

A TALE OF TWO SUSANS:  
THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY ON THE  
BRITISH COLUMBIA FRONTIER

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the last twenty-five years, women's historians have striven with the problem of how to uncover women's lives in the past. The early concern with merely "retrieving" women's life stories has recently been augmented by a more theoretically-informed approach which takes into consideration issues of experience, voice, and representation, and which challenges the notion of absolute objectivity. This study was designed as a contribution to the latter type of historical research informed by the sociological debates on these issues, and was influenced by feminist materialist approaches that insist on accounting for both the content of experiences and the various discursive positions occupied by subjects. Specifically, it examines the bases of identity construction in the lives of two women teachers (Susan Abercrombie Holmes and Susan Suckley Flood) in nineteenth-century British Columbia, a context in which relatively little work on the history of women has been done.

Identity is not perceived as given or static, but rather as constructed, changing, and sometimes contradictory. Even those markers of identity commonly called upon to describe a person--such as gender, race, class, religion, and nationality--are seen as problematic, and their ambiguities are discussed in relation to the life stories of the two women. Subsequently, the effects of these "markers" are further adumbrated through an examination of some of the less obvious ways in which the women's identities were constructed. These are all seen as interrelated, and include the

influences of their families of origin on the women's earlier lives, especially regarding their education and marriage decisions, their functions as economic agents, their social relationships, and their self-images or self-representations. To the extent that these were fashioned by their gender identity, many similarities can be seen in their lives, but their experiences also diverged (widely or narrowly) as a result of their differences in other aspects, notably racial identity. These differences had a profound effect on the type and degree of material and ideological constraints placed upon them, and thus on the degree to which they were able to shape the construction of their own identities.



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## CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL "VOICE": THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

Until fairly recently, a serious analysis of the question of gender and its importance to the understanding of women's and men's experience was largely missing from scholarly work on British Columbia. This omission denotes an incompleteness in the province's historical record: as Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag have noted, "the continued absence of much of women's lives from most scholarship [on B. C.] reflects the work still to be done if female experience in all its variety is to be retrieved and integrated into our understanding of the past and the present."<sup>1</sup> Beyond the

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<sup>1</sup>Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds., British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992), p. 8. For other works that have dealt with the history of women in British Columbia, see Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B. C. (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980); Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984); and the BC Studies special double issue on "Women's History and Gender Studies," nos. 105-6 (Spring 1995), eds., Annalee Golz and Lynne Marks. Two works on specific women from this time period are: Margaret A. Ormsby, ed., A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1976), and Kathryn Bridge, Henry and Self: The Private Life of Sarah Crease 1826-1922 (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1996). A number of publications that consider the experiences of women in the context of the American western frontier may also be of interest. These include: Sandra L. Myres, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Glenda Riley, The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988); Lillian Schlissel, Vicki L. Ruiz, and Janice Monk, eds., Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Dean L. May, Three Frontiers: Family, Land, and Society in the American West, 1850-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Glenda Riley, Building and Breaking Families in the American West (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). See Diana Pedersen, Changing Women, Changing History: A Bibliography of the History of Women in Canada, second edition (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1996) for a comprehensive source of material on Canadian women's history in general.

"corrective" nature of the task, the work of excavating the nexus of ideological and material relations within which women's experiences were situated also remains to be done.

The strong influence of context on the lives and experiences of women in British Columbia's history cannot be denied. "Race"<sup>2</sup> and class (perhaps race in particular) have been major constituting factors, for the gender, racial, and class structure of B. C. society was long peculiarly skewed: in particular, through the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class, white women were still few in number relative to their male counterparts.<sup>3</sup> The relations of power were distinctively constructed through the colonial (and later provincial) political and economic experience and through these racial, class, and gender structures.

The original impetus for this historical project was a personal one. Since I was a child, I was fascinated by what I knew of my great-grandmother, Susan Suckley Flood, a woman I perceived as having lived in and coped with three different worlds. However, because the evidence left of her life seemed somewhat fragmentary, I had never thought of attempting to interpret her experience in any

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<sup>2</sup>Of course, "race" is, like gender, a problematic category, and its reification has tended to obscure its historical nature. In the context of this study, the construction of race in nineteenth-century B. C. is of considerable significance. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two. In order to indicate its socially constructed character, the term "race" has been put in quotations here, but will not subsequently be so marked, in the interests of reader convenience.

<sup>3</sup>John Belshaw points out that the traditional view of frontier B. C. society as *overwhelmingly* male is not entirely accurate. A more moderate male:female ratio occurred among non-Asian settlers. Given the barriers against marriage between Asian men and European women, this would mean that women had a higher representation in the non-Asian population than has generally been acknowledged. John Belshaw, "Cradle to Grave: An Examination of Demographic Behaviour on Two British Columbia Frontiers," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, New Series, vol. 5 (1994): 48-50.

scholarly historical sense. Then the diaries of Susan Abercrombie (Nagle) Holmes were brought to my attention. These diaries provide one of the few publicly accessible examples of long-term nineteenth-century women's autobiographical writing in B. C., and as such offer an exceptional opportunity to delve into the experiences of a woman in this particular context. When I started reading them, the possibility of viewing Susan Holmes' experience and that of Susan Flood as a "point" and "counterpoint" on the bases of identity construction in the lives of women in nineteenth-century British Columbia began to take shape.

While I started out by wondering how much an examination of Susan Holmes' life could illuminate Susan Flood's, I eventually discovered that the research I did on each one brought up new questions to ask about the other, and about the different ways they may have experienced similar contexts, opportunities, and limitations. To some degree their lives could be seen as flowing on a similar course: both became teachers at one point, probably more for economic reasons rather than from any sense of career; both married men they "chose" themselves, but under certain constraints at least partly imposed by others; both expressed strong religious sentiments and artistic natures. However, these apparent commonalities only go so far, as the differences between them--for example, differences of race, social status, and religion--seem much more elemental. In light of these differences, Susan Holmes would appear to be a representative of women more in the "mainstream" of her society, whereas Susan Flood was more on the "margins."

These two women are, of course, only in a weak sense "representative" of other women of their time and place. While neither is a famous or "great" woman, each is remarkable in many ways--but perhaps any woman studied at random would also show some remarkable traits. Yet, in both their ordinariness and their remarkableness, their lives offer some insight into the particular kinds of constraints, struggles, and conditions that contributed to shaping their experience. In this way, a deeper understanding of their experiences may, at the very least, offer a different way of thinking about other women's experiences within the early B. C. context.

