

Reading Log Week Eight

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Gold was first discovered around Keithley Creek in 1860, which caused Barkerville to become an “economic hub” of the interior in shortly after 1862.¹ Despite the fact that the area is a portion of traditional territory that belongs to the Dakelh people, there is a popular myth that claims the First Nations neither worked or lived there. In the book, “Into That Country to Work”: Aboriginal Economic Activities during Barkerville’s Gold Rush” by Mica Jorgenson, the author uses credible sources to argue that the Indigenous people lived and worked in Barkerville before and after the gold rush. Beginning in 1862, the Indigenous people actively used their skills to benefit the gold rush and further the economy of Barkerville.

The Dakelh people lived in Barkerville long before the gold rush happened, and many of them suffered the result of the Europeans entering their land. The author points to many primary sources that prove that Barkville was an economic hub for the First Nations, sources such as the local newspapers, mining records, and government reports. (112) The miners chose to settle and work close to Barkerville because of the quality of life the location had to offer. Barkerville in itself was difficult to live in due to the extreme temperatures and narrow gullies, so many of them stayed twenty kilometers east of town near Bowron Lake. (113) Living near a body of water was an ideal settlement location due to a cooler climate and an easier accessible waterway. Having easy access to water meant that they could have a better chance of fishing, and more edible vegetation. The author refers to a document that has a recording of Simon Fraser’s 1808 expedition where he discussed finding furs, berries, and plenty of fish. (114) With the settlement of the Europeans, they brought over many diseases that the Indigenous people were not used to. These diseases included smallpox, measles, and influenza. The author refers to a few sources that

¹ Thomas Thorner and Thor Frohn-Nielsen, *A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 233.

mention that these diseases significantly decreased the Indigenous population between 1848-1862. (116)

In light of the drastic life changes that the Indigenous people endured, they continued to sustain themselves through hunting and gathering. According to the text, the Indigenous people participated in the annual salmon run that took place at the Bowron River. They set up fishing stations and drying racks, similar to the harvest stations they established along the Fraser River. (122) Another way that the Indigenous people sustained themselves was through gathering the fruitful vegetation in their area. The author claims that the Indigenous people eventually become miners and played a vital role in the Fraser River gold rush of 1858. To support this claim, the author quotes an author who mentions that the Indigenous people proposed a fair portion of the mining plan that was a success. (129) The Indigenous people adjusted to balancing both mining and their traditional ways of living.

During this time, the Indigenous women participated in the sex trade. According to the text, it is hard to trace in the documents since the sex trade was referred to in very vague terms in Barkerville. (132) However, there are limited sources that define the trade of goods, cash, and sexual service on a formal basis. (133) The author mentions that there are many more accounts that recall the Indigenous women trading sex for money or alcohol on an informal basis. Although there is limited evidence to this reality, it is suggested that the sex trade was a part of Barkerville's economy.

British Columbia was a resourceful land for mining, and the Europeans took full advantage of that. Contrary to popular belief, the Indigenous people played a vital role in the gold rush and helped shape the tale of what it is today.