

Race, Disease, and Public Violence: Smallpox and the (Un)Making of Calgary's Chinatown, 1892

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Summary. This paper examines the impact that ideas about race, gender and disease had on the social ordering and settlement of southern Alberta by focusing on a smallpox outbreak, which originated in Calgary during the summer of 1892. The first person to contract the disease was believed to be a Chinese laundry worker. When town authorities discovered the man's illness he was immediately placed under quarantine and the laundry was burned down. Municipal authorities used racialised ideas about health and cleanliness to discursively create sites of meaning, delineating strict spatial boundaries between the Chinese and non-Chinese community. Discourses produced during this period reveal how the language of public health and contagion were used to create sites of belonging and meaning in southern Alberta at a time when western Canadian society was struggling to define its identity within both the Prairie West and Canada more broadly.

Keywords: smallpox; public health; race; Chinese men; western Canada

On the night of 2 August 1892 a riot broke out in the town of Calgary, in present-day Alberta Canada following a cricket match. Fuelled by alcohol, the rioters directed their anger towards Calgary's Chinese community, targeting Chinese homes and businesses and physically assaulting Chinese-Calgarians. Forced to flee for their lives, some Chinese-Calgarians took refuge with the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) while others sought protection from local clergy. Sporadic violence towards the Chinese community persisted for several weeks and city officials did very little to curb it. Authorities laid no charges against the perpetrators and when Chinese businessmen hired a lawyer the town council informed them that they should not pursue their complaint. Contrary to appearances, the riot and subsequent violence against the Chinese-Calgarian community was not spontaneous; rather, it illustrates the deep-seated anti-Asian sentiment in western Canada and the efforts of European-Canadians to buttress social and physical boundaries in the Prairie West predicated on race.

The riot in Calgary was preceded several weeks earlier by the discovery of a case of smallpox aboard a ship called the *Empress of Japan*, docked at Victoria, British Columbia Canada in the middle of June 1892. The *Empress of Japan* had arrived from China.¹ Victoria and Vancouver soon witnessed cases of smallpox, and despite efforts to contain the

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¹Dawson 1991, p. 29.

outbreak it spread further east. Calgary's town council formed a health committee and local officials and medical practitioners worked to prevent the spread of the disease. By mid-July they had quarantined 18 individuals (six Chinese men) in an encampment on the outskirts of the town. The town and the surrounding area weathered the epidemic with minimal loss of life, but the outbreak transformed the social and economic landscape of Calgary.

The surviving records about this incident were penned by European-Canadians and thus our ability to 'know' the Chinese-Canadian perspective is limited. However, drawing on newspapers, city council minutes and official government reports offers an important window, however small, onto the Chinese-Canadian experience in Calgary. Using these sources we can examine the terrain through which Chinese-Canadians were forced to navigate and catch glimpses of how Chinese-Canadians responded to the public violence and the formal and informal restrictions placed on their movements.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese-Canadian communities developed across western Canada, and often the businesses and homes they established were confined to specific areas of a city or town. The spaces which Chinese people occupied were seen by the dominant society as separate and different.² In order to give tangible meaning and legitimacy to this spatial separation, European-Canadians used the language of medicine and public health to construct Chinese men as unhealthy and dangerous.

Prior to the outbreak in Calgary, Chinese businesses and homes were loosely clustered around present-day Centre Street South and Ninth Avenue East. However, the smallpox epidemic changed this spatial arrangement by simultaneously making and (un)making Calgary's nascent Chinatown. White Calgarians demarcated clear and obvious boundaries between Chinese and non-Chinese spaces through public sentiment, the actions of the health committee, and the language of public health that branded Chinese men as the source of ill-health. At the same time, Calgarians tried to destroy Chinatown through public violence and the efforts of town officials to wipe out what they believed to be the source of the contagion. Following the outbreak, the Chinese community was increasingly consigned to the eastern periphery of the town's centre.

While western settlement was important, white southern Albertans did not want hard working Chinese Canadians to put down roots in the region. The right kind of settler, according to the dominant society, was white, Protestant, hardworking, married, and in possession of a thorough knowledge of agricultural or animal husbandry.³ A community made up of single non-white men performing roles typically carried out by women in settler society seemed dangerously aberrant to the white majority.⁴ Indeed, the Dominion Lands Act and the homestead system entrenched the monogamous family model in western Canada, placing the 'yeoman farmer, and the male-female couple and their family [at settler society's core].'⁵

Nor did a nationalized public health care system exist in Canada at the turn of the nineteenth century, in part, because the 1867 British North American Act made health a provincial responsibility. However, the provinces did very little and the actual business of

²Anderson 1991, p. 104.

³Palmer 1982, p. 310.

⁴For a discussion of the development of white settler societies in western Canada, see Perry 2001.

⁵Carter 2008, p. 74.

public health was left to municipalities. As a result, epidemics were dealt with on a local and often ad hoc basis, through the establishment of temporary public health boards that dissolved as soon as the crisis was over.⁶ Enforced quarantine and compulsory vaccination were the technologies typically used by municipalities throughout Canada and the United States; where local officials saw disease as an 'aberration, the result of personal moral failings [and] external to the country itself.'⁷ It was not until 1907 that a permanent Provincial Board of Health was created in Alberta with the authority to administer laws and divide the province into health districts with local administrative boards.

