



History Program
University of Northern British Columbia



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ABSTRACT

Perceptions often dictate the understanding, definition and interaction that people have with the real world. Northern British Columbia was and still is, perceived by Canadians as a frontier region that offered limitless opportunity to those willing to come north. These opportunities were more often than not found within the natural environment. Using Prince George, British Columbia as a case study, this thesis seeks to understand how people interacted with the natural environment up to 1915. Evidence suggests that during the early settlement period of Prince George, the dominant perception was that the natural environment was a storehouse of natural resources available for human use. What resulted from this human perception were changes in the land.

I began with an examination of how Native people viewed and interacted with the environment and furthermore how their experiences differed from that of European settlers. Second, was an investigation of what early non-Native explorers wrote about when travelling to Prince George. Third, an examination of town boosters was undertaken to expose what aspects of nature they promoted in attempts to lure people to the central interior. Furthermore, boosters' success or lack thereof was measured. Modes of transportation in Prince George during the study period were also considered as it was apparent that people needed to access the resources before extraction could occur. In this sense, transportation became a means to an end. Finally, this thesis includes an exploration of the forest industry. Settlers initially viewed forests as a hindrance to settlement, but soon realized that forest harvesting could lead to profits, resulting in massive cutting. In sum up to 1959 the human-environment relationship was based on resource extraction, which resulted in unprecedented changes in the land.