

Core Documents: What Were the Real Reasons for Creating the Colony of British Columbia?

Document #1

Douglas Francis, Richard Jones and Donald Smith are professors of history at Canadian universities. They have written a popular history of Canada:

Nevertheless, American president James Polk, who won the presidential election in December 1844 with the electoral slogan '54°40' or fight,' demanded all of 'Oregon,' up to the Russian border.

In his inaugural address in March, President Polk reaffirmed his position that the United States' title to Oregon was 'clear and unquestionable.' Great popular support existed for his stand. In the summer of 1845, the expansionist newspaper, *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, introduced in an editorial the phrase, 'manifest destiny.' The paper argued that foreign governments were attempting to check 'the fulfillment of our manifest destiny [the belief that the United States was destined to expand across the North American continent from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean] to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.' Within months, the phrase became common usage throughout the United States.

Source: R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones, and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Origins: Canadian History to Confederation*. Fifth edition. (Scarborough, ON: Nelson, 2004), p. 436.

Document #2

James Douglas, Governor of the nearby Colony of Vancouver Island, writes to his superior in the Colonial Office in London, England:

[T]here is much reason to fear that serious affrays [public fights] may take place between the natives and the motley [great diversity of a group] adventurers, who will be attracted by the reputed wealth of the country, from the United States possessions in Oregon, and may probably attempt to overpower the opposition of the natives by force of arms, and thus endanger the peace of the country.

I beg to submit, if in that case, it may not become a question whether the Natives are entitled to the protection of Her Majesty's Government; and if an officer invested with the requisite authority should not, without delay, be appointed for that purpose.

Source: Despatch to London, Douglas to Labouchere, 8657, CO 305/8, p. 108; received 18 September, No. 22, Victoria Vancouver's Island, 15th July 1857.

Document #3

Margaret Ormsby, a University of British Columbia history professor, wrote a number of books, including a book commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Colony of British Columbia:

The gold excitement offered Lytton [British politician] the excuse for canceling the trading rights of the Hudson's Bay Company in the territory west of the Rocky Mountains. He decided to constitute [create] a new British colony, not because of his faith in the value of the new mineral resources or fear of American expansion, but because the moment was propitious [favorable] to open the area to free trade. He would have been more than a little surprised to learn that Chief Factor Douglas had already decided to announce to the Directors of the Hudson's Bay Company his considered opinion that the Gold Rush had spelled the doom of monopoly.

Source: Margaret Ormsby. *British Columbia: A History*. (Vancouver: MacMillan, 1958/1971), p. 150.

Document #4

James Douglas, Governor of the nearby Colony of Vancouver Island, writes to his superior in the Colonial Office in London, England:

The search for gold and "prospecting" of the country, had up to the last dates from the interior been carried on almost exclusively by the native Indian population, who have discovered the productive [gold] beds, and put out almost all the gold, about eight hundred ounces, which has been hitherto exported from the country; and who are moreover extremely jealous of the whites and strongly opposed to their digging the soil for gold . . .

Source: Despatch to London, Douglas to Labouchere, 5180, CO 305/9, p. 61; registered 29 May, No. 15, Victoria Vancouver's Island, 6 April 1858.

Document #5

James Douglas, Governor of the nearby Colony of Vancouver Island, writes to his superior in the Colonial Office in London, England:

I have as a preparatory [introductory] step, towards the proposed measures [steps] for the preservation of peace and order this day, issued a proclamation [official announcement] declaring the rights [ownership] of the crown in respect to gold found in its natural place of deposit within the limits of Fraser's River and Thompson's River Districts, within which are situated the "Couteau Mines," [mines on Thompson and Fraser Rivers] and forbidding all persons to dig or disturb the soil in search of Gold until authorized on that behalf by Her Majesty's Colonial Government.

Source: Despatch to London, Douglas to Labouchere, 2084, CO 305/8, p. 271; received 2 March 1858, No. 35, Victoria Vancouver's Island, 29th December 1857.