In Calgary mandatory vaccination played an enormous role in the fight to contain and eradicate the disease, becoming an important tool of the state in this 'epic' struggle. Although Western medicine could not cure smallpox, vaccination enabled doctors and health authorities to view the disease as preventable.⁸ Thus, city officials regarded vaccination both as a means to safeguard the West and further restrain non-whites in the region. State actors used the discourse surrounding this outbreak to legitimate the extension of coercive control over Chinese people in southern Alberta: a group regarded as outside of and dangerous to the body politic. As Ryan Eyford eloquently states, public health efforts on the part of the state 'helped to reify a new spatial order mandating the compartmentalization of land and people into a system of [racial-segregation].'⁹

Contemporary discourse often conflated health and race, which determined the treatment of certain racialised groups.¹⁰ For instance, in San Francisco's Chinatown at the turn the century, historian Nayan Shah found that the state under the guise of public health reforms created inclusive and exclusive definitions of 'public' and 'health'.¹¹ City officials often designed public health initiatives to protect 'citizens' from the 'abnormal'. Public health measures typically targeted the visibly different elements of North American society, and public health officers used discussions of dirt and disease to relegate certain racialised groups to physical and social ghettos. Officials justified ghettoisation as a way of dealing with the failures of modern science: 'vanquishing all disease, dirt, and contagion was not an achievable goal, of course, especially in the short term. But confining these problems to a single city space seemed both possible and rational.'¹²

Although western Canadian scholars like Howard Palmer have examined nativism in Alberta they have overlooked the power wielded by public health authorities.¹³ Indeed, academics and popular historians examining the outbreak of 1892 have concentrated on the riot that broke out following the release of the Chinese men from quarantine, and have interpreted the event in one of two ways: first, as an extreme example of anti-Asian sentiment in western Canada, and second, as an exemplar of how effectively the NWMP ensured peace and order in the West.¹⁴ When the municipal police would or could not, the NWMP stepped in to curtail the violence targeting Calgary's Chinese community.¹⁵ While extremely important, such works overlook the social contours of the disease and how discussions of race were intimately linked to the 'material world'

⁶Cook 1940, p. 115.

⁷Nathanson 2007, p.39.

⁸Porter 1999, pp. 127–34.

⁹Eyford 2006, p. 57.

¹⁰Markel 1997, p. 29.

¹¹Shah 2001, p. 251.

¹²Molina 2006, p. 17.

¹³For example, see Palmer 1982.

¹⁴For examples, see Foran in Stewart and Antonson (eds) 1979; Friesen 1987, p. 271; Dawson 1991; Baureiss 1971; Seng Hoe 1976.

¹⁵For an example, see Beahen 1981, pp. 1–7.

through public health.¹⁶ Medicalised nativism, a term coined by Natalia Molina, aptly describes this process.¹⁷

History of Chinese in Calgary, Alberta

Asian men came to southern Alberta following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia in 1885. Southern Alberta drew Chinese men in search of employment to its coal fields and expanding service sector.¹⁸ Most often Chinese men found themselves working on ranches as cooks, labourers and domestic servants or in Calgary where they established laundries, restaurants, a tailor shop, a grocery store and a boarding house.¹⁹ In Calgary, census records reveal that most Chinese men lived and worked under the same roof, often with a group of men who came from the same province in China.²⁰ These living arrangements were affordable and provided individuals with companionship and support. The larger Chinese community regularly came together to socialise. Prior to 1901 the back room of the Kwong Man Yuen Restaurant served as the community's meeting place.²¹ By 1891 31 Chinese men lived in the district of Alberta, most of them working either in laundries or as cooks.²²

In 1885 and 1904 the federal government passed legislation that limited the number of Chinese people who could enter Canada and imposed a head tax on those that did; the head tax was 50 dollars in 1886 and rose to 500 dollars in 1904.²³ Few people could afford both the cost of travel and the required head tax. As a result, the number of Asian men living in Calgary continued to be small throughout this period. Wives, children, and other family members remained in China, living on the remittances men sent home. According to historian Alison Marshall 'women and children were largely absent [from the landscape] until after 1947' when the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 was rescinded.²⁴ To offset dislocation and loneliness, many men joined benevolent and clan associations, which held holiday gatherings and offered support to members.²⁵

By 1901 there were still only 63 Chinese men living in Calgary, comprising only 1.5 per cent of the city's population.²⁶ Only after 1901 did increasing numbers of Chinese immigrants see Chinatown relocate to Tenth Avenue SW as the community needed a larger area in order to meet its growing needs. This move coincided with the arrival of the first Chinese woman in 1902. Local newspapers enthusiastically announced her arrival. The first child born to a Chinese couple in Calgary was in 1906.²⁷ The influx of Chinese women into the city, however, remained more of a trickle than a flood. In 1911, only three Chinese women resided in Calgary which had a male Chinese population of 482.²⁸ By the 1920s the number of married Chinese women rose to five. The Chinese community in Calgary, by and large, remained a bachelor society until after the Second World War.

¹⁶Anderson 1991, p. 74.

¹⁷Robert Miles coined the term racialization to refer to the 'process by which attributes such as skin colour, language, birthplace, and cultural practices are given social significance as markers of distinction.' Miles 1982.

¹⁸Gardner 2006, p. 13.

¹⁹Gardner 2006, p. 17 and Dawson 1991, p. 26.

²⁰Baureiss 1971, p. 34.

²¹Dawson 1991, p.147.

²²Palmer 1970, p. 32.

²³Seng Hoe 1976, pp. 50–3.

²⁴Marshall 2009, p. 3.

²⁵Gardner 2006, p. 21.

²⁶Chuenyan Lai 1988, p. 89.

²⁷Gardner 2006, p. 22.

²⁸Baureiss 1971, p. 33.

