’s ambitions,” and the role of the political was to assist in meeting a religious obligation to maximise productivity by “stepping up exploitation.”²⁸⁶ But as industrial exploitation shortened perceptions of distance and opened new areas to casual travellers or tourists, a recreational view of landscape took hold.²⁸⁷

A Pastoral View

The HBC intended to settle Vancouver Island with those “who will exert a sound and wholesome influence on society” and envisioned an island cultivated by freehold rather than tenant farmers, supplemented by paid Indigenous labour.²⁸⁸ This followed Douglas’ general plan of coexistence with Indigenous peoples.²⁸⁹ The view also represents a pastoral or Arcadian conception of the landscape captured by Douglas’ statement that Vancouver Island was “a perfect Eden” inhabited by the “children of the forest.”²⁹⁰ This view emphasised the simplicity and goodness of pious rural life rather than a programme of exploitation or conquest.²⁹¹ This colonial programme demanded colonists with the means to sustain themselves for several years as well as pay for the journey, and could not compete with US offers of cheap land in the Willamette Valley.²⁹² The colonial endeavour failed to attract more than a thousand settlers to the Island by 1855, exposing Douglas to criticism. In British Columbia, the pastoral or Arcadian view of land broadly did not survive the E&N.²⁹³

Industrial Exploitation

Alternative, more industrial views of land to Douglas’ pastoralism clearly existed on Vancouver Island even if they were not entirely represented in colonial policy under Douglas. An exploitative or industrial view is apparent as early as 1859 in a report to the Royal Geographical Society:

the extent of rich or cultivable land is thus extremely limited, and the timber of the woodland is so inferior to what is found on the neighbouring coasts that the principal resources of the island must, I think, be said to be the mineral wealth of its rocks and the fisheries of its seas. The latter, if properly developed, might be made extremely profitable, the fish, if caught and cured under European superintendence, and with European means, might be exported profitably to Australia, where salmon and herring are both in demand, and the two distant extremities of the British empire might thus be made to join hands, with mutual benefit to each other. Of minerals, coal is the only one which has as yet been profitably worked. The coal-fields are extensive.²⁹⁴

This view demonstrates several clear differences from that of Douglas. Firstly, Indigenous labour has been replaced with European labour. Secondly, the report focuses on the possibilities of large-scale exploitation rather than a yeoman ideal. This view of land, combined with progressive industrial views of technology, was a key part of what Der Otter calls “technological nationalism”: the idea of harnessing the

²⁸⁶ Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 52-53.

²⁸⁷ Worster, *Nature’s Economy*.

²⁸⁸ Hartwell Bowsfield, ed., *Fort Victoria Letters 1846-1851* (Winnipeg: Saults & Pollard Limited, 1979) 44.

²⁸⁹ Harris, “The Native Land Policies of Governor James Douglas”.

²⁹⁰ Bowsfield, ed., *Fort Victoria Letters 1846-1851*, 39; Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, 3-25.

²⁹¹ Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, 3-25.

²⁹² Bowsfield, ed., *Fort Victoria Letters 1846-1851*.

²⁹³ Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*, 14-20.

²⁹⁴ W. C. Grant, “Remarks on Vancouver Island, Principally Concerning Townsites and Native Population,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 31 (1861): 208, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1798261>.

technology of exploitation to justify and legitimise the Canadian state.²⁹⁵ John A. Macdonald turned to this technological nationalism to secure Vancouver Island and British Columbia within Confederation. The construction of the E&N and the cross-continental railway was part of a “divine” mission to civilise (exploit) the Canadian west.²⁹⁶ In this sense, the competition of the railroad was the fulfilment of a moral and religious mission to better exploit the landscape. While this vision was present before the construction of the E&N, its implementation was facilitated by the construction of the railway.