However, a "complete" understanding of these two lives cannot be gained from an interpretation of their experience alone, any more than from an interpretation either of only the ideological or only the social and economic structures in which they lived. Their "voices" must necessarily be viewed as limited, not separable from or unaffected by the context of power relations within which they were embedded. These women, and others similarly situated, can thus be seen as active agents in a discourse they did not control, and in which their voices could be accorded more or less weight (or silenced altogether) when claims were being made with regards to the definition of their work, identities, and experience. In interpreting their voices in relation to other voices, ideologies, interests, and structures, I have been influenced by some feminist materialist theories and approaches that insist on taking account both of the content of women's experiences and of the discursive

positions and structural locations of the various groups which constructed the meaning of their identities and lives.

### **Feminist Materialism**

In her discussion of socialist feminist criticism, Cora Kaplan noted that the socialist feminist approach had not yet integrated questions of subjectivity ("semiotic or psychoanalytic perspectives") into its "social, economic and political analysis."<sup>4</sup> Such an integration is attempted within the feminist materialist perspective, which takes a materialist approach, focusing on "women's different material relations to their gendered positions through race, class, age, and sexual orientation,"<sup>5</sup> while at the same time avoiding a strictly "productivist" analysis, such as that found in Marxist accounts. Within feminist materialist analyses, structures and relations of power tend to be conceptualized less in terms of "reproduction" than of "hegemony," a term which "designates a process wherein cultural authority is negotiated and contested. It presupposes that societies contain a plurality of discourses and discursive sites, a plurality of positions and perspectives from which to speak."<sup>6</sup>

In short, as Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt point out, a feminist materialist perspective generally means "more focus on material realities than in most feminist criticism and more power granted to ideas, language and culture than in much traditional

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<sup>4</sup>Cora Kaplan, "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism," in Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism (London: Verso, 1986).

<sup>5</sup>Leslie G. Roman and Linda K. Christian-Smith, eds., Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture (London: Falmer Press, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Nancy Fraser, "The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories for Feminist Politics," boundary 2 17, no. 2 (1990): 85.



Marxist criticism."<sup>7</sup> The latter aspect of this analysis is often done through a discussion of ideology, viewed not as

a set of deliberate distortions imposed on us from above, but [as] a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourse, images, myths) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live. Ideology is a system of representations through which we experience *ourselves* as well, for the work of ideology is also to construct coherent subjects.<sup>8</sup>

Subjectivity is discursively constructed "through effects of language and representation . . . as the point of articulation of ideological formations,"<sup>9</sup> and is displaced across a range of subject-positions. These subject-positions may be incompatible or even contradictory.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in order to understand any individual's social identity, it is necessary to recognize that such identities are "discursively constructed in historically specific social contexts; they are complex and plural, and they shift over time."<sup>11</sup>

Such a perspective implies a conception of "experience" quite different from that often employed by women's historians, which views it "as having a 'core' of subjectivity knowable first-hand only by those whose minds and bodies 'lived' the experience."<sup>12</sup> Thus,

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<sup>7</sup>Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, eds., Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. xix.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup>Catherine Belsey, "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text," in Feminist Criticism and Social Change, eds. Newton and Rosenfelt, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup>Fraser, "The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories," p. 84.

<sup>12</sup>Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History," in Writing Women's History: International

"experience" is not usually deemed to be accurately rendered unless this is done in the particular women's own "voices": the greater the distance, or "difference" from those voices, the less authenticity is accorded the account. However, Ruth Roach Pierson argues that it is by virtue of its "power over" others that a dominant group is separated from these others' lived experience, rather than by the mere fact of difference itself. Moreover, women's written or spoken words must also be critically examined, for they do not stand alone and unmediated, but must always be contextualized. Narratives should be examined in relation to dominant discourses of the time and place concerned, and their interpreters must be aware of both the narrator's and their own "political and institutional contexts."

Joan Scott contends that, while an insistence on the authority of experience as evidence has been essential to challenges to orthodox history, this "appeal to experience as uncontested evidence" has actually weakened these critical histories because

They take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize their difference . . . Questions about the constructed nature of experience . . . are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Such histories thus preclude a critical examination of the categories of given ideological systems: the experience of those placed within

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Perspectives, eds. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 83.

<sup>13</sup>Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," Critical Inquiry 17, no. 4 (1991): 777.

these categories is made visible, but the categories themselves are not historicized. "Experience" is not historicized.

Scott does not advocate abandoning the term "experience." She does insist, however, that its study must begin to question its status, to recognize its political construction, to analyze and redefine it. There must be a new focus on identity production, but "experience is, in this approach, not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain."<sup>14</sup> Such an understanding of experience is offered by Teresa de Lauretis,<sup>15</sup> who uses the term not to express something "belonging" to an individual,

but rather in the general sense of a *process* by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations--material, economic, and interpersonal--which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical.

This process, and therefore the subjectivity constructed, is ongoing and "not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world."<sup>16</sup>

Such a definition of experience means that the notion of "freeing" the voices of women as past historical subjects is not particularly straightforward. The idea of the "Woman's voice," and even of "women's voices," has been extremely problematic for feminists. For example, the problems of representation and

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<sup>14</sup>ibid., p. 797.

<sup>15</sup>Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't (1984); and "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," Feminist Studies 16, no. 1 (1990).

<sup>16</sup>de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, p. 159.

potential appropriation of voice even in practices and research methods designed to be responsive to the need to hear the voices of and "empower" the "subjugated" have received considerable attention in recent years. Lugones and Spelman, while acknowledging the epistemological, moral, and political reasons for "demanding that the woman's voice be heard," at the same time point out two related problems with this demand. First, it tends to ignore the likelihood that women who "feel highly vulnerable with respect to other parts of [their] identity" will probably not see their voices "simply or essentially as a 'woman's voice,'" and second, because of this *some* women's voices are more likely to be heard now than are others. As a result, "Other" women feel an uneasiness with white, middle-class feminist theorizing, in which they often cannot recognize themselves.<sup>17</sup>

In a later work, Elizabeth Spelman notes how the condition of white middle-class women has been conflated with the condition of all women, such that, just as most philosophical accounts of human nature are not about women, "neither are most feminist accounts of 'woman's nature,' or 'women's experiences' about all women."<sup>18</sup> Thus, a double standard often exists whereby much feminist theory insists that non-white women "separate their 'woman's voice' from their racial or ethnic voice without also requiring white women to distinguish being a 'woman' from being white" (and presumably also

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<sup>17</sup>Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory For You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand For 'The Woman's Voice,'" Women's Studies International Forum 6, no. 6 (1983).

<sup>18</sup>Elizabeth V. Spelman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 6.

from being middle-class, heterosexual, and so on).<sup>19</sup> Simply bringing "outside voices" into these accounts will not necessarily change anything--the voices are still those of "outsiders," and feminism only has to become more "inclusive," not to change in any deep and significant way.

