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## SCOTTISH COLUMBIA

Until a feckless English lawyer named Richard Blanshard arrived in Fort Victoria symbolically to represent British colonial government in 1850, the dominant European mentality west of the Rockies during the first half of the nineteenth century remained fortress and commercial.

Petticoats and Bibles would come later, after guns, booze and disease. This was not an era for heroes, or heroines. Pragmatism was the main rule of law. But if Hollywood North ever wanted to make a blockbuster movie about the fur trade west of the Rockies from 1800 to 1850, that motion picture would not be lacking in violence, sex and political intrigue.

Opening credits would introduce six main characters. In order of appearance, they would be Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, David Thompson (explorers for the upstart North West Company) & George Simpson, John McLoughlin and James Douglas (administrators of the Hudson's Bay Company). Bagpipes would be heard as the title appeared in bold tartan letters: Scottish Columbia.

In terms of size and appearance, Anthony Hopkins would be perfect as the "Little Emperor" George Simpson, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) governor who kept personality profiles on his workers like a nineteenth-century J. Edgar Hoover.

Sensitive changeling Johnny Depp would have to grow his hair for a bowl-cut to play David Thompson, the gifted and long-suffering orphan who ended up pawning his surveyor's equipment to feed his family.

With his Scottish accent, Sean Connery would need only a long, white beard to duplicate the magisterial "father of Oregon," John McLoughlin, mentor to James Douglas, the "father of British

Columbia.”

Itinerant artist Paul Kane, undercover agent Henry Warre and botanist David Douglas would generate plum cameos as heartthrobs in their twenties.

Unfortunately the only plunging neckline would arise from the bosom of a Portsmouth barmaid named Miss Jane Barnes, “the flaxen-haired, blue-eyed daughter of Albion,” who sailed around the Horn to become the first white woman on the mainland above California.

Francophones would be well represented by voyageurs such as Jules Maurice Quesnel who survived Simon Fraser’s vainglorious escapades in the Fraser Canyon. While the American-born Fraser enviously schemed to match the achievements of Alexander Mackenzie, Quesnel could sit by the campfire and utter his one immortal line under his breath, “There is nothing to be had but misery and boredom.”

First Nations characters would get short shrift because fur traders’ journals offer scant reportage of Aborigines as individuals. Chief Kwah, the Carrier leader who captured and intended to kill young HBC trader James Douglas—because Douglas had allowed his men to beat an untried Aboriginal murder suspect to death—could be an exception. This gruesome beating could flash through Douglas’ mind as he kneels to receive his knighthood for his noble service to the empire.

Newcomers had to learn to co-exist with Aborigines or starve. Whereas David Thompson, James Douglas and John McLoughlin all remained faithful to their mixed-blood wives—Charlotte, Amelia and Margaret (who bore more than 25 children between them)—Simon Fraser and Alexander Mackenzie did not.

After he was knighted and he tried unsuccessfully to gain ascendancy in the North West Company (NWC), Alexander Mackenzie left behind his mixed-blood offspring and retired to baronial ease in Scotland, marrying his fourteen-year-old cousin at age fifty.

Subtitles would be required; otherwise the audience would be mystified by the weird mixture of Gaelic, French, English, Cree,

Latin and the trading dialect of Chinook, usually rendered with thick Scottish accents.

With the noteworthy exceptions of David Thompson and American-born Simon Fraser, it was largely Highlanders and Orkneymen who unwittingly laid the foundations for Canada's western-most province prior to 1850. The clan-oriented Scots prevailed west of the Rockies by mapping the region, discouraging American incursions north of the 49th parallel, generating an export economy, publishing their journals and achieving mutually advantageous relations with the clan-oriented First Nations.

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## WHY THE SCOTS?

Scots prevailed in British Columbia prior to 1850 in part because of poverty in the Highlands, English arrogance and the Scottish Enlightenment (1740–1800), a period of intellectual ferment that gave rise to thinkers such as David Hume, Adam Smith and James Hutton. (Hume was the moral philosopher who wrote *A Treatise on Human Nature*; Smith was the economist who wrote *The Wealth of Nations*; and Hutton was the geologist who wrote *A Theory of the Earth*.)