Hunting and Shooting

While the colonial exploitation of Vancouver Island resulted from the E&N and this industrial view of landscape, cheap access for middle class and upper class tourists to perceived wilderness had an effect overlooked by technological nationalists: tourism. The idea of tourism was not new to British Columbians; the *British Colonist* reported repeatedly on the presence of tourists (and sometimes their detrimental impact), especially in Paris.²⁹⁷ Travel writers and guide editors had several times commented on the beauty, “freshness, and calm” of the Victoria area in the 1870s.²⁹⁸ These early tourists were confined to the Victoria area and to mainland navigable rivers; one account recalls the “trial trip of four days on foot” required to reach Sooke Inlet via Albert Head and Matheson Lake, while a steamship tour from Victoria to the Fraser River canyon began in 1874.²⁹⁹ Tourism was therefore not an important aspect of land use on the Island until the railway brought a tourism and hospitality boom in the late 1880s. Even before the railway had been extended from Esquimalt to Victoria Harbour in 1888, five new hotels had been established along its route to Nanaimo including in the previously remote Shawnigan Lake area.³⁰⁰ These hotels and resorts introduced the Vancouver Island backcountry to middle and upper class visitors for walking, hunting, and fishing, but it also put them face to face with the industrial exploitation of the landscape. Duncan, a town boasting three “significant” hotels by 1901, was surrounded by clearcut.³⁰¹ Backcountry became frontcountry.

The introduction of tourism and the accompanying views of land as a place to hunt, fish, and explore, were naturally in opposition to the goals of industrial exploitation. Sports fishing, hunting, and backpacking have long been recreational interests aligned with ideas of conservation, setting aside land from industrial exploitation.³⁰² Strathcona Park, the Island’s first provincial park, opened in 1911 and immediately drew crowds of sport fishers. A stark change in bourgeois views of industrial exploitation is on show in the 1906 *Daily Colonist* publication of the mystery story “Arncliffe Puzzle”, where George Lester, a sports fisherman looking for trout, refers to the “bloated colliery magnate [that] probably owns the neighbouring property and the fish” and who mismanages his “vista of rolling parkland” by “encouraging otters, weasels, stoats, and other destructive creatures.... perfect pests in a well stocked river.”³⁰³ Lester’s view of landscape is reflective of an understanding of landscape as a place of recreation,

²⁹⁵ Den Otter, *The Philosophy of Railways*, 7.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁹⁷ “Varieties,” *British Colonist*, 1869-02-09, <https://britishcolonist.ca> (accessed 2021-08-06).

²⁹⁸ “Scenery and Resources,” *British Colonist*, 1872-06-07, <https://britishcolonist.ca> (accessed 2021-08-06); “The Portland ‘Oregonian’ Don’t Take Any Stock in the Annexation Movement,” *British Colonist*, 1872-11-29, <https://britishcolonist.ca> (accessed 2021-08-06).

²⁹⁹ “Knapsack Excursion on Vancouver Island,” *British Colonist*, 1873-05-23, <https://britishcolonist.ca> (accessed 2021-08-06); “Tourist Tickets, To the Canyons of the Fraser,” *British Colonist*, 1874-06-02, <https://britishcolonist.ca> (accessed 2021-08-06).

³⁰⁰ Mofford, *Along the E&N*, Appendix A.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 63-72.

³⁰² Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection* (Duke University Press, 2016).

³⁰³ Louis Tracy, “The Arncliffe Puzzle,” *The Daily Colonist*, November 8, 1906, <https://britishcolonist.ca> (accessed 2021-08-05).

where “hounds” are required to maximise the enjoyment of fishers and onlookers.³⁰⁴ This is in line with views of conservation at the time where industrial exploitation became an enemy of enjoyment of the land.³⁰⁵

Conclusion

While this paper has not addressed Indigenous perspectives on changing land use, it has worked to fill a gap left by historical scholarship on the changing settler understandings of landscape created and facilitated by the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway. The railway is an important piece of local history with deep ties to ideologies of control, exploitation, and enjoyment of nature. As the E&N effectively created the current system of industrial exploitation on Vancouver Island, it is vital to understand how the railway and its land grant shaped the legal, political, military, ecological, and geographic history of the Island. The railway is part of a settler ontology of exploitation and conservation. The goals of nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrialists play an often-uncomfortable role in the founding stories of Canada and the United States. As long as this settler ontology and industrial role is poorly understood, there will be a crucial part missing from a historical understanding of Vancouver Island and, by extension, the Salish Sea. The E&N changed what was done on the land, what could be done on the land, and most importantly it changed what people saw as the purpose of the land. These changes mirrored societal trends in North America, but with unique local representations that still reverberate today.

³⁰⁴ Tracy, “The Arncliffe Puzzle.”

³⁰⁵ Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement*, 290-292; Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 258-291.

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