Chandra Mohanty claims that the assumption that women comprise a homogeneous category of analysis is part of a "latent ethnocentrism" found in much of western feminists' writing on Third World women.<sup>20</sup> In western feminist discourse, Third World women have tended to be constructed as an "already constituted group," victims of male violence, of the colonial process, of familial systems, of religious ideologies, and of the development process. In each case, the analysis is ahistorical, assuming women are "sexual-political subjects" before they enter the realm of social relations, and ignoring the fact that they are also constructed by these relations. Such an analysis

limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities . . . Because women are thus constituted as a coherent group, sexual difference becomes coterminous with female subordination, and power is automatically defined in binary terms: people who have it (read: men) and people who do not (read: women).<sup>21</sup>

Mohanty also criticizes the ways in which the universality of women's oppression is considered to be "proven." This may be done

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<sup>19</sup>ibid., p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991). In this collection, "Third World women" is taken to include "black, Asian, Latino, and indigenous peoples in North America, Europe, and Australia."

<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 64.

through a simple "arithmetic method" in which "a large number of fragmented examples from a variety of countries" is taken to "add up to a universal fact."<sup>22</sup> It is also done through employing concepts (such as the sexual division of labour) without attention to the specific context or through confusing "discourses of representation" with material realities, and thus blurring the distinction between "women as historical subjects" and "Woman" as discourse-constructed Other.

Because many feminist sociologists see a need for "an integrating transdisciplinary approach to knowledge which grounds theory contextually in the concrete realm of women's everyday lives,"<sup>23</sup> an approach which focuses on the "experience and language of women" and stresses reciprocity and intersubjectivity, they have advocated the use of an ethnographic method. Based on some of her own research experiences, however, Judith Stacey has questioned whether the "appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation."<sup>24</sup> She sees contradictions between her feminist principles and the ethnographic method in terms of both the process and the product of research. First, the importance of human relationship to the method places the research subject at risk of being manipulated and/or "betrayed" and the researcher in a position of inauthenticity. Second, the research project is an intrusion into a system of relations which the

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<sup>22</sup>ibid., p. 66.

<sup>23</sup>Judith Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?," Women's Studies International Forum 11, no. 1 (1988): 21.

<sup>24</sup>ibid., p. 22.

researcher is much freer to leave than is the subject, and this may have negative implications for the outcome. Third, conflicts of interest between the researcher as participant and as observer may be unavoidable. Finally, regardless of how reciprocal the process is, the product is ultimately written in the voice of the person who interprets and evaluates evidence, the researcher.

Similarly, Anne Opie believes that feminist research has the potential to be either liberatory, in that it may empower participants through "avoiding appropriation and highlighting difference," or repressive in that it may silence "significant experiential elements which challenge or partially disrupt [the researcher's] interpretation." These elements do not necessarily contradict the entire interpretation, but they may represent disjunctions between the "experiential" and the "ideological" which must be fully incorporated into the interpretation in order for appropriation to be avoided.<sup>25</sup>

Linda Alcoff notes that the discussion of the validity of "speaking for others" arises both from the recognition that where one speaks from (one's "location") has a major effect on what one says and from the idea that "certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous." Many now will not speak for others because of the inevitably mediated nature of representation. Yet Alcoff believes that the possibility of speaking for is a necessary condition for political action; therefore, those who simply retreat from doing so may be merely allowing themselves to avoid responsibilities

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<sup>25</sup>Anne Opie, "Qualitative Research, Appropriation of the 'Other' and Empowerment," Feminist Review 40 (1992): 52-53.

towards others. Furthermore, such a retreat does not even solve the problem of mediated representation, for the self is not autonomous but rather "constituted by multiple intersecting discourses" such that even "when I 'speak for myself' I am participating in the creation and reproduction of discourses through which my own and other selves are constituted."<sup>26</sup>

While rejecting the notion of an outright retreat from speaking for others, Alcoff offers some suggestions for reducing the dangers of this activity. Above all, she argues that anyone who does so should only do it out of "a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved."<sup>27</sup> This will involve analyzing the impetus to speak and the effects both of the speaker's location on what is said and of what is said on the context in which it is said. Likewise, Opie claims that appropriation can be mitigated but not entirely eradicated because it is impossible to "write beyond ideology." Instead, one can employ "a constant, sensitive reflection on the way that the texts of the participants are created by ideology and yet at some points challenge it."<sup>28</sup> Finally, Stacey advocates a recognition of the limitations of the research and a reduction in the knowledge claims made--research can look for "partial truths," and in this way there can exist a "partially feminist ethnography."<sup>29</sup>

It seems to me that much of this discussion, while originally referring to studies dealing with contemporary

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<sup>26</sup>Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking For Others," Cultural Critique 23 (1991): 21.

<sup>27</sup>ibid., p. 24.

<sup>28</sup>Opie, "Qualitative Research," p. 67.

<sup>29</sup>Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?"



participants/subjects, can and should also be applied to historical research and subjects. Such research is hardly immune to the kinds of pitfalls described in the above works, even (or perhaps especially) if the "participants" are no longer living, and the interaction between them and the researcher is limited to the latter's interpretation of their words and other artifacts.

### **The Projects of Feminist History**

The view that the first task of feminist history is "the simple retrieval of women from obscurity"<sup>30</sup> (certainly in itself not a *simple* or unproblematic mission statement) has been commonly held among women's historians. From this perspective, the silencing of the majority of women's experience is seen as a "basic oppression" rooted in patriarchal structural inequalities; these structures and the power relations resulting from them need to be fully analyzed. However, retrieval must go beyond a focus only on women who have "achieved" to "embrace the whole of women's experience in the past."<sup>31</sup>

For instance, recent work on teachers' history has been informed by a realization that the study of neither ideology nor social and economic structures alone can offer a complete understanding of women's (or of men's) lives and work. This body of work indicates an "increasing insistence on understanding historical women on their own terms rather than from the vantage point of men who as fathers, husbands, employers, or political representatives

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<sup>30</sup>Ruth Roach Pierson and Alison Prentice, "Feminism and the Writing and Teaching of History," in Clio's Craft: A Primer of Historical Methods, ed. Terry Crowley (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), p. 216.

<sup>31</sup>*ibid.*, p. 217.

sought to define or influence women's lives."<sup>32</sup> Hopefully, such an understanding will also include a recognition of the ways in which women's "own terms" may vary greatly, depending on such factors as race and class. This would require an acknowledgement that "women's history cannot be written without recognition of the imperial/colonial relationships of past and present, creating relationships of dominance and difference among women."<sup>33</sup>

While there has been a tendency for the work of feminist historians of women to be undertheorized due to its empirical emphasis, much recent work is moving towards a more theoretical stance in an attempt to develop a "theoretically informed feminist historical consciousness."<sup>34</sup> The theories informing feminist historical work have thus far tended to be either poststructural or feminist materialist. In many cases, the lines between these seem to be blurred. For instance, Judith Newton discusses the problem of defining the "new historicism," claiming that some of the critical practices of this approach are employed by cultural materialists and feminist materialists as well as by "new historicists." She notes that the "post-modernist" assumptions identified with this orientation are familiar from many other contexts--these assumptions include the belief in no universal human essence, the

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<sup>32</sup>Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, "The Historiography of Women Teachers: A Retrospect," in Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching, eds. Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>33</sup>Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall, "Introduction," in Writing Women's History, eds. Offen, Pierson, and Rendall, p. xxxv.

