

CLOSING THE DOOR TO IMMIGRATION

Many groups of Canadians began to resent Clifford Sifton's "open-door" immigration policy. Some labour organizations saw unskilled immigrant workers as a threat to their members' livelihoods. Some British-Canadians feared that immigrants from eastern, central, and southern Europe would alter the British character of the country. French-Canadians also feared that the influence of their culture would decline as their numbers became proportionately smaller. For the most part, business people supported the growth of immigration during the boom years. These immigrants supplied them with a pool of cheap labour.

Immigration policy was an especially thorny issue in British Columbia. Employers in the mines, forests, and canneries encouraged the arrival of hard-working Asian immigrants, who accepted less pay compared to other workers. But many British Columbians felt their jobs were threatened and pressured the federal government to restrict Asian immigration. In 1905, Frank Oliver replaced Sifton as Minister of the Interior. He agreed with those who wished to reduce the number of

immigrants, especially non-White immigrants. Oliver introduced a more selective immigration policy aimed particularly at Asian immigrants, and provincial governments started to restrict Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian immigration.

British Columbia: The "Golden Mountain"

Chinese immigrants comprised the largest single group of Asians in British Columbia at this time. The Cariboo Gold Rush and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway had lured many Chinese people to BC. By 1891, 9400 Chinese immigrants were living in the province. Most of them were men who intended to return to China when they had made enough money in British Columbia. Chinese workers lived in isolated "Chinatowns" in Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, and New Westminster. Chinatowns became lively communities with many businesses and cultural organizations.

Most of the Chinese workers were employed in the salmon canneries and in the coal mines of Vancouver Island. Profit-hungry employers were eager to hire

Can you find any pattern in these figures? Name two ways in which the ethnic composition of the BC population differed from that of the prairie provinces in the same years.

Table 7-3 British Columbia Population by Ethnic Origin, 1901-1921

| Year | British | European | Asian |
|------|---------|----------|--------|
| 1901 | 106 403 | 21 784 | 19 524 |
| 1911 | 266 295 | 69 799 | 30 864 |
| 1921 | 387 513 | 72 743 | 39 739 |

Figure 7-21 The aftermath of a Vancouver riot that destroyed many businesses in the Japanese and Chinese areas of the city.



Chinese immigrants because they worked hard for low pay, but labour councils representing Canadian workers resented the Chinese workers, who seemed to be undercutting the jobs of their members. Labour organizations became leaders in demanding exclusionary legislation that would restrict the number of Chinese entering Canada.

Opponents of Asian immigration formed the Asiatic Exclusion League. Early in 1907, anti-Asian feelings came to a head in British Columbia. When Lieutenant-Governor James Dunsmuir refused to sign a bill to exclude Japanese immigrants from entering Canada, protesters marched to Vancouver's city hall. Some of the speakers inflamed the mob, and roughly a thousand demonstrators left a trail of destruction through Chinatown and the Japanese section of the city. The riot focused international attention on Vancouver, much to the embarrassment of the federal government. Because Japan was an ally

of Great Britain, Prime Minister Laurier apologized to the Japanese government and struck a Royal Commission to report on the riot. Nevertheless, the government set a limit of 400 Japanese immigrants a year into Canada.

By "Continuous Passage" Only

Laurier's Minister of Labour, William Lyon Mackenzie King, led the Royal Commission to investigate the Vancouver riots and to study the damage to property. He was also asked to investigate how workers from Asia had been "enticed" to come to Canada. Since 1904, for example, CPR agents based in Hong Kong had encouraged Sikhs to emigrate to Canada. It was difficult to restrict East-Indian immigration because as British subjects they could not be denied entry to Canada.

To prevent the entry of East Indians into Canada, the government amended the 1906



Figure 7-22 The East Indians aboard the *Komagata Maru* spent two uncomfortable months in Vancouver harbour. In 1994, the eightieth anniversary of the incident, a commemorative plaque was unveiled in Vancouver harbour.

Immigration Act. Immigrants were now required to come to Canada via a non-stop, direct route from their country of origin. A direct, or "continuous passage," from India was impossible. By this means, the Canadian government thought it had resolved the issue of Asian immigration. The continuous-passage amendment was challenged in 1914 when a Sikh businessman, Gurdit Singh, chartered a steamer called the *Komagata Maru* to transport 354 Sikh immigrants to Vancouver. The ship left Hong Kong

on April 4, 1914. After stopping in China and Japan, it arrived in Vancouver on May 23. Canadian authorities put the ship in quarantine so that its passengers could not land. Supporters of the Sikhs argued that the continuous-passage rule was invalid, but the government stood firm. Nearly 200 police and immigration officers tried to board the vessel, but they were showered with bottles and sticks. Finally, on July 23, the *Komagata Maru* was escorted out of Vancouver harbour by the cruiser *Rainbow*.

