

## Core Documents: The Fraser River War

**Document #1: Overview of Douglas' actions**

Historian, retired museum studies professor and manager for BC Heritage John Adams has published several history books including “*Old Square-Toes...*” which he had been researching for ten years.

“Although Douglas’ actions with respect to administration during the gold rush were vindicated [justified] in the end, the situation almost turned the other way. In August 1858 the governor of Vancouver Island had no legal or effective control over the formation of the quasi-military [miners] companies, comprised [made up] mostly of Americans, which waged war in the Fraser Canyon with native people. These companies negotiated at least ten ‘treaties’ with the aboriginal population, unsanctioned [not supported] by the British Crown. Although his authority had temporarily been usurped [taken], Douglas went to Yale in September and exhorted [urged] the American miners to obey the laws of Britain and ‘pay the Queen’s dues like honest men.’”

Source: John Adams, *Old Square-Toes and his Lady: The Life of James and Amelia Douglas*. (Victoria, BC: Horsdal & Schubart Publishers, 2001), pp. 123-124.

**Document #2: Protecting Native people from American miners**

Governor James Douglas describes the potential for war between the miners and the Aboriginals in a despatch sent to the British Colonial Office.

“... there is much reason to fear that serious affrays [bloody struggles] may take place between the natives and the motley adventurers [miners from many countries], 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, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1857.

**Document #3: Douglas' investigation**

Donald Fraser was the Pacific Coast correspondent for the *London Times* and reported from the Fraser Canyon following the conflict that took place.

“The Governor is engaged endeavouring to trace the murders committed on the river. The information received goes to implicate white men. Indians complain that the whites abuse them sadly, take their squaws away, shoot their children, and take their salmon by force. . . .

A village orator appeals to the Governor for relief against the miners, who are intruding upon the Indian domain. The poor creatures! They were very modest in their demand. They only asked for a small spot to draw up their canoes, and to dry their fish upon, to be exempted from mining. Their request was granted by the Governor, and the boundaries marked by the sub-commissioner.”

Source: Donald Fraser to *The Times* (London), 1 December 1858, p. 10. cited in G.P.V. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle, 1847-1871: Gold & Colonists*. (Vancouver, BC: Discovery Press, 1977), pp. 131-132.

**Document #4: Douglas takes action to settle peace**

University of British Columbia professors, G.P.V. and Helen Akrigg, wrote two widely-used B.C. histories, and they self-published a bestselling book, *1001 British Columbia Place Names*.

“On September 20<sup>th</sup>, having completed his investigation and satisfied himself that the peace was no longer in danger, Douglas started back to Victoria. From there, on October 12<sup>th</sup>, he wrote a report to Lytton, the Colonial Secretary, in London. Discreetly [wise in secrecy] he said hardly a word about the recent American-Indian ‘war’ fought on British soil. He did mention that there had been much unrest, which he attributed to the excessive use of liquor. He noted that he had enjoined [instructed] moderation in its use by the whites, and had prohibited [disallowed] its sale to the Indians. Further to moderate [reduce] the consumption of ‘rotgut’, he had set up for the saloons a licensing system which would cost them six hundred dollars each. At Hope he had found a number of persons wanting to settle on the land. He had ordered townsites laid out both at Hope and Yale and had arranged to the provisional occupancy of land, pending the establishment of a duly constituted government which could issue land titles... He mentioned that, in order to assure better governance for Yale, he had appointed a chief of police and five constables.”

Source: G.P.V. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle, 1847-1871:*

*Gold &*

*Colonists*. (Vancouver, BC: Discovery Press, 1977), pp. 130-133.

**Document #5: Assessment of Douglas' response**

University of Victoria historian Daniel Marshall has written several academic books and publications about British Columbia and Aboriginal history.

“In the contest over land and resources the Native peoples of the Fraser River corridor were finally overwhelmed by enormous numbers of miners and weaponry, their monopoly control of gold forfeited, their claim to the land marginalized through modern day. Douglas, in advance of any authority from London, took immediate action in the war's aftermath and established the basis for colonial administration through appointment of gold commissioners and justices of the peace. Yet his message to the ‘citizens of that great republic which like the mustard seed has grown into a mighty tree... that offshoot of England of which England is still proud’ spoke more of ingratiating oneself [gaining favour] to a foreign army of occupation [the American miners in the Fraser Canyon] than any attempt to arrest the illegal practices of miners. Douglas in his official communiqués [despatches] to London did little to mention that British sovereignty [authority] and had been undermined [taken over] by a foreign population [miners] that took the law into its own hands. Neither did he comment on the degree to which massacres had occurred. In the final analysis Douglas's fledgling [new], unconstituted [not established] colonial authority, consisting of a handful of officials, was terribly dwarfed by the tens of thousands of foreign adventurers who claimed the land.”

Source: Daniel P. Marshall, “No Parallel: American Miner-Soldiers at War with the Nlaka'pamux of the Canadian West,” in John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates, ed., *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 64-65.