<sup>34</sup>Ann-Louise Shapiro, "History and Feminist Theory; or Talking Back to the Beadle," in Feminists Revision History, ed. Ann-Louise Shapiro (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 2.

construction of subjectivity through cultural codes, and no "objective" representations. The "new historicist" perception of history is that it is "best told as a story of power relations and struggle, a story that is contradictory, heterogeneous, fragmented."<sup>35</sup> However, Newton argues that feminist theorizing of these same kinds of premises has received little attention, and that the feminist versions of some differ significantly from those more dominant and less-politicized versions generally embraced by new historicism. For example, feminist challenges to "objectivity" generally have not been accompanied by a slide to relativism; nor has the feminist conceptualization of constructed subjectivity led to cultural determinism, or notions of the "death of the subject." In other words, the feminist versions "allow for human agency and social change."<sup>36</sup>

The result has been versions of feminist history which may overlap in some ways with new historicism, but which generally differ from it in the degree to which they insist upon viewing gender identity and gender relations as within the realm of "history." This insistence in itself is not particularly new--Sally Alexander comments that "feminists from the 17th century have refused to concede that relationships between the sexes belong outside history in any conception of the natural world, which is where philosophers, poets or marxist historians, until provoked, have been content to

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<sup>35</sup>Judith Newton, "History as Usual? Feminism and the 'New Historicism,'" Cultural Critique 9 (1988): 89.

<sup>36</sup>ibid., pp. 98-99.

abandon or place them."<sup>37</sup> Determining the meaning of gender, however, has occasioned considerable disagreement. As Judith Butler has noted,

the problematic circularity of a feminist inquiry into gender is underscored by the presence of positions which, on the one hand, presume that gender is a secondary characteristic of persons and those which, on the other hand, argue that the very notion of the person, positioned within language as a 'subject,' is a masculinist construction and prerogative which effectively excludes the structural and semantic possibility of a feminine gender.<sup>38</sup>

A theorization of "gender" as a historical category would nevertheless seem necessary to feminist history.

For Joan Scott, gender is not seen as merely another variable to be added to historical research, but must be considered as both "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" and "a primary way of signifying relationships of power."<sup>39</sup> In terms of perceived differences between the sexes, gender is constituted by four interrelated elements: "culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations"; normative concepts by means of which these symbols are interpreted (often fixed binary oppositions); political and social institutions (for example,

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<sup>37</sup>Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History," History Workshop Journal 17 (1984): 130.

<sup>38</sup>Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>39</sup>Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review 91, no. 5 (1986): 1067.

education); and subjective identity.<sup>40</sup> The task for historical research is to determine how these elements are interrelated in the construction of gender in any given context.

Scott's conceptualization of gender is useful to a feminist historical project because, as Roman and Christian-Smith explain, it is "genuinely feminist and materialist; that is, it attempts to account for the role of gender representations in ideological and cultural formations while explaining historical changes in the social organization of relationships."<sup>41</sup> As a need to practise a more theoretically-grounded history has been acknowledged, there has been at the same time a growing recognition that a specifically historical approach is imperative for feminist theory. Advocates of "a historically oriented social theory which focuses on gender" believe such a model will allow a greater understanding of the ideological ramifications of modern western conceptualizations of the relations among family, state, and economy--and a recognition "that the divisions between these spheres are not as rigid as we are led to believe and that conceiving them in such a manner obscures the realities of women's lives."<sup>42</sup>

Some consider an emphasis on gender to be especially pertinent in a study based in the nineteenth-century Western world because it can be argued that almost all Victorian struggles for authority "assumed and reinforced [a] binary model of difference

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<sup>40</sup>ibid., pp. 1067-1068.

<sup>41</sup>Roman and Christian-Smith, eds., Becoming Feminine, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup>Linda J. Nicholson, Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 11.

articulated upon sex."<sup>43</sup> Mary Poovey argues that the "ideological work" performed by gender representations in the Victorian era created an ideological formulation that was "uneven" both because it was experienced differently by differently positioned individuals and because it was constructed and deployed differently in various institutions, discourses, and practices. There were thus contradictions and fissures within the ideological system which allowed for contestation of that system. An understanding of these processes can enable an understanding of how change occurs and how it is resisted.

Poovey's discussion of uneven ideological developments rests almost entirely on an examination of textual materials. The effects of ideological and material contradictions on the daily lives and practices of nineteenth-century middle-class English men and women are considered in detail in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's Family Fortunes. The authors claim that "these contradictions . . . prevented closure and ensured continual shifts both in discourse and practice."<sup>44</sup> Contradictions within definitions of femininity and masculinity, and in the ways these intersected with forms of social and economic organization, necessitated a constant negotiation in "self construction." Although both of these works deal specifically with the first half of the nineteenth century in England, they still have a fair degree of relevance for Canada in the latter half of the century and even into the twentieth, for social change occurred

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<sup>43</sup>Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>44</sup>Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 450.

slowly, and attitudes as well as fashions took longer to find their way to the "colonies." Nevertheless, it must also be remembered that the particular conditions existing in British Columbia would mean that these processes would be manifest there in different ways.

### **Women's Personal Narratives**

The realization that the "retrieval of voice" for the purpose of "getting at the actual experience of women in the past" can be a difficult undertaking has led many historians to reconsider what sources may be deemed appropriate and how these sources should be used. As Eliane Silverman notes, it is not sufficient to focus on subjects "merely because they are accessible." Rather, "women's historians must also be prepared to be far more daring than they have been, more prepared to ask new questions, to speculate even from fragmentary data, to be suggestive as well as definitive. There are elusive questions to raise, even if the answers remain tentative."<sup>45</sup> Where more traditional sources are used, new questions must be asked of them, and materials that once would have been overlooked--such as "the letters and diaries of ordinary women, scrapbooks and photograph albums, recipe books, and reminiscences recorded in writing or on tape"<sup>46</sup>--should be considered as potentially valuable sources.

In particular, the reclamation of the diary as an important source for feminist history has been the object of considerable

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<sup>45</sup>Eliane Leslau Silverman, "Writing Canadian Women's History, 1970-82: An Historiographical Analysis," Canadian Historical Review 63, no. 4 (1982): 531.