Prior to 1892 the popular media in Calgary paid sporadic attention to the presence of Asian men in town, although efforts to restrain and monitor the movement of Asians within the district of Calgary were certainly underway.²⁹ In 1886 Mr Amos Roscoe, the customs sub-collector for Fort Calgary, became the comptroller of Chinese immigration in the district.³⁰ As comptroller, it was Roscoe's job to collect 5 dollars from every Chinese man already residing within the district of Alberta and 50 dollars from new arrivals.³¹ The district applied this fee only to Chinese people, and this added considerably to the burden represented by the federal government's head tax. The appointment of Roscoe mirrored anti-Chinese measures undertaken by governments at both the federal and provincial levels.

The European-Canadian population expressed concerns regarding the potential health threats posed by Chinese immigrants from the very beginning, and authorities subjected Chinese men to greater scrutiny than other new arrivals. In order to remain in the region recent Chinese immigrants had to obtain a medical certificate to ensure that they were 'free from leprosy and other contagious diseases', indicating that government officials and likely the white majority conflated Chinese immigration and public health issues in the Prairie West from the earliest period of Chinese settlement in the region.³²

The (un)making of Calgary's Chinatown

On 28 June 1892 town authorities discovered a Chinese man afflicted with smallpox being cared for by friends at the Fai Lou (sic) laundry.³³ Most likely the laundry served as both a workplace and living space. Authorities immediately quarantined the sick man and his roommates in a shack outside town. A NWMP officer guarded the camp to ensure that no one broke the quarantine.³⁴ Over the following weeks this camp grew to house all but one of the 18 people diagnosed with smallpox over the course of the epidemic. City officials took further measures and burned down the laundry and all of its contents, including the washing.³⁵ Authorities believed the first man quarantined, who has remained anonymous in all of the contemporary accounts of the epidemic, to be the individual who brought the disease to Calgary; however, it is unclear exactly how this transmission took place. Reports from the NWMP indicate that he had just returned from a prolonged stay in Victoria, British Columbia and had been working at the Fai Lou Laundry when he fell ill; other accounts described him as working at the Alberta Hotel. Certainly, by the time he was in quarantine he was no longer contagious and on the road to recovery.

The city council set up a temporary emergency Health Committee and empowered it to take any actions deemed necessary to prevent the spread of the disease.³⁶ The town council instructed Dr Harry Goodsir Mackid to inspect all of the city's Chinese Laundries and to make

²⁹Dawson in Rasporich and Klassen (eds) 1975, p. 127.

³⁰Palmer 1970, p. 26.

³¹Ibid.

³²*Calgary Herald (CH)*, 23 January 1886.

³³Library and Archives of Canada (LAC), Royal Canadian Mounted Police RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892.

³⁴*CH*, 15 July 1892.

³⁵LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892. *CH*, 15 July 1892.

³⁶City of Calgary, Corporate Records, Archives, Council Minutes, Vol. 4, p. 105.

sure that lanes and alleyways were clear.³⁷ From the very beginning, authorities' descriptions of the outbreak always referenced the Chinese community. In his reports to the NWMP Commissioner in Regina Inspector A. Ross Cuthbert accounted for all new cases of smallpox in terms of their relationship to the Fai Lou Laundry; he described where those infected lived in relation to the laundry and queried if they took their washing there.³⁸ The vision of 'queer domesticity' posed by the Chinese men who worked and lived at the laundry ran contrary to the white male–female couple and family ideal in this burgeoning white settler society, and in the media became conflated with filth and disease.³⁹ In sowing this confusion the newspapers created tangible connections between the Asian community, the Chinese laundry, and the disease and its dissemination. If dirt was the cause of the disease, then its removal (read Chinese men) would be the cure.

The second individual to contract the disease, or at least be publicly recognised as having it and so be placed in quarantine, was a Mr Kest on 2 July 1892. Kest was a carpenter who lived with 'a companion in a shack' east of the Elbow River.⁴⁰ Both were transferred to the quarantine camp, but unlike the Fai Lou Laundry, authorities did not burn down Kest's shack. Town authorities believed Kest and his companion had contracted smallpox when they took their washing to the laundry.⁴¹ Records never identified Kest's companion and mentioned her or him in passing only once. The failure to identify Kest's companion parallels the 'namelessness' of the Asian community and suggests that s/he, like the first unnamed carrier of the disease, possessed a marginal identity in the West's racial hierarchy.

Mr Pettipiece [sic], owner and operator of a boarding house located two doors west of the Chinese laundry, was the third person to contract smallpox.⁴² The Health Committee dispatched him to the quarantine grounds on the night of 14 July 1892; yet, authorities quarantined neither Pettipiece's business nor its boarders in spite of their proximity to the disease. Instead, they simply disinfected the house and its contents.⁴³ The following day, Dr Mackid diagnosed Mrs F. Burton, a recent arrival from the West Coast with smallpox. As it happens, Burton was staying at the Alberta Hotel where the first person to catch smallpox may have been employed.⁴⁴ Mackid initially thought Mrs Burton had the measles; however, after correcting his diagnosis he promptly removed the patient to the quarantine camp where two nursing sisters from the Holy Cross Hospital attended her. The nuns volunteered to care specifically for Mrs. Burton.⁴⁵ The Health Committee immediately burned the contents of her room at the Alberta Hotel and fumigated and disinfected adjoining areas in the hotel.⁴⁶

³⁷CH, 15 July 1892. City of Calgary, Corporate Records, Archives, Council Minutes, Vol. 4, p. 119.

³⁸LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 17 July 1892. LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 22 July 1892.

³⁹Shah 2001, pp. 77–104.

⁴⁰CH, 15 July 1892.

⁴¹LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892.