ACTIVITIES

1. What issues were common to the Vancouver Riot and the *Komagata Maru* incident? Which groups benefited from the resolution of each event?
2. Imagine you are an Asian immigrant living in British Columbia in the years before World War I. Compose entries into a journal that you are keeping to describe your experiences in Canada. Mention the jobs you have held, working conditions, interactions with other Canadians, the effect of government restrictions on your personal life, and any other important events that affect you or those close to you.
3. Compare the figures in Table 7-3 on page 273, which shows British Columbia's population by ethnic origin in the years 1901 to 1921, with the most recent figures you can find. Sources such as an atlas or the *Canada Yearbook* may be useful. What principal differences do you find?

THOSE LESS EQUAL: THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

women's suffrage: the right of women to vote

suffragist: a person who advocates extending the right to vote, especially to women

prohibition: the banning of the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages

By the time Laurier was elected in 1896, the practice of voting by secret ballot had been the law for more than twenty years. However, only male property owners were entitled to the franchise. Women, Native Canadians, immigrants of Asian ancestry, and many other newcomers to Canada were denied the right to vote. During Laurier's time as prime minister, women, the Native peoples, and other groups began organized efforts to win social and political equality.

Women's Suffrage and Social Reform

Around the turn of the century, most Canadian women had very hard lives. Before the invention of labour-saving devices, such as washing machines, housework and child rearing consumed most of the average woman's day. Families of ten to

twelve children were common. For women, the risk of death or disability during childbirth was high, and many babies died at birth. Because women rarely worked outside the home after marriage, educational expectations for women were low. By 1900, women made up only 15 percent of undergraduates at Canadian universities. They were barred from many professions, such as law, and were not eligible for university scholarships.

The campaign for **women's suffrage**—the right to vote—came of age in the Laurier era. **Suffragists** were mainly middle-class women devoted to social reform. They blamed most social ills, including poverty and child neglect, on the evils of alcoholism, which was a growing problem. They demonstrated regularly to persuade the government to extend the franchise to women. Many prominent suffragists were also members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded in 1885, to promote prohibition. WCTU members supported women's suffrage because they believed most women supported **prohibition**.

Suffragists of this era were also known as "maternal feminists" because they were convinced that the skills of wives and mothers would bring a fresh, compassionate perspective to male-dominated governments in Canada. They believed that this feminine influence would lead to laws that would improve the lives of women and children.

Canadian suffragists were part of a worldwide movement. To attract

Figure 7-23 The Manitoba-based Political Equality League is pictured here with their petition demanding women's suffrage in the early 1900s.



Nellie McClung

One important suffragist was Nellie McClung (1873–1951). Raised in Manitoba, she became a teacher and well-known author who published many articles and books, including her autobiography. When her family moved to Edmonton, she promoted women's suffrage and prohibition. McClung was an effective speaker and often used wit and humour to "win over" an audience. Devoted to many reform issues affecting women, she worked especially hard to win suffrage for the women of Alberta.

In the excerpt that follows, McClung's words typify the maternal approach to women's rights that characterized the suffragist movement.



Women must be made to feel their responsibility. All this protective love, this instinctive mother love, must be organized some way, and made effective. There [is] enough of it in the world to do away with all the evils that war upon children, undernourishment, slum conditions, child labour, drunkenness. Women could abolish these if they wanted to."



public attention to their cause, suffragist leader such as Emmeline Pankhurst, in Britain, and Susan B. Anthony, in the United States, organized demonstrations and hunger strikes. In Canada, the generally peaceful suffragist campaign was led by the Canadian Woman's Suffrage Association. This association was supported by Canada's leading women's organization, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), founded by Lady Aberdeen, the wife of Canada's governor general. Lady Aberdeen used her influence to channel what she called "the unused capacity of women in Canada" into efforts to achieve reform.

On the Prairies, the suffragist movement had some of its earliest successes. Perhaps this was because western women had struggled side by side with men against the harsh realities of farm life, and so prairie men were more inclined to regard women as equals. Moreover, western farmers saw women's suffrage as

a way to increase the farm vote and farmers' influence in provincial politics. Not surprisingly, the western provinces were the first to grant women's suffrage.