<sup>46</sup>Pierson and Prentice, "Feminism and the Writing and Teaching of History," p. 218.

attention. Some historians are inclined to view the diary mainly as "an *additional* source" by which "the thread of the diarist's narrative weaves into what is already known . . . and renders the latter more vivid."<sup>47</sup> As such, it can be a "corrective" for institutional history, which tends to dilute individual experience within the larger picture and, in so doing, to present a perhaps too monolithic image of the institution (or situation) in question. This view stresses the diary's usefulness as a window on personal and everyday life, as well as on changing experiences throughout a life. However, it also emphasizes the form's limitations, notably both the possibility that mention of very intimate events may be avoided, and the "omniscient perspective," which could result in the omission of explanatory details.

Other historians attribute much greater significance to diaries and memoirs, though. For example, Margaret Conrad claims that "such documents are extremely valuable tools for learning how the larger historical forces intersect with women's daily realities--how 'census time' intersects with 'women's time.'"<sup>48</sup> They are considered to be of immense use in enabling the construction of life stories for women absent from public records.

Such a viewpoint is less likely to embrace the traditional notion of history as an objective method of getting at the "truth" of the past. It is more interested in examining the "partial truths"

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<sup>47</sup>Johanna Selles-Roney, "A Canadian Girl at Cheltenham: The Diary as an Historical Source," Historical Studies in Education 3, no. 1 (1991): 98.

<sup>48</sup>Margaret Conrad, "Sundays Always Make Me Think of Home': Time and Place in Canadian Women's History," in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History, second edition, eds. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991), pp. 100-101.



discussed earlier, given that "unlike the reassuring Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident," but can only be understood through interpretation, an activity which can never be completely "objective" or disinterested.<sup>49</sup> It seeks to illuminate the truths that may have been obscured by the elevation of certain kinds of "Truth" to normative status on the basis of their conformity to specific criteria. The truths revealed in personal narratives are seen as issuing from the multiple positions occupied by subjectivities in progress; in this perspective, even the omissions of a narrative tell us something. Its "guiding principle" is that "all autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose."<sup>50</sup>

One of the more interesting sidelights of this project has been considering how the different kinds of materials available on each woman structured the methods I used to understand their experience. To put it another way, I came to "know" them in different ways, and this has had a profound effect on the entire study. Of the two Susans, Susan Holmes has left by far the more direct means to interpreting her personal experience, her diaries from the 1860s until 1911 in the latter part of her life (she died in 1921). Her sister Jessie also kept a diary of several years' duration, thus providing another personal perspective of some events from within

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<sup>49</sup>Personal Narratives Group, ed., Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 261.

<sup>50</sup>Luisa Passerini, "Women's Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences, and Emotions," in Interpreting Women's Lives, ed. Personal Narratives Group (1989), p. 197.

the same family. The evidence left of Susan Flood's life is in an obvious sense much more fragmentary, since she kept no sustained journal of her life (at least none that has survived). There is certainly a more evident need for speculation. Yet in some ways this "fragmentary" evidence was also potentially quite rich, largely due to my direct connection with it. She did leave *some* written work (reminiscences, poems, and so on), and I had access to letters, written and oral reminiscences of other people, local history, and many other pieces of information which individually may seem small but, taken together, offer a fairly vivid portrait. Nevertheless, the process of painting that portrait offered more and different constraints than was the case for Susan Holmes, and the effects of these will be apparent throughout this study.

Recent interest in "women's personal narratives"<sup>51</sup> has often focused on the ways in which these have departed from the traditional autobiographical genre which, grounded in the liberal humanist conception of the unified self, tended to be a "Western white male's" form. The genre's valorization of autonomy and the notion of the "quest" meant that autobiographical writings had a fairly "public" character, which tended to exclude women's life stories in Europe and North America, especially as these were channeled more and more into the realm of the "private."<sup>52</sup> Women

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<sup>51</sup>"Women's personal narratives" are defined in different ways: some definitions include all kinds of "narratives," no matter how unsustained, including letters and diary entries, and others focus more narrowly on biography, autobiography, and life history.

<sup>52</sup>Margo Culley notes that, in the United States, journals were more likely to be kept by men than women until after the mid-nineteenth century, at which point the trend was reversed. She believes that a large part of the reason for this reversal was the fact that, during this period, diaries changed from being "semi-public" documents to a means of recording private thoughts. Margo Culley, A Day at a Time: The Diary

who used the genre (in any of its forms) had therefore to conform to its "master narratives," thus obscuring their female subject positions. However, these subjectivities could still be present in a "double-voicedness" by which female life experience is indirectly represented.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the "silences" in women's life-writing may be as important as what is actually said.<sup>54</sup>

Carolyn Heilbrun claims that anonymity has long been thought the "proper condition of woman."<sup>55</sup> More than anything else, anger, and with it the desire for control over one's life, has been considered unwomanly. Thus, women have not had access to "narratives" or "plots" that might have allowed them to take power over their own lives. Their stories, "if they have been written at all, have been written under the constraints of acceptable discussion, of agreement about what can be left out."<sup>56</sup> Heilbrun perceives the common use of pseudonyms by women writers as indicative of the desire to create an alter ego, "another possibility of female destiny" and of the search for "an escape from gender" into a new identity of their own.<sup>57</sup>

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Literature of American Women From 1764 to the Present (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1985).

<sup>53</sup>Sidonie Smith, A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1987).

<sup>54</sup>Recent works dealing with subjectivity, identity, and autobiography are reviewed in Laura Marcus, "Border Crossings: Recent Feminist Auto/biographical Theory," in Gender and Memory: International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories, vol. IV, eds. Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini, and Paul Thompson (London: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>55</sup>Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), p. 12.

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>57</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

However, most recent works do not view this identity as unified, or set once and for all. In some instances, this may be readily apparent; for example, Barbara Powell examines the "different strategies of self-representation" adopted by the Crease family women in nineteenth-century Victoria. These women kept different diaries for different purposes, thus writing "multiple versions of their lives" which "as a whole offer a polyphonic variety of voices."<sup>58</sup> In other cases, these multiple subject-positions are not as evident on the surface.

In her work on Canadian women's autobiographical writings, Helen Buss seeks a means of understanding these complex subjectivities. She chooses to position herself between the two "extremes" of humanist and poststructuralist theories of subjectivity because she feels her task requires both the "broad working hypotheses" of humanism *and* a "theory of language that will allow for freely connotative interpretations that recognize the possibility of many texts in one text."<sup>59</sup> She believes that a "mapping" metaphor is most useful for this project because "language 'maps' both the self and the coexistent world," and the historian of autobiography is engaged in "archaeological map making." Such a metaphor is considered to be complex enough to comprehend "the possibility of multiplicity of identity formation."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Barbara Powell, "The Diaries of the Crease Family Women," BC Studies, nos. 105 & 106 (Spring/Summer 1995): 46.