Document #6

A senior official in the Colonial Office in London, England, writes to James Douglas, Governor of the nearby Colony of Vancouver Island:

[Y]ou might find some one capable of . . . furnishing [providing] me, as early as possible, with a Report of the general capacities [capabilities] of the harbour of Vancouver—their advantages and defects—of the mouth of the Fraser's River, as the site of the Entry into British Columbia apart from the Island—of the probabilities of a Coal superior [better] for steam purposes to that of the Island, which may be found in the Main Land of British Columbia, and such other information as may guide the British Government to the best and readiest means [the best ways] of developing the various and the differing resources both of the Island and the mainland—resources which have so strangely been concealed [hidden] for ages, which are now so suddenly brought to light, and which may be destined to effect at no very distant period a marked [significant] and permanent change in the commerce and Navigation of the known world.

Source: Despatch from London, Lytton to Douglas, CO 410/1, p. 160, No. 8, 14 August 1858.

Document #7

James Douglas, Governor of the nearby Colony of Vancouver Island, writes to his superior in the Colonial Office in London, England:

Such being the purpose of the Natives; affrays [fights] and collisions with the whites will surely follow the accession [increase] of numbers, which the latter [Natives] are now receiving by the influx of adventurers from Vancouver's Island and the United States Territories in Oregon, and there is no doubt in my mind that sooner or later the intervention [involvement] of Her Majesty's Government will be required to restore and maintain the peace; up to the present time however, the country continues quiet; but simply I believe because the whites have not attempted to resist the impositions [laying out of conditions and demands] of the natives. I will however make it a part of my duty to keep you well informed in respect to the state [peace] of the gold country.

Source: Despatch to London, Douglas to Labouchere, 5180, CO 305/9, p. 61; registered 29 May, No. 15, Victoria Vancouver's Island, 6 April 1858.

Document #8

Donald Hauka is a former Vancouver newspaper reporter who has written several books including a history of the conflict during the Fraser River Gold Rush:

Politically, Douglas's greatest fear was that the American government would use the massive immigration of Yankees as a pretext for seizing New Caledonia. Both Mexico and Britain had already been forced to give up vast chunks of territory after a flood of U.S. immigrants swarmed over the mountains and onto the Pacific Coast. With Britain and the U.S. embroiled in the boundary dispute over the 49th parallel, there were four hundred American troops sitting on what the Yankees proposed as their side of the line. Indeed, some of the Americans on the gold fields were U.S. army deserters. . . .

As for the number of U.S. citizens in the territory, Douglas knew they could be controlled if they remained fractious [unruly, stubborn and difficult] and he gave them no single grievance [problem] around which to unite. Since he could not prevent the torrent of newcomers from settling the mainland, he would throw the territory open to settlement – but under the rule of British law.

Source: Donald J. Hauka, *Ned McGowan's War: The Birth of Modern British Columbia on the Fraser River Gold Fields*. (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2003), pp. 41, 42-43.

Document #9

John Galbraith was a professor of history at University of California and considered to be a pre-eminent scholar of the history of the British Empire:

Throughout most of his political career [British opposition leader William E.] Gladstone was a bitter opponent of the Hudson's Bay Company. To him it was an anachronism [out of date, from an earlier time], a throwback to the days when restrictive trade practices [monopolies] had been accepted . . . The Hudson's Bay Company was a monopoly [had exclusive control of trade from Rupert's Land to the Pacific Coast], and to Gladstone monopolies were per se [by their nature] hostile to the public interest. . . .

[T]he impending termination of the license [expired April 30, 1859] for exclusive trade west of Rupert's Land, and the beginning of Canadian agitation [frequent and persistent urging for a political cause] for acquisition of the Company's chartered territory [HBC control of Rupert's Land], caused an over-all investigation of the Company's operations.

The select committee of the House of Commons, which met in 1857 to take testimony and to present recommendations, devoted relatively little attention to Vancouver Island, but most witnesses who presented evidence concerning the colony were unfavorable to the Company . . . The committee recommended termination of the Company's tenure on the island, and the Colonial Office soon resumed correspondence with the governor and committee to achieve that end.

The character of this negotiation was suddenly transformed by the discovery of gold on the Fraser River and the rush of miners, principally from western United States, to the gold fields.

Source: John S. Galbraith. *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869*. (New York: Octagon Books, 1957/1977), pp. 288, 303.