⁴²LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892.

⁴³CH, 15 July 1892.

⁴⁴LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892.

⁴⁵Calgary Tribune (CT), 20 July 1892.

⁴⁶CT, 20 July 1892.

The local newspaper commended the proprietor of the Alberta Hotel for immediately informing town authorities about Mrs Burton's illness and preventing the spread of the disease. The editor of the *Calgary Herald* proudly noted the hotel proprietor's quick action and commented that it was because 'he was not a Chinaman', suggesting that Asian men were inherently deceptive and that this was a contributing factor in the spread of smallpox.⁴⁷ According to town authorities, Mrs Burton had contracted smallpox when she had her washing done in Victoria at a nearby Chinese laundry, and although the *Calgary Herald* noted Mrs Burton brought the disease with her from Victoria, it did not condemn her, as it had the Chinese men, for doing so.⁴⁸ Her status as a white woman protected her from social censure. Instead, local newspapers wished her a speedy recovery and expressed sympathy for Mrs Burton's circumstances, especially after it was discovered she was pregnant and that her husband had caught a train going east without her. The *Calgary Herald* lamented Mrs Burton's 'baseless abandonment', and the city paid for her stay at the hotel.⁴⁹ The North West Council later reimbursed Calgary for the expenses it incurred while taking care of Mrs Burton.⁵⁰ Burton's dual identity as a white person and woman ensured she received good treatment and care, in spite of sharing responsibility for bringing the disease to Calgary.

The next victim of the epidemic, and perhaps the victim who produced the most outrage among the European-Canadian population in town, was 23 year old Mrs Tena [sic] Stevenson Halliday.⁵¹ Her husband owned a bakery next door to the Fai Lou Laundry. Town authorities believed she contracted the disease because the men working at the Fai Lou Laundry had thrown dirty water onto the floor of the cellar and the water had soaked through to her house.⁵² Dr Mackid discovered Halliday's case during the birth of her son. As Halliday was too ill to be moved to the quarantine camp, authorities chose instead to immediately block off her house by placing a rope around the residence and adjoining houses.⁵³ Tragically, both Halliday and her baby died a few days later on 22 July 1892.⁵⁴ Halliday never attended the quarantine camp. Most likely, Tena's death was a result of complications brought on by childbirth. Editorials published in the *Calgary Herald* expressed deep sympathy for Mr Halliday and blamed Chinese-Calgarians for her death.⁵⁵ The non-Asian community took Tena's tragedy as evidence of the danger Chinese men posed to white women and the European-Canadian community more generally. The Mayor of Calgary was not alone in declaring that he believed the Chinese had deliberately 'concealed their countryman, who was affected with the disease, for some weeks, at the same time taking in clothes, knowing that the disease was among them, and the deadly nature of smallpox.'⁵⁶

The last group of people to contract the disease lived 12 miles east of Calgary in the small town of Shepard. Shepard was the only other community in southern Alberta to experience an outbreak. Authorities believed a Mrs Belwar contracted the disease

⁴⁷CH, 17 August 1892.

⁴⁸CH, 23 July 1892. CT, 23 July 1892.

⁴⁹CH, 15 August 1892.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Sanders 2002.

⁵²LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892.

⁵³CH, 18 July 1892.

⁵⁴Sanders 2002.

⁵⁵CH, 23 July 1892.

⁵⁶CT, 10 August 1892.

when she had dinner at Pettipiece's boarding house.⁵⁷ At the time, Belwar was pregnant and living with her father while her husband, a seasonal labourer in the logging industry, was away working.⁵⁸ On 28 July the Health Committee sent everyone living in the house (two men, two women and two children) to the quarantine grounds near Calgary and on the way to town, Belwar suffered a miscarriage.⁵⁹ This was the last group that authorities sent to the quarantine camp, which they closed on 16 August 1892. In total, the outbreak led to three deaths in southern Alberta: Tena Halliday, her newborn son and Mrs Belwar's unborn baby.

The story, however, did not end with the closure of the quarantine grounds. The death of Tena Halliday sparked real anger in the community towards Chinese-Calgarians. The Chinese laundry embodied the Asian community in Calgary and provided the non-Chinese community with what they believed to be a physical manifestation of the disease. Editorials appeared in the *Calgary Herald* demanding the town's health committee inform non-Asian citizens about the committee's intentions regarding the release of the Chinese men from quarantine. The tone was threatening: 'local feeling is strong against the race, and it is well for the authorities to recognize this fact. If the Chinese now at the quarantine be sent back into town there will be trouble.'⁶⁰ The newspaper called upon town authorities to forbid Chinese men from returning to the city, describing the presence of these men as a pestilence and their homes and places of work as pits of disease. The local press described the Fai Lou Laundry, for example, as a 'filthy nest' that needed to be destroyed.⁶¹ European-Calgarians wanted municipal officials to come up with a permanent solution for the so-called 'Chinese problem'.

The Chinese men were the first group to be released from quarantine. Unhappy with their release, white Calgarians decided to deal with the 'Chinese problem' themselves. On 3 August the first in a series of riots and violent acts directed at the Asian community took place. An angry mob ransacked one residence and burned it to the ground.⁶² Sam Lee, who ran the laundry next to Bain and Hamilton Stables, had \$280 stolen.⁶³ More than a few Chinese men (although no detail is provided) suffered severe physical abuse and several had their queue (a waist-long braided ponytail) cut off. All Chinese men living in the city fled: some sought protection at the barracks of the NWMP, others turned to local clergy, and at least one man took off into the countryside to escape the violence. Conveniently, the town police, councillors and mayor were nowhere to be found. The police Chief, John English, had in fact left town several days earlier. Concerned residents instead called upon the NWMP who finally dispersed the rioters.⁶⁴ The next morning those individuals who had sought safety with the NWMP went about their daily activities only to be forced to return to the NWMP barracks that evening when more violence broke out.