<sup>59</sup>Helen M. Buss, Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 28.

<sup>60</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

Gender is perceived as a strong influence on the way such maps are made. Buss feels that women's autobiographical writings should be more accurately described as "fissured" rather than "discontinuous," as women may "find identity not always located in that man-made map, but seemingly welling up from some unwritten, unspoken other map."<sup>61</sup> An understanding of these works calls for an active reading, especially in the case of diaries, since "we are engaged in a task of decoding encoded materials; that is, we use historical knowledge unavailable to the diarist to decode significances in her writing, whereas she had personal knowledge she has not shared with us, but which led her to encode certain presences as silences in her text."<sup>62</sup> This kind of reading can help to mitigate the silences. Buss envisions a relationship with the text in which the reader will be "mother," "sister," and "daughter" to the text. As mother to the text, she holds the responsibility of nurturing the text while still recognizing its ultimate separateness; as sister, she recognizes the parallels between her own subjectivity and that expressed through the text; and as daughter, she realizes that her subjectivity is also changed through reading the text.

In her reading of various women's autobiographical accounts, Helen Buss noted with some surprise that, while the accounts of more and less privileged women differed in obvious ways, there were also ways in which both sought "similar maps of subjectivity." For her, this helped to confirm a belief "that it is in the examination

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23.

of women's own stories that we can find the nuances of the interrelationship of subjectivity and society that will allow us to avoid [the] two epistemological traps" of "advocating either sameness or difference."<sup>63</sup> In some ways, this is what I am attempting to do here.

If the empiricist notion of an objective researcher is rejected, then the researcher's perspective must be a continually self-conscious one. The historian is required to proceed "with methodological and epistemological caution and humility" not just to reclaim voices but also "to contextualize the individual voices, to reconstitute the 'discursive' world which the 'subjects' inhabited and were shaped by."<sup>64</sup>

While I feel a deep connection with (and commitment to) both Susan Flood and Susan Holmes, I am aware that I cannot fully comprehend their interior experience, though I can attempt to reconstruct the contexts of that experience--and to get to "know" them as well as possible through a combination of that reconstruction and what they themselves have left behind. The differences between my position and those of the two Susans are many. In particular, the ambiguities of Susan Holmes' social and economic status are foreign to me. This ambiguous position (as part of a social but not economic elite) had important effects on her everyday life: she had to work both for a living and in the home *and* keep up her social responsibilities of constant calls and visitors.

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<sup>63</sup>ibid., p. 135.

<sup>64</sup>Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice," p. 94.

On the other hand, because I am Susan Flood's direct descendant and because she has a valued and respected place in my family history, I feel that who she was is a part of who I am. Although I never met her, the memories and perceptions of my grandmother and parents have had a strong influence on my own vision of the woman herself. Furthermore, she has always had a material presence in my life, given the large number of her belongings that came into my grandmother's, and later my mother's, possession. From a fairly young age, these artifacts engaged my imagination, and from the vantage of my admittedly limited knowledge I tried to speculate how she would have felt about her situation, frequently feeling outraged or indignant on her behalf. Such a level of identification, while ensuring that I could not take a detached stance, could also easily become problematic if care was not taken to avoid imposing my own emotional reactions onto my great-grandmother. As I have learned more about her life, I have had to acknowledge the limitations of these responses. I am separated from her experience because, among other things, I have never had her particular racial experience, I have never lived in and coped with three "different worlds" as she had to do, and I do not share her religious background. I claim my heritage from her, but I cannot claim her experience.

The possibility of over-identification was also present, though to a lesser extent, with Susan Holmes' story.<sup>65</sup> While the bulk of my

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<sup>65</sup>Belle Chevigny posits a "fantasy of reciprocity" in women's biography of women, "in which author and subject in effect become *surrogate mothers* in that they offer one another 'maternal' nurture," through "a sanctioning of their autonomy." Belle Gale Chevigny, "Daughters Writing: Toward a Theory of Women's Biography," in Carol Ascher, Louise De Salvo, and Sara Ruddick, eds., Between Women: Biographers.

engagement with her life took place through the written texts she left behind, I also had several long and interesting conversations about her with her grandson and granddaughter-in-law, Don and Phyllis Roberts. The Roberts have done considerable genealogical research on Susan and her family, and their sense of kinship with the subject of this research was similar to my own with Susan Flood. Since I already "liked" the Susan Holmes I encountered in the journals, our discussions often took on the tone of a chat about a mutual friend, and their enthusiasm and solicitousness for her story provoked similar responses in my own attitude towards it.

With respect to both Susans, I also have the privileged position of every historian. I can look back and know what happened both to them and to the society in which they lived. History is always written from the point of view of the time period in which it is written and this is not a negative thing in itself, but it must be a recognized condition and care must be taken that it not lead to decontextualization of the time under study. Of course, these two women also knew much that I cannot access. I believe that, while I busy myself with an interpretation of the Susans' lives, I can keep the question of how they might interpret *my* life and experience alongside my questions of them; in this way, I can also be the "daughter" to their texts, even though it may appear that the "mothering" relationship would have to be the strongest in this situation.



If historical narratives are always based in a particular set of values, then "feminist history is inextricably bound up with feminist theory and the question of identity."<sup>66</sup> My own perspective on the historical work I am undertaking, and the method with which I approach it, are both influenced by the feminist materialist stance(s) discussed earlier in this chapter. Like Helen Buss, I would not align myself with either the liberal humanist belief in the unified subject and "objectivity" based on transcendental reason or the more radically relativistic poststructuralist resistance to the use of any categories and resultant undermining of a positive feminist politics. As Christine Di Stefano notes:

To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centred inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, while the feminist materialist approach is concerned with language and discourse, and may employ a deconstructive method (or at least have a deconstructive "intent"; that is, a treatment of "cultural forms and their gender ideologies as *constructs* subject to undoing or deconstruction"<sup>68</sup>), it does not reduce all experience to the "play" of language. Furthermore, the "feminist materialist notion of deconstruction defines the text more

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<sup>66</sup>Rosemary Hennessy, Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. xvii.

<sup>67</sup>Christine Di Stefano, "Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism," in Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.76.