In British Columbia, the fight for suffrage would last more than forty-five years. It began when the province joined Confederation, in 1871. That year, the American suffragist Susan B. Anthony visited Victoria to speak in favour of women's rights. The following year, a bill supporting women's suffrage was roundly defeated in the provincial legislature—only two members of the legislature voted in favour of the bill. By 1873, women who owned property had won the right to vote in **municipal** elections, but in 1899, the suffrage bill was again defeated in the British Columbia legislature. However, this time the vote was close—15 to 17.

In 1912, the provincial Liberals made suffrage part of their election platform and, in 1916, a suffrage referendum passed as part of the

municipal: city or town

Time Line 7-1

The Enfranchisement of Women in Canada

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1916 | Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta |
| 1917 | British Columbia, Ontario |
| 1918 | Nova Scotia; federal enfranchisement of women |
| 1919 | New Brunswick |
| 1922 | Prince Edward Island |
| 1925 | Newfoundland (joined Confederation in 1949) |
| 1940 | Quebec |

Figure 7-24 This handbill, circulated by the Women's Political Equality League, asked for support in getting the vote for women. Do you agree with the reasons listed on the handbill? To whom is the message in this handbill being directed? How effective would it have been? Add a few more reasons to the list that you think might be effective.

VOTE FOR WOMAN'S FREEDOM

THE WOMEN OF BRITISH COLUMBIA WANT THEIR POLITICAL FREEDOM BECAUSE

1. IF WOMAN HAS TO OBEY THE LAWS IT IS ONLY JUST THAT SHE SHOULD HAVE A VOICE IN MAKING THEM.
2. WOMAN'S INFLUENCE WOULD BE INCREASED AND LAWS FOR WOMAN'S PROTECTION WOULD BE MORE EASILY SECURED.
3. AS POLITICAL RIGHTS MAKE MAN NOBLER, SO THEY WOULD MAKE WOMAN NOBLER ALSO.
4. THE BALLOT IS AN EDUCATOR. WOMAN NEEDS THE EDUCATION OF THE BALLOT; THE WORLD NEEDS THE EDUCATION OF THE WOMAN'S BALLOT.
5. WOMAN CAN BETTER PROTECT HER HOME INTERESTS.
6. WOMAN HAS BORNE HER SHARE OF THE TOIL, SUFFERING AND LONELINESS IN THE PIONEER WORK OF THIS PROVINCE AND SHE OUGHT TO HAVE A VOICE IN HOW IT IS GOVERNED.

WOMEN ARE FREED FROM POLITICAL SLAVERY IN NORWAY, SWEDEN, FINLAND, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, TASMANIA, ISLE OF MAN, UTAH, WYOMING, COLORADO AND IDAHO, WITH THE RESULT THAT THE LAWS ARE BETTER AND CONDITIONS IMPROVED.

GIVE THE WOMEN THE BALLOT

provincial election. By 1917, British Columbia women finally gained the official right to vote and the right to hold political office.

For the most part, however, change did not come quickly (see Time Line 7-1). During the Laurier years, most Canadians believed that specific areas of life were "natural" to each sex. For example, politics and business were considered "man's work." Such beliefs hindered the struggle for women's equal rights, and many years would pass before women would have their rights recognized in law.

The Rights of the Native Peoples

At the turn of the century, the survival of Native lands and culture was threatened by government policies. The goal of federal government policy was to assimilate Native people into Canadian society and to make treaties with aboriginal groups that would free up land for European settlement. The Native peoples wanted to retain their traditional territory and based their claim to land on the Royal Proclamation of

1763, which recognized them as "Nations or Tribes," extended to them the protection of Britain, and recognized their right to own the land they had used and occupied. An excerpt of the Proclamation follows:



"It is just and reasonable ... that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected ... should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of they, as their Hunting Grounds.

"And We do further declare it to be Our Royal Will and Pleasure, for the present ... to reserve under our Sovereignty, Protection, and Dominion, for the use of the said Indians, all lands and Territories not included with limits of Our ... new governments, or within the Limits of the Territory granted to the Hudson's Bay Company, as also all the lands and Territories lying to the Westward of the Sources of the rivers which fall into the Sea from the west and the North West."

