

Reading Log #6

This week we look at a reading by Jorgenson titled "Into That Country to Work", explaining roles of first nations in the gold rush in Barkerville. History documents suggest that first nations were not present during this time, but other sources show otherwise. Although there was a large wipeout in the population due to disease the first nation people relocated, and still had present communities. They continue their ways of life which proved to be prosperous. There was a significant need for first nations people in the gold rush. Although some first nations people thrived others had to turn to sex work. There is an arguable presence of first nation people during this time.

Some historians argue that first nations were not present during the gold rush in Barkerville, but Barkerville is situated on first nations territory. "Although the area is currently considered part of the traditional territory of the Dakelh (Carrier) people, and despite much documentation of First Nations presence, Barkerville has long been subject to the myth that no First Nations lived or worked there" (pg.109). The Bowron Lakes and rivers were used in the gold rush for gold panning and trade routes. Many immigrants also turned to first nation routes through the Cariboo mountains to get to the gold rush. "*Cariboo Sentinel* (hereafter the *Sentinel*) stated that "it [was] a well-known fact that the Indians ha[d] trails and communication between Bear River and lake and Tete Jaune Cache" and proposed putting a road in for miners" (pg.116). The Europeans needed the first nations knowledge of the land to navigate it.

There was a large wipeout of first nation people in Barkerville during the first gold rush. Smallpox nearly wiped out the whole first nation population there. "Smallpox further reduced the First Nations population in 1862, the first year of the Cariboo gold rush.²³ The effects of disease are apparent in the memories of Barkerville's earliest white residents" (pg.116). With many of the first nations gone the residents of Barkerville witnessed the effects of their loss. For example the first nation people hunted moose around the area with them gone the numbers of moose jumped up. "McCabes also noted that the moose population exploded after a "passing of great numbers of Indians in some of the late epidemics" (pg.117).

Some of the remaining first nation people relocated from Barkerville. Many relocated for the fur trade to trading posts to make a more prosperous living. "First Nations also relocated to take advantage of the commercial fur trade economy, which was established and relatively stable by 1850" (pg.118). Many other first nations groups migrated to Barkerville to hopefully find riches in the gold rush.. "At the same time, rising employment opportunities associated with the gold rush attracted Aboriginal people to Barkerville from other areas of the province that were undergoing similar demographic changes" (pg.118). The first nations people set up "Indian Camps" near Barkerville. "Lillooet Indians were in the habit of spending their summer months in Barkerville in the [18]70s – their camping ground was on the East side of Williams Creek, opposite the hospital – the same camping [site] every year, as it was their custom to camp on the same ground when travelling up and down the road" (pg.119). Even with relocating the first nation people continued their ways of life .

Although the presence of first nations people is not well depicted in history they were a big part of the gold rush. They had means of finding good routes and roads for transport with their knowledge of the land. ""ere are numbers of Indians all through this region ... along the route. they work pretty well, packing over the portages, loading wagons and boats, etc." (pg.126). The first nations also transported and packed goods they made a business out of it. They would charge Europeans and even come Chinese

people, and would transport goods for them. "On several occasions, the demand for goods created opportunities for Aboriginal packers" (pg.127). First nation people also participated in gold panning. " *Sentinel* noted that "there [was] not an idle man on the creek," and that "in a few claims Indians [were] being employed"(pg.130).

Although some Indians made a prosperous living this way many had to resort to other means to make a living. Some even resorted to sex work. There were brothels in Barkerville and many first nations women would use their bodies for money or goods." Aboriginal women who came into contact with white men through the sex trade were comparatively more visible (and therefore potentially better recorded) than were those involved in other forms of work, but even here the records are either sporadic or of a sensational nature" (pg.132). "Bendixen owned and operated a long series of "parlour" and "private" saloons known to be disorderly houses" (pg,133). Although some women could sustain a living off of this, it was a dangerous trade.

Despite what some historians argue first nations were present during the gold rush in Barkerville. They were not wiped out and played vital roles in the gold rush. Some even struck rich and they made good livings using their skills to their advantage during this time.

Primary Document:

This primary document shows letters written by men who were present at the time of the gold rush. These letters give us a glimpse of life in British Columbia, and California during this time. We look at the lives of Gardiner, Charles Major, and Matthew Macfie. We just a first-hand look into the he lives of men seeking riches in the said to be promise land.

Gardiner is from Prince Edward Island and went to British Columbia to try and hit luck with the gold rush. He experienced a lot of hardships as did his crew. "I am afraid Mr. Editor, I have taken up too much space in your columns, and shall conclude by saying I should not advise anyone from P.E. island to come to Fraser River, with the intention of making his fortune; and I'm quite sure, speaking from experience, nothing will be gained by going for anything else, as the trip Michigan Bluffs, Placer County, California" (pg.237). We also see Gardiner face some troubles with the first nations people of the land. "Those nights we passed in sleeping in our wet clothes, or part of them only, as each in his turn had to keep watch, with revolver in hand, that the Indians did not steal our provisions, as well as Mamaloose (kill) us while asleep" (pg.236). Gardiner did not see the gold rush as a prosperous glorious thing, he portrayed the gold rush as overrated.

Charles Major was from Toronto. He saw the "new country" as a place to make a fair living although he did not find it anything special. "They say it wants a man with Capital to make money here; but a man with money in Canada will double it quicker than he will here" (pg.238). He did make a fair living but he was living the bare minimum. He did not have as bad of an experience with the local first nations people as Gardiner did. "The Indians are not very troublesome at the mines; they are kept down pretty well" (pg.239). Charles Major saw that people could make a fair living but didn't see anything special there.

Matthew Macfie was from Vancouver Island. He explains the changes he sees with increased immigration to Vancouver Island with the gold rush. He saw influxes of people coming

and leaving with the ups and downs of the gold rush. "in September of '59, when I first set foot in Victoria, the process of depopulation was still going on, though it soon after reached its lowest point" (pg.244). There were increased amounts of Chinese and other colored people to Victoria. In this document we see racist views and how colored people were seen as a lesser race. "Yet even on the British side of the boundary there is a disposition to look coldly upon the immigration of Celestials" (pg.246). "He maintained that the stains of supreme insignificance before the Almighty, in comparison, and that the separation desired by the whites was of carnal suggestion, which Christianity demanded should be repressed (pg.248). He also touches on how women were viewed both American and British. "Whether that malady exist in a greater degree in this community than in one of a more settled description, I am not sufficiently versed in the statistics of the subject to aver" (pg.250). Over all Macfie saw the gold rush fluctuate and predicted to see an increase of people coming in to Vancouver.

These letters give us an insight into the life of people pursuing the gold rush. Overall people living the life in the gold rush did not see anything special, and made enough money to break even. It shows the hardships they suffered, and how life wasn't easy. Not all that glitters is gold.