<sup>68</sup>Roman and Christian-Smith, Becoming Feminine, p. 21.

broadly to include social relations and their conflicting divisions by gender, class, race, age, and sexual orientation . . . attempting to find the fissures or contradictions between people's lives and representations of gender."<sup>69</sup>

Such contradictions are apparent throughout the varied aspects of Susan Holmes' and Susan Flood's lives, and these will be the subject of the chapters which follow. In the next chapter, I will outline the lives of these two women. In doing so, I hope to highlight the complexities inherent in the ways in which "identity" is commonly delineated--in terms of race, social status, nationality, religion, and the basic "facts" of our lives by which we tend to define ourselves. These complexities affect all the areas of our lives, and the ways in which this occurred in the Susans' life stories is examined in subsequent chapters. Chapter three will examine the influences of their relationships with their families of origin on their earlier lives, especially with regards to education and marriage decisions. Their participation in their families' economic lives (both before and after marriage)--or how they functioned as economic agents--will be highlighted in Chapter four, while Chapter five will be concerned with the construction of their social identities through their relationships with others, both within the family and in the larger community. These are, of course, all interrelated. Finally, in Chapter six, I will consider how all of these factors coalesced in each woman's self-image, or presentation of self.

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<sup>69</sup>ibid., p. 22.

Rosemary Hennessy claims that a politically-informed historical agenda "always has inscribed within it a 'utopian future.' It is, in other words, a reading *of* the past *from* the present *for* the future."<sup>70</sup> The hope underlying my pursuit of this project is that, as research into the "past," it may also be linked to contemporary debates in such a way as to contribute to the "struggle to understand and hopefully transform the historical contradictions of becoming feminine within the contexts of conflicting sets of power relations."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Hennessy, Materialist Feminism, p. 102.

<sup>71</sup>Roman and Christian-Smith, Becoming Feminine, p. 4.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE AMBIGUITIES OF IDENTITY

As many who have sought to analyze such issues as "identity politics" have discovered, the notion of "identity" and how it is formed is anything but simple or non-contradictory. Certain categories and classificatory schemes tend to be utilized both by a society and by individuals in determining how people are to be defined. However, the historical nature of these categories is seldom considered, and potential contradictions among them often go unremarked. There is a tendency to see "selves" as "made up of separable units of identity strung together to constitute a whole person,"<sup>1</sup> some of the most common of these units of identity being gender, class, race, nationality, and religion. Opposed to this notion is the view that identity is contingent, predicated on "difference" (or non-identity), and "rarely identical to itself but instead [carrying] multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings."<sup>2</sup> People are situated along various dimensions of identity, but these dimensions are not parallel; rather, they cut across each other such that an individual's experience will differ from that of others placed along the same dimension according to which other dimensions each is placed along at the same time. This is the case even when someone does not consciously recognize their placement along

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<sup>1</sup>Spelman, Inessential Woman, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 98.

certain lines, for the lack of awareness of some elements can in itself be a significant reflection of a person's identity.<sup>3</sup>

### **"Identity" in Historical Records**

On a practical level, the problems of understanding, even to some degree, the identities of people in the past are highlighted by a consideration of the ways open to historians to achieve this task. Typically, we must rely on the "facts" provided by official and nonofficial documents and records such as birth, marriage and death certificates and announcements, and census materials. However, these records are by no means uncontaminated by "subjective" interpretations. More care may be taken for accuracy (and accuracy may indeed be defined differently) with records for certain "kinds" of people, and types of information deemed pertinent may vary for the same reasons. Furthermore, the categories under which information is gathered are always determined by the various agendas of those who set them, and reflect the changing concerns of any given society.

For instance, Patrick Dunae has stressed the need to pay attention to the process of enumeration for the census in British Columbia--how enumerators were chosen and how the activities of enumeration were carried out, especially given the geography and dispersed population of the province.<sup>4</sup> Such knowledge would aid interpreters in recognizing "the inaccuracies, inconsistencies and biases that characterize manuscript census returns."<sup>5</sup> While Dunae

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<sup>3</sup>Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, pp. 101 & 96.

<sup>4</sup>Patrick A. Dunae, "Taking and Shaping the 1891 Census in British Columbia," paper presented at the B.C. Studies Conference, Kelowna, B. C., October 7-10, 1994.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

feels that overall the work of the enumerators of the 1891 census in B. C. was efficient and acceptable by the standards of the time, the above-mentioned flaws are still readily apparent. Enumerators varied greatly in their approach to the information they gathered, and these variations resulted in a somewhat uneven portrait of the people polled. Less attention to detail may have been paid to certain groups of people, particularly Indians and Chinese. From scanning much of the 1901 census, I noted that it would be very difficult to determine much about many of the people in these groups, at least in terms of the census categories. It was plain in many of these cases that enumerators either felt unequal to, or disinterested in, the task of trying to convey accurately a complete name or any detailed information. Language was certainly sometimes a contributing factor (although these outcomes still occurred even when the mother tongue was listed as English), and Dunae notes that some enumerators found northern Indians suspicious of, and therefore reluctant to cooperate with, the process.<sup>6</sup>

A different sort of idiosyncrasy appears in the way in which "race" was approached. Of the three censuses available,<sup>7</sup> only the 1901 return called for the designation of the individual's race; this was determined through the categories of "colour" and "racial or tribal origin." The classification of people of mixed Indian and white background is particularly interesting. Their racial origin is generally described in abbreviated form as "HB" (for halfbreed) or,

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<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>These are the censuses for 1881, 1891, and 1901. British Columbia did not enter Confederation in time to be a part of the 1871 census, and the manuscript censuses subsequent to 1901 have not yet been released to the public.

more specifically, "EB," "SB," "FB," "IB," or "OB" (for English breed, Scottish breed, French breed, Irish breed, or Other breed, respectively). Very rarely is the specific tribal background of the Indian parent mentioned. Where someone classified as a "breed"<sup>8</sup> and a white person had children, these children were still designated as breeds, with perhaps a change to reflect the (white) father's origin: for example, the children of an "English" father and a "Scottish breed" mother would be described as "English breeds."

(Interestingly, this strategy, while following the typical European patrilineal mode, obscured the paternal line of the mother in favour of the maternal. It would appear that the survival of the racial marker was paramount.) In any case, these children's racial identity as Indian or "red" remained. On the other hand, when people of mixed-blood married Indians, their children were classified as "Indian," and any reference to their "white blood" was erased.<sup>9</sup>

With these kinds of constraints in mind, the rest of this chapter will be concerned with how Susan Holmes and Susan Flood would most readily be "defined" in terms of the elements of identity most commonly called upon in creating a biographical sketch. On one level, these may appear the more superficial and uncomplicated components of self-definition, those things we can "know" about people without delving into their interior lives or experiences. Yet even these seemingly straightforward elements are often fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. In outlining the lives of these

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<sup>8</sup>The Indian or mixed-blood partner was virtually always a woman, so it is difficult to separate the roles race and gender played in this scheme.