The policy of removing Native children from their families and placing them in residential schools further encouraged assimilation. By 1910, more than sixty residential schools existed, most of them run by Christian religious groups. In these schools, Native children received manual, vocational, and religious instruction in the Christian faith. Strict rules forbade the Native students from practising their customs and speaking their languages among themselves. Some Native parents valued the education, training, and skills their children received. However, removing children from their family and familiar surroundings was traumatic for parents and children. The policy had a devastating impact on Native attempts to preserve and pass on their culture to future generations.

The Native peoples of British Columbia were in a unique situation. The remoteness of the province and the delay in large-scale settlement had allowed them to retain their lands longer than the aboriginal peoples of eastern and central Canada. The federal government was responsible for Indian affairs, but control of Native lands lay with the provincial governments. This overlap complicated the question of ownership of Native lands in British Columbia.

As you learned in Chapter 6, the first governor of British Columbia, James Douglas, recognized Native ownership of the land and had negotiated treaties with a number of bands. Then settlers flooded into the West during the Laurier era. The Native peoples felt threatened, and the issues of land and title suddenly became more urgent. From the

viewpoint of the federal government, the priority was to establish **reserves** for Native bands through treaties or by special arrangement with individual bands. But by 1900, only fifteen treaties had been concluded with the province's 200 Native bands, and these treaties covered only a small area of British Columbia.

The Native bands of British Columbia united to press for **aboriginal title** to the land. In 1911, Native chiefs from across the province presented the provincial government with claims regarding land title, treaties, and self-government. However, the federal and provincial governments could not agree on how to respond to these claims.

Economic expansion in British Columbia in the early 1900s forced the issue of land onto the back burner. However, the McKenna-McBride **Royal Commission** was established to determine the size and location of Native reserves. In 1916, it recommended adding 136 square miles (35 224 hectares) to the reserves, but also recommended cutting off 74 square miles (19 166 hectares) of more valuable land, to be sold to the public. Since the Indian Act of 1876 had stipulated that **cut-off lands** could be removed from reserves only with the consent of the Native peoples, the **Allied Tribes of British Columbia** rejected the report. The federal government then passed a law that removed the requirement for consent to the sale of cut-off lands. For the government, this decision closed the land-claims issue. For the Native peoples of British Columbia, however, the issue was far from resolved.

reserve: land set aside for the Native peoples

aboriginal title: the concept that Native people have ownership (or control) of the land because they were the first to occupy it

Royal Commission: an investigation by a person, or persons, into a matter on behalf of the federal or provincial government—their decision is not binding on the government

cut-off lands: lands removed from Native reserves, or title to land that was revoked

Allied Tribes of British Columbia: an organization representing most Native peoples living in British Columbia

The Importance of the Potlatch

The federal government had one other problem with the aboriginal people of British Columbia. Here, the cornerstone of Native culture was the **potlatch**, an important ceremony that served many social functions.

"Potlatching" involves elaborate feasts to celebrate special occasions, such as the naming of a child, a marriage, or burial. It confirms the powers of chiefs. The potlatch also provides a way to share wealth because hosts give away much of their wealth, including many of their possessions, to the guests. Because it preserved important Native customs, the potlatch was seen by the federal government as an obstacle to assimilation. In an 1884 amendment to the Indian Act, the government banned potlatch ceremonies. However, lax enforcement of the ban until 1914, and the isolation of many villages, allowed the potlatch to continue in many areas of the province.



Figure 7-25 This button blanket was once given away at a potlatch. During the potlatch, gifts are given to all in attendance, so that these people can later be called upon to verify that certain ceremonies took place, for example, a marriage, or to verify the passing on of names or the transfer of rights, for example, hunting or fishing rights.

potlatch: a ritual of giving away property and goods that is observed by many West Coast Native bands

The Nisga'a Land Claim

One historic Native land claim in British Columbia has taken more than ninety years to resolve. On August 4, 1998, representatives of the federal and provincial governments, and the Nisga'a First Nation signed the first treaty in modern British Columbia. This treaty allocates \$200 million in treaty-settlement funds (most of it coming from the federal government), along with 1930 square kilometres of land in Lower Nass Valley, as well as ownership of 18 reserves outside the area. The treaty states that the Nisga'a are entitled to all resources on Nisga'a-owned lands, have the right to tim-

ber outside settlement area, and have a guaranteed share of about 20 percent of the allowable catch of Nass River Salmon. The Nisga'a government will also be able to make laws consistent with Canadian law, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Criminal Code. The struggle for Nisga'a rights began in 1907, when the Nisga'a Land Committee launched a campaign for recognition of title to their ancestral lands. They were the first Native people in British Columbia to pursue their goals within the Canadian political system. These long-time occupants of the Nass Valley in northwestern British Columbia had protested gov-

DID YOU KNOW?