⁵⁷LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892.

⁵⁸CH, 31 July 1892.

⁵⁹LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 28 July 1892.

⁶⁰CH, 19 July 1892.

⁶¹CH, 13 August 1892.

⁶²LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A telegram from A. Ross Cuthbert to the Commissioner in Regina, 5 August 1892. The telegram stated the NWMP were on duty day and night and required reinforcements.

⁶³CT, 3 August 1892.

⁶⁴LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A telegram from A. Ross Cuthbert to the Commissioner in Regina, 3 August 1892.

For several weeks sporadic outbursts of violence against Chinese residents continued: white men threw stones through windows, kicked down doors, and entered laundries late at night and roughed up the occupants. Essentially, angry white agitators were terrorising the Chinese-Calgarian community while municipal authorities did nothing to stop the perpetrators. The town council responded to the violence by calling an emergency meeting where councillors empowered the mayor, Alexander Lucas, to undertake any measures necessary to preserve the peace.⁶⁵ This did not have the desired effect, however; instead, the mayor obstructed any serious efforts to address the problem and protect Chinese-Calgarians. Lucas candidly stated that he believed reports of violence to be grossly exaggerated and that he doubted any damage done to Chinese homes and businesses would exceed more than 15 dollars.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Lucas thought that Sam Lee's claim that he had had money stolen was utterly false and should be treated as such. Lucas concluded the meeting by dismissing any possibility of taking legal action against the rioters, noting that 'under all the circumstances it would be inadvisable that any prosecution should be initiated by or on behalf of the municipality' because it would only make matters worse for the Chinese.⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, Mayor Lucas became the first president of Calgary's newly formed Anti-Asiatic League.

The Chinese community did not sit passively during these events although their ability to respond was limited. Mr Lougheed, the lawyer hired by the Chinese-Calgarian community, and several local citizens sent the mayor and town council a joint letter calling for the rioters to be denounced and preventative action taken. As Molina shows in her study on Chinese laundries in Los Angeles, the Chinese community there regularly hired white lawyers and generated petitions when faced with the arbitrary and racist actions of the state.⁶⁸ Similarly in San Francisco, Shah shows how the Asian community responded to attacks through lawsuits, boycotts and protests. Reverends Cooper, Herdman, Dean, Leduc and Wise also signed the Chinese-Calgarian community's petition.⁶⁹ However, the ministers did not want the rioters punished, rather they demanded that the town repudiate their actions and ensure that a similar incident would not take place again.⁷⁰ The ministers' message of prudence and reconciliation was not echoed by law enforcement authorities. Instead, Inspector Cuthbert of the NWMP used the outbreak as a cautionary tale, commenting that the epidemic should serve as a lesson to 'municipal authorities to have frequent inspections of these places.'⁷¹ In other words, European-Calgarians needed to remain vigilant against the potential deleterious effects of Asian men on the community.

While the town council, local newspapers and respectable white citizens officially condemned the violence against the Chinese community, they always qualified their denunciations. In an anonymous editorial, for example, the writer questioned 'who could blame these men for attacking the Chinese threat'? One article in the *Calgary Herald* went so far as to grant order and respectability to a violent mob, likening the Chinese men to hunted animals. In an article entitled 'Hunting Chinamen' the author, describing the riot, noted

⁶⁵CH, 4 August 1892.

⁶⁶CH, 10 August 1892.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸Molina 2006, pp. 35–9.

⁶⁹CH, 21 August 1892.

⁷⁰CH, 23 August 1892.

⁷¹LAC, RG18, Series B-1, vol. 1255, file 356, parts 1 and 2, Report, A Report from A. Ross Cuthbert submitted 22 July 1892.

that at 'about 10:30 at night a large body of citizens collected and undertook the hunt.'⁷² Accounts of the outbreak published in the *Calgary Herald* demonised Chinese men, accusing them of maliciously hiding the disease purposely endangering the European-Canadian population; editorials in the *Herald* demanded town officials remove Chinese men from the town limits.⁷³ White Calgarians saw the disease as a deliberate attack on the body politic by a foreign element.⁷⁴ While municipal authorities did not go so far as to expel Chinese-Calgarians from the city they did subject them to increasing regulation through health inspections.

Descriptions of Chinese men in the newspaper labelled them as strange and different from the city's white residents in both politics and religion. In this instance 'belonging took a biological turn' and the outbreak showed non-Chinese residents that Chinese men were both physically dangerous and inassimilable. Thus, the only solution to this 'foreign presence' was to isolate them physically. Commentators applauded town authorities for 'corralling the [Chinese] and utterly destroying their filthy nest on Stephen Avenue East'.⁷⁵ While the city never prohibited Chinese men from living in Calgary, after June 1892 it became increasingly difficult for Chinese-Calgarians to coexist with the white community. Chinese men left Calgary for Lethbridge and Edmonton.⁷⁶ Scholars have argued that the 1892 outbreak led to the dispersal of Chinese-Calgarians throughout the province and the growth of Chinatowns outside of Calgary where vibrant communities developed. In Calgary the area of the city in which Chinese men could congregate and socialize became increasingly constrained. However, in spite of the hostility it encountered, the Chinese community recovered from the setback of 1892 and continued to grow. Although Calgary's Chinatown was externally constructed as separate and dangerous, after 1892 it may also have served as a place of relative safety and refuge for Chinese men.⁷⁷

Pathologising Chinese men was central to constructing not only their bodies but the space they occupied as 'a foreign substance, within but not of our body politic'. In this manner, as historian Kay Anderson has aptly noted, the 'ideal' and the 'material' become 'mutually confirming axes'.⁷⁸ In urban space municipal authorities used racialised ideas about health and cleanliness to create sites of meaning discursively which were constructed in stark contrast to the 'other' who was always described as dirty (dark) and unhealthy. The laundry in Calgary operated as a symbol of the Asian community and figured prominently in public discussions about containing the infection and maintaining social order.

