



History Program
University of Northern British Columbia



History Master's Theses completed at UNBC



Buddle, Melanie.

1997

**"All The Elements of a Permanent Community":
A History of Society, Culture and Entertainment
in the Cariboo,"**

Supervisor: Robin Fisher

UNBC Library call number: FC3849.B37 B83 1997

ABSTRACT

The gold rush of 1858 on the Fraser River led to a rapid influx of miners and settlers in the Cariboo region of British Columbia. Mining communities grew rapidly, and were populated mainly by British colonists, but a large number of American gold seekers also entered the region in the mid-nineteenth century. This thesis examines the social organization and cultural institutions of the colonial settlers of the Cariboo, from the discovery of gold, to the early twentieth century when many gold rush communities were waning. In the 1860's, these communities quickly developed social institutions reminiscent of Home, which for many settlers was Britain. Their amateur theatre productions, and their interest in staging and watching British-inspired drama demonstrated their need to establish cultural markers of civilization. Glee clubs, church institute readings and the literary institute also demonstrated the cultural baggage of the settlers. Yet the American influence in the Cariboo was unmistakable, and it led to the development of many varieties of entertainment, not necessarily considered legitimate or respectable, but lauded by Caribooites nonetheless. By examining the Cariboo's newspaper, The Cariboo Sentinel (published from 1865 to 1876), and looking at letters, journals and small publications by Cariboo settlers, this thesis traces the history of society, culture and entertainment in the Cariboo. The newspaper's effort to sustain the belief that the Cariboo communities would be permanent, civilized, and respectable settlements, and the miners' please for amusement, mark the unique cultural milieu of the region. While miners were perhaps desperate for any entertainment at all, their ready acceptance of all types of performance, regardless of their legitimacy or origin, is notable. Out of the conditions of the gold rush, a cultural frontier developed that reflected the particular needs and desires of British and American miners in the new colony of British Columbia. Today, theatre is still viewed as an indicator of gold rush society at the recreated townsite of Barkerville in the Cariboo. Just as theatre indicated community permanence for the settlers of the min-nineteenth century, theatre is used in the present to understand the communities of the past. Stage, saloon, and myriad other entertainments can thus be viewed as avenues to understanding gold rush society.