Under the terms of the 1998 treaty, 5500 people will qualify as Nisga'a. To be considered Nisga'a, a person must prove that there was a Nisga'a woman among his or her ancestors.



Figure 7-26 A ceremonial canoe brings Nisga'a chiefs and elders to New Aiyansh for the signing of the treaty.

ernment surveys that were meant to mark off reserves to be occupied by Native peoples in the area. The Nisga'a argued that because they had not signed a treaty with the provincial government, the concept of reserves for the Native peoples was invalid.

In 1913, the Nisga'a Land Committee made their position clear on the issue of reserves and White settlement in their lands:



“We are not opposed to the coming of the white people into our territory, provided this be carried out justly and in accordance with the British principle embodied in the Royal Proclamation (of 1763). What we don't like about the Government is their saying: ‘We will give you this much land.’ How can they give it when it is our own? We cannot understand it. They have never bought it from us or our forefathers. They have never fought and conquered our people, and taken the land that way, and yet they now say that they will give us so much land—our own land.”

The Nisga'a chiefs wanted a treaty to accomplish three things: honour aboriginal title to the land, give the Nisga'a larger reserves on which to live, and compensate the Nisga'a for any land they surrendered.

During a visit to Prince Rupert in 1910, Prime Minister Laurier encouraged the Nisga'a to take their case to the **Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council**. The Nisga'a Land Committee asked the

Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council: at the time, the highest level of legal appeal in Canada



Figure 7-27 This map shows the areas designated as Nisga'a land in the 1998 treaty.



self-government:

government by a territory's own people, used here for the right of Native peoples, but could also be applied to Canada itself, when it became independent of Britain

Judicial Committee in London, England, to consider their claims. The British government decided that the claims must first be heard in a Canadian court. By then, Laurier was no longer prime minister and neither the Canadian courts nor the Privy Council would have the opportunity to hear the Nisga'a case.

The Nisga'a never abandoned their claim. Despite legal barriers, they were determined to keep the land question alive. Nisga'a chief Frank Calder's election to the British Columbia legislature in 1949, and the granting of suffrage to the Native peoples of Canada in

1960, signalled the winds of change. Soon, favourable court judgements in Native rights cases prompted governments to resolve issues of land claims and Native **self-government**.

The treaty between the Nisga'a and the federal and provincial governments signed on August 4, 1998 was an historic event. It was the first treaty concluded west of the Rockies since British Columbia joined Canada in 1871. In 1999, the treaty was approved by the Nisga'a and the British Columbia legislature. The federal government is expected to pass the treaty in the House of Commons in the fall of 1999.

ACTIVITIES

1. How was "maternal feminism" linked to women's suffrage and social reform during the Laurier era?
2. In small groups, discuss why some members of each of the following groups might have opposed the granting of political and legal rights to women:
 - a) politicians, b) employers, c) men, d) women.
3. Design a promotional poster suitable for women's groups in the Laurier era. On the back of the poster indicate why you think the poster would be effective in achieving its goal.
4. "The aims of today's feminists are not significantly different from those of the feminists of the Laurier era." Organize a debate on this statement. You might use a chart like the model below to organize your ideas.

| 1890s Feminists | Today's Feminists |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Issues on which they agree | |
| Issues on which they disagree | |
5. a) Identify the policy of the federal government towards Native Canadians at the turn of the century.
 - b) Name two ways in which the government tried to ensure the success of its policy.
6. Summarize the positions of the Native peoples and the federal government on the questions of land title and treaties in BC.
7. Write a legend in the way that a Native elder might tell young people, years from now, about the Nisga'a struggle to claim their land.
8. Write and record the script for a BC government radio commercial which will inform the public about the Nisga'a land claim. If you wish to do a TV commercial, include sketches to accompany the script.
9. Supporters and opponents of the treaty with the Nisga'a have been quick to set out their opinions. Research the positions of each side and compile a two-column list of arguments in favour and in opposition to the 1998 Nisga'a treaty. Use this information to reach your own conclusion on the justice and practicality of this agreement.
10. The BC government has said the Nisga'a treaty will be the model for treaties with the rest of BC's first nations. Find out more about the treaty process in BC and, with the information you gather, decide if the Nisga'a treaty can be used in other situations.