Megan Davies in her work on sanitation, race and governance in early British Columbia notes that municipal officials used public health measures to create health hierarchies premised upon race.⁷⁹ These hierarchies determined where particular groups could reside within urban areas. Urban planners mapped out small towns and cities in zones according to the perceived health status or cleanliness of certain racial and ethnic groups. The location of the zones was predicated on the perception of a group's

⁷²CH, 3 August 1892.

⁷³CH, 17 August 1892.

⁷⁴CH, 19 August 1892.

⁷⁵CH, 13 August 1892

⁷⁶*Edmonton Bulletin*, 14 July 1892; Gardner 2006, p. 14.

⁷⁷Baureiss 1971, p. 34; Gardner 2006, p. 15.

⁷⁸Anderson 1991, p. 74.

⁷⁹Davies 2005, pp. 381–407.

relationship to or distance from whiteness. Fears about disease and the supposed ill-health of particular communities 'polluting' white communities made the physical and social distances of non-White peoples from the European-Canadian community a geographic and material reality. Labelling Chinese men as 'filthy' and diseased helped to solidify discursive boundaries between Asians and non-Asians, while destroying their homes and businesses made those borders tangible.

By singling out Chinese laundries for inspection, town health authorities made a very unambiguous statement: Chinese laundries and the individuals who operated them were the principal source of the disease and they posed a health hazard to the non-Asian community. Editorials in the local newspaper characterised the residences and places of Chinese-Calgarians as foul and polluted. One anonymous letter to the *Calgary Herald* even suggested that the conditions under which the disease reproduced itself and was transmitted were inherent to Chinese culture: 'in accordance with their own laws, religion, and customs' the Chinese had concealed the disease 'until it was discovered by the merest accident'.⁸⁰

In addition to posing a biological threat, whites feared that Asian men would disrupt the still fragile social order of the white settler society in southern Alberta. Restrictive labour laws, the hostility of white employers and unions, and low wages forced Asian men to seek jobs in occupations like laundering that were labour intensive, required less capital and faced little white competition.⁸¹ In western Canada, and southern Alberta especially, there were few white women and Chinese men tended to occupy jobs that women traditionally performed. While such work offered Chinese men economic opportunity it exposed the vulnerability of colonial society's gender order.⁸² Given that 'laundry work has traditionally been one of the most powerfully gendered of all domestic tasks'⁸³ the association of Chinese men with laundry work in the Canadian West where notions of 'manliness' were premised not only on whiteness but on the types of labour men performed, served to unsex Chinese men because it 'blurred separate gender spheres'.⁸⁴

During the epidemic in Calgary these concerns crystallised in discourses that simultaneously raised public health concerns regarding the washing of clothes by individuals deemed unclean and accused Chinese men of deliberately taking work away from white women. Local newspapers published editorials questioning the appropriateness of non-Chinese people using Chinese laundries. The reliance on Chinese laundries, charged one article, impeded the growth of home industry and hurt the development of the community.⁸⁵ Such editorials stated that not only were Chinese laundries unclean they took work away from not just women, but the right kind of women. According to the *Calgary Herald*, the 'Chinese have been employed almost invariably in preference to many deserving and industrious women some of them the worthy helpmates of ranchers with small means, who come into town for the express purpose of earning an honest penny, to enable them to purchase a cow, and other requisites to complete

⁸⁰*CH*, 19 August 1892.

⁸¹Backhouse 1996, p. 322.

⁸²Wanhalla in Boucher, Carey and Ellinghaus (eds) 2009, p. 220.

⁸³Wang 2002, p. 52.

⁸⁴Wang 2002, pp. 52–4.

⁸⁵*CH*, 23 July 1892.

their homestead conditions.⁸⁶ Clearly, the ideal laundry woman did not intend to pursue the laundry business as a full time occupation, but rather to work casually to buttress her family farm or ranch. Local businessmen offered their support to any women who chose to take in washing. Town councillor William Osler even offered money and land to any European-Canadian women willing to establish a laundry and maintain 'proper sanitary conditions'.⁸⁷ White businessmen commonly characterised Chinese men as dangerous to white women as a strategy to undercut the Chinese competition.⁸⁸

The visible and cultural differences of Chinese immigrants made them easy and frequent targets. Calgary's settler community wanted to draw immigrants to the area in order to develop the region socially and economically, but did not welcome Chinese contributions to that development. Representations of non-white peoples as 'out of place' were central to the construction of white settler societies as 'natural'. Medical discourses that drew on contagion and disease helped authorities privilege particular groups at the expense of others, legitimising the marginalisation of non-white peoples in the body politic.