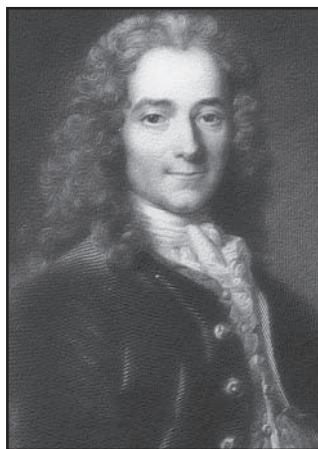
Such men—including Robbie Burns—were the flowering of a unique public educational system envisioned by religious philosopher John Knox (1515–1572). To allow everyone to read Scripture themselves, Knox wanted to introduce schooling into every parish. Classes for the great unwashed were not free, but parents could pay for education with goods in kind. Teachers' salaries were paid from local taxes. Hence, Robbie Burns, born in his mother's kitchen as the son of an impoverished tenant farmer, was able to boast, "Though I cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar."

Scotland introduced a second level of "grammar school" (ba-

sically Latin and grammar) and a third college level or “high school.” As the foundation for Canada’s educational system, Scotland’s radically inclusive system encouraged unusually gifted students to attend Scotland’s venerable universities: St. Andrews (founded 1411), Glasgow (1451), King’s College, Old Aberdeen (1495), Edinburgh (1583) and Marischal College (1593).

By the time the Scottish Enlightenment reached its zenith around 1800, it was said a man could stand in Market Square in Edinburgh and shake hands with fifty men of genius in an hour. Even remote Highlanders gained access to books and education, thanks in part to the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK).

Scottish universities reputedly produced ten thousand medical doctors between 1750 and 1850, whereas Oxford and Cambridge produced five hundred. Only Jews, it has been suggested, developed an equal respect for scholarship.



*“We look to Scotland,” wrote Voltaire, “for all our ideas of civilization.”*

This social progress to the north of England made London uneasy. In the aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, victorious England, aided by complicit Scottish lairds, enacted a series of draconian measures known as the Proscriptions and the Clearances. Bagpipes were banned, estates confiscated, etc.

Once again, Scots were victims of England’s “chains and slavery,” but this time England’s legislated oppression bordered on genocide when Scotland’s crippled economy was exacerbated by famines and an unprecedented population explosion.

These developments explain why literate but poor Scots—such as Alexander Mackenzie and Robert Campbell—were eager to test their survival skills in the hinterlands of Canada. The New World could not be much worse.

Scotland’s loss was the Hudson’s Bay Company’s gain. So-called

oatmeal savages were willing to work for relatively low wages and they were able to endure the privations that arose from horrendous Canadian winters.

HBC ships bound for Canada made their final stops, prior to their Atlantic crossing, at the Orkney Islands or the Hebrides. There the Honourable Company established recruiting stations at Stromness (Orkney Islands) and Stornoway / Steòrnabhagh (Outer Hebrides).

In his letter of advice to doomed Arctic explorer Lt. John Franklin in 1819, Alexander Mackenzie wrote: "Amongst the Crew there should be two of the HB Company's old Servants, Natives if possible of the Orkneys."

No part of Scotland was more than 50 miles from seawater, so most Scots were good sailor material. Frugal by nature and necessity, Scots also made ideal clerks. Not only could they add and subtract, they would be able to paddle loaded canoes from Quebec to British Columbia and back again. In the first five years of the nineteenth century, at least six thousand Scots left Scotland for North America.

One obvious result of this migration from starvation was the creation of a province within eastern Canada to be named Nova Scotia, where Gaelic is still sometimes heard. A lesser-known result was the formation of a network of forts and trading stations west of the Rocky Mountains, from San Francisco to Alaska. Most were constructed prior to 1850. About one-third of those forts were built in the interior of present-day British Columbia, in a zone generally called New Caledonia (meaning New Scotland).



*The derogatory term oatmeal savage arose from Samuel Johnson's innumerable jibes at the Scots, as well as his famous dictionary in which he cheekily defined the word oatmeal: "A grain, which in England, is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people." As a rejoinder, Johnson's Scottish-born biographer James Boswell replied: "Which is why England is known for its horses, and Scotland for its men."*