Western identity and the Empire

This white settler society ideal also shaped the discussions about identity and citizenship that arose during and after Calgary's smallpox outbreak. Canadian immigration policy has always been shaped by its economic and political needs. With the completion of the trans-continental railway in 1885, the need for cheap disposable labour declined, and the government instituted a head tax in 1886 in order to stem Chinese immigration.⁸⁹ In 1892 Canada was still a young country with conflicting national visions stemming from the incongruent position of its various regions and provinces and its relationship with Britain.⁹⁰ This divergence was reflected in how European-Calgarians envisioned their place within Canada and the British Empire more broadly. In Calgary in 1892, European-Calgarians identified themselves in one of two ways: as stalwart western Canadians protecting the interests of the North-West or as loyal British subjects upholding the ideals of the crown in the far corners of the Empire. In this instance 'public health and medicine [became] intimately intertwined with national political visions'.⁹¹ Examining the discourse, or lack thereof, regarding vaccination and compensation for losses during this outbreak offers revealing insights into identity and community formation in late nineteenth-century Calgary.

By 1892 vaccinations against smallpox were common practice and frequently employed against outbreaks in North America and Europe. However, public confidence in the efficacy of mass state-directed compulsory vaccination was and continues to be limited. Opposition to such state initiatives has been a constant since the mid-nineteenth century and has taken a variety of forms.⁹² Nadja Durbach found that opposition to vaccination in Victorian England was strongest among the working class. For the English

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷*CT*, 24 August 1892.

⁸⁸See for example Ward 1978; Backhouse 1996, pp. 315–68.

⁸⁹Bangarth 2003, pp. 395–422.

⁹⁰Buckner in Buckner (ed.) 2008, pp. 66–86.

⁹¹Fairchild 2006, p. 337.

⁹²For examples, see Nelson and Rogers 1992, pp. 369–88; Arnup 1992, pp. 159–76; Colgrove 2006; Clark 2004, pp. 175–98; Durbach 2000, pp. 45–62.

working class resisting compulsory vaccination was a means to combat the efforts of the state to shape their bodies.⁹³ Historians examining the origins of anti-vaccination campaigns in other contexts have concluded, similarly, that in each case where the populace resisted vaccination 'who wielded the needle or lancet and whose body was marked governed how vaccination was experienced and the meanings attached to it'.⁹⁴ In Calgary local newspapers characterised compulsory vaccination as the instrument of a benevolent state defending its white citizens.⁹⁵ Citizens applauded the town council's hard work to contain the outbreak and described it as heroic. The lack of overt popular opposition to compulsory vaccination reflects the relatively short duration of the outbreak, the town's position as an emerging settler colony, and the united sentiment of European-Canadians against the danger posed by non-white 'others'. In this instance, the European-Canadian public regarded the vaccination as both a solution to an immediate problem and the obligation of responsible citizens, protecting the Territories. As Paul Greenough so eloquently states in his work on mass vaccinations, the people of Calgary and its surrounding area 'surrendered their immune systems as a public duty' to the demands of the modern state for protection against a 'foreign invasion' of the body politic.⁹⁶

In western Canada the federal government commonly used smallpox vaccinations to contain epidemics among Aboriginal people and ensure that their costs remained relatively inexpensive. Essentially the state's approach to vaccinations in western Canada guaranteed that the disease could be confined to the Aboriginal population and did not negatively affect white settlement in the region.⁹⁷ In the West compulsory smallpox vaccinations protected the white settler population and therefore, constituted an essential component of the nation building process just as did the construction of the intercontinental railway.

Calgary's town council immediately imposed compulsory vaccination during the 1892 smallpox outbreak.⁹⁸ An anonymous editorial published in the *Calgary Tribune* on 13 July 1892 called for universal vaccination in the area in order to protect citizens.⁹⁹ Shortly thereafter, Mayor Lucas issued a circular requiring town residents to get vaccinated and two days later the *Calgary Tribune* reported that many citizens had already done so.¹⁰⁰ Dr Maclean received 200 vaccine points the morning of 20 July and was expecting another 300 the following day.¹⁰¹ Vaccinations cost 25 cents and were available in Dr Mackid's office every afternoon between three and four.¹⁰² Those people who could not afford 25 cents could receive the injection for free at the town hall daily between 12.00 and 1.00pm. Opposition by non-Chinese people to the municipal authorities' vaccination efforts was limited and passive. Indeed, the only indication that there was opposition was that notices regarding compulsory vaccination and threats of prosecution for those who failed to comply continued to be posted well into August.

⁹³Durbach 2000, pp. 40–61.

⁹⁴Durbach 2005, p. 5.

⁹⁵For further discussion of smallpox vaccination as a tool of colonial states, see Arnold 1993, p. 135.

⁹⁶Greenough 1995, p. 606.

⁹⁷Lux 2001, p. 139. Lux notes the irony that Aboriginal people most often contracted smallpox from non-Aboriginal people. See also Lux 1998, pp. 277–95.

⁹⁸City of Calgary, Corporate Records, Archives, Council Minutes, Vol. 4, pp. 117–19.

⁹⁹CT, 13 July 1892.

¹⁰⁰CT, 15 July 1892.

¹⁰¹CT, 20 July 1892.

¹⁰²CT, 3 August 1892.

Chinese-Calgarians, according to city council records, were quietly vaccinated without protest. The decision not to resist vaccination may well have been a strategic move on the part of the Chinese-Calgarian community. Refusing to be vaccinated would only have singled them out for more retribution and anger. Calgary's European-Canadian population already perceived Chinese-Calgarians as the source of the disease, and regarded smallpox as the 'natural state' of Chinese men. Indeed, China, noted the local newspaper, was the 'home of leprosy and smallpox'.¹⁰³

Identity was central to representations of people and place during the outbreak. Discussions around vaccination served as reminders about who belonged to the body politic, and was thus deserving of state protection. At the local level such conversations were fairly straightforward: the European-Canadian populace regarded Chinese men as sojourners who came to Canada to make money from a nation where 'leprosy and smallpox' were universal.¹⁰⁴ Settler society constructed Chinese men as the carriers of smallpox and their homes as dens of filth and disease—both metaphors for animal residences. Many white Calgarians, moreover, saw the problem as a function of Canada's subordinate position within the British Empire. Britain's trading relations with China threatened the well-being of Canada. European-Canadians saw the campaign to vaccinate people as part of a larger effort to protect citizens and safeguard the West. To construct Chinese men as foreign also helped European-Canadians distance themselves from individuals who had also come to southern Alberta as newcomers via train. Thus, European-Canadians characterised Chinese men as 'alien' to reaffirm their own claims to belonging in the region.

Anti-Chinese articles during the outbreak blamed the Dominion (read eastern Canada) for trading with China and failing to prevent the spread of infection. Editorials attacked the federal government for its inefficiency and held it directly responsible for the introduction of smallpox in Vancouver, Victoria, the North-West and Manitoba.¹⁰⁵ In turn, Calgary characterised itself as a bulwark against the infection spreading and as filling the vacuum left by federal inaction. 'It was felt throughout the fight that the Calgary authorities were working not for Calgary alone, but for every portion of the Territories' Town officials described the restrictive measures as 'protect[ing] Alberta and other portions of the territories from the ravages of the disease'.¹⁰⁶ Editorials in the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Tribune* urged the government to adopt harsher measures towards Asian immigrants, using the language of contagion and public health as justification. These measures ranged from frequent inspections of homes and businesses to prohibiting Chinese immigration to Canada altogether. Chinese-Canadians were clearly identified as the source of the contagion and a threat to the well-being of European-Canadian society.

European-Calgarians who denounced the violence towards the Chinese community invoked Great Britain. During a town council meeting Minister Dean, a clergyman who had provided shelter for several Chinese men during the riot, criticised the inaction of the police force and the mayor. Dean's censure was not based on 'special feelings for the Chinamen', but rather on his 'intense loyalty for British freedom and British institutions, and fair play [as] one of the brightest jewels in the British crown'.¹⁰⁷ Such individuals

¹⁰³CH, 21 July 1892.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵CH, 31 July 1892.

¹⁰⁶CH, 13 August 1892.

¹⁰⁷CT, 24 August 1892.

used the language of loyalty and empire to condemn the lawlessness of the Calgary mob. This rhetoric was not a guise for tolerance: Dean urged, as an alternative to violence, that white Calgarians 'render [Chinese men's] stay unprofitable', to encourage them to leave.¹⁰⁸ Dean's sentiments were echoed by Reverend Cooper who also criticized the actions of the mob, and supported Dean's financial solution to the 'Chinese problem': 'if we [don't] want the Chinese in our community then we should stop employing them'.¹⁰⁹ Cooper also advocated a law to require laundries to be regularly inspected.

Indeed, the outbreak and the events that followed clearly defined who was a member of the newly formed settler society. Some demanded fair treatment as loyal subjects of the empire, while others claimed a western Canadian identity:

It is gratifying to reflect that our citizens and our town council did not stop to count the cost of stamping out the disease. The work had to be done; it had to be done at once and thoroughly, the matter of expense being a secondary consideration. Calgary was fighting the battle of the Territories, and it had to assume the Territorial Legislature would take a generous view of its conduct in the great emergency.¹¹⁰

The municipal government compensated most of the non-Chinese victims for the losses they incurred during the epidemic. Notably however, neither the landlords who had rented their properties to Chinese-Calgarians and suffered damages during the riots nor, naturally, the Chinese themselves, were compensated.¹¹¹ The municipal government blamed the landlords for profiting from the unwelcome presence of the Chinese and so directed landlords to seek compensation from vandals on their own if they wished. Mayor Lucas cautioned, however, that 'any action against the rioters would make it worse for the Chinamen, not perhaps directly, but they would be subject to insult and petty persecutions'.¹¹²

Conclusion

In the North American West Chinatowns were contentious sites because these communities, for European-Canadians, embodied fears about the 'other'. Not only were Asian men physically and culturally different from the European-Canadians, as a result of increasingly racist immigration laws they were largely a bachelor society.¹¹³ In Calgary, given the small size of the Chinese population, and the small size of the town generally, a geographically separate space designated as 'Chinatown' did not exist before June 1892. The outbreak solidified and justified growing geographical boundaries between Chinese and non-Chinese people.

Clearly, the outbreak of smallpox in late June 1892 and the subsequent violence towards the Chinese community is an example of the racist attitudes that many white Calgarians held of Chinese-Canadians during the late nineteenth century. However, ending the examination here ignores the social contours of the outbreak and fails to lay bare popular fears regarding contemporary ideas about race and gender. Discourses produced during this period reveal how social commentators used the language of

¹⁰⁸CH, 5 August 1892.

¹⁰⁹CH, 24 August 1892.

¹¹⁰CH, 13 August 1892.

¹¹¹CT, 24 August 1892.

¹¹²*ibid.*

¹¹³Seng 1976; Anderson 1991, p. 79.

public health and contagion to create sites of belonging and meaning in southern Alberta at a time when western Canadian society was struggling to define its identity within both the Prairie West and Canada more broadly. The outbreak and the events surrounding it also exposes the inconsistencies that existed around appropriate gender roles and racial categories. The 1892 smallpox outbreak reflected the process of boundary making in western Canada; drawing on the language of science, medicine and public health white Calgarians made tangible connections between Chinese men, Chinese laundries and contagious disease. The (un)making of Calgary's Chinatown was a reflection of the larger colonial project underway in the West directed at non-white peoples.

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