<sup>9</sup>This was most frequently encountered in the separate return for the reserves.

two women in terms of their "experience externally observed,"<sup>10</sup> my hope is to clarify how these ambiguities and contradictions were manifested in the various positions the women filled. This will be done first through a brief description of their lives and then through a more in-depth discussion of the actual complexities of the "markers" of identity which may appear "obvious" in their life stories.

### **Susan Abercrombie Holmes**

Susan Holmes was born Susannah Abercrombie Nagle on May 18, 1840, on board the Thomas Lowrie, ten days before that ship landed in Sydney, Australia. She was the second of Jeremiah and Catherine Nagle's eight children who survived infancy (a son and daughter were born and died between Susan and her elder sister Kate). Jeremiah was a sea captain and, while the family settled in New Zealand for some years (adding Harry, Jessie, Isabella, and Fred to their ranks), his apparent wanderlust eventually brought them to the west coast of North America. They moved to San Francisco in the spring of 1850 and stayed there for eight years, during which time their last two children, Ella and Eddie, were born. In 1858, when Susan was eighteen, the Nagle family (with the exception of Kate who had by then married) made its last move to Victoria, in the young colony of Vancouver Island.<sup>11</sup>

Captain Nagle, who had been involved in real estate and shipping while in California, continued his varied activities after settling in Victoria. Besides his office as Harbourmaster, he was

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<sup>10</sup>Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice," p. 94.

<sup>11</sup>This information has been culled mostly from notes provided by Don Roberts, Susan's grandson.



appointed Collector for Victoria<sup>12</sup> and Justice of the Peace for Vancouver Island.<sup>13</sup> After he gave up the Harbourmaster post in 1861, he continued working in various aspects of shipping, though it would seem his impetuosity created a rather unsettled life for his family: he was "a good father but not a very good provider."<sup>14</sup> In December 1865, he opened a "shipping customs and broker's office" in New Westminster and moved his family to that town, selling their "delightfully situated house and property at James Bay," only to move them back to Victoria again by July 1866.<sup>15</sup> He was later appointed a port warden for Victoria and Esquimalt,<sup>16</sup> a post that would have augmented somewhat his probably rather erratic income from his shipping agency. Susan Holmes' journals, especially during these early years, reflect a strong interest in shipping matters of all kinds--which ships had docked, which embarked, what they carried, concerns about the effects of the weather on those at sea.

By all accounts, the Nagle family was closely-knit and loyal, and the older children also contributed to the family income in varying ways. Harry worked both as a clerk in the Harbourmaster's office while his father had control of it and in the business in New Westminster, Fred at seventeen worked at the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Fort Alexandria, and Jessie was employed as

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<sup>12</sup>British Colonist, 13 June 1859, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>British Colonist, 15 June 1859, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup>Don Roberts, "Susan Holmes," in Memories Never Lost: Stories of the Pioneer Women of the Cowichan Valley and a Brief History of the Valley, 1850-1920 (Duncan: Pioneer Researchers, 1986).

<sup>15</sup>British Colonist, 11 December 1865, p. 3; 19 March 1866, p. 3; 16 July 1866, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Jim Nesbitt, "Old Homes and Families," Daily Colonist, 8 February 1953, p. 6.

governess by Colonel Richard and Mary Moody<sup>17</sup> and later as a schoolteacher in New Westminster. At the time of the first diary entries we have from Susan, in 1865, she was working at "Mr. Reece's school"<sup>18</sup> in Victoria. By 1869, she was fretting about her inability to find a way to help out, since "Papa is doing next to nothing, & not likely to do any better"; unfortunately, she felt that "the only thing there seems to do is to open a school, & there are already . . . almost more [schools] than scholars."<sup>19</sup> A few months later, she was appointed to teach in the public school at Yale, then head of navigation on the Fraser River.

At the time of her arrival in Yale, Susan was engaged to Algernon Hill, a young man she had not seen for some time, as he attempted to build a career in the Colonial Services. (By this time he had received a minor posting in British Honduras.) Within a year, she had broken off the engagement and shortly thereafter she acquired another suitor, Reverend David Holmes, the Church of England clergyman at Yale. At first somewhat resistant, she eventually consented and they were married in Victoria on June 19, 1871, afterwards returning to Yale.

David Holmes was born in Lincolnshire in 1837, and attended St. Augustine's College in Canterbury.<sup>20</sup> He arrived in Victoria as a missionary in 1864<sup>21</sup> and was later sent to Yale, where he built a reputation as a tireless worker. He had been ordained to the order of

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<sup>17</sup>Colonel Moody was commander of the Royal Engineers in British Columbia.

<sup>18</sup>Mr. Reece was an Anglican clergyman.

<sup>19</sup>Susan Abercrombie Holmes Diary (hereafter SAH), 7 April 1869, British Columbia Archives and Records Service (hereafter BCARS).

<sup>20</sup>From Don Roberts' notes.

<sup>21</sup>Fourth Census of Canada, 1901.

deacons in 1868<sup>22</sup> and was ordained as a priest the year after his marriage.<sup>23</sup> Susan seems to have been in intermittently poor health during the months following their wedding, and had thought she might be pregnant in the fall of 1871. However, their first child, Harry, was not born until November 1872.

Susan had at least one miscarriage, early in 1876, so there was a five year gap between Harry and Fred, born in 1877, but Fred and the last four Holmes children followed each other fairly closely: after Fred came Beatrice in 1878, Isabel in 1880, Josephine (Zephie) in 1882, and Phil in 1884. Thus, between the ages of thirty-two and forty-four, Susan had six children. All of the children survived to adulthood, though Phil would die from pneumonia in 1907, at the age of twenty-three.

The Holmes' had moved back to Vancouver Island in the fall of 1873, when David was appointed rector of the church at Cowichan.<sup>24</sup> Here, they resided at the parsonage until 1884, when they moved into the large house they had built at Holmesdale, the property they had acquired in what is now the town of Duncan. David Holmes' zeal and energy had continued at his new posting, as he was soon responsible for undertaking fundraising for the erection of three new churches in the district, at Somenos, Chemainus, and Quamichan, the latter specifically for Indians.<sup>25</sup> However, this zeal was likely a factor in his apparent falling-out with some of his parishioners--his views on the great "spiritual wants of this

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<sup>22</sup>British Colonist, 21 September 1868, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>British Colonist, 28 May 1872, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>British Colonist, 26 September 1873, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>British Colonist, 18 April 1874, p. 3.

District" most likely extended not only to the "needs" of the local Indians, but also to those of the area's white settlers. Partly in consequence of these disagreements, in 1884 he resigned from his clerical office at Cowichan in order to found an agricultural college,<sup>26</sup> an endeavour which fit in with his earlier activities at the mission farm at Fort Hope and with his belief that "industrial improvement [was] a necessary supplement to religious and moral training."<sup>27</sup>

The fate of this college is unknown, but it does not appear to have been successful in the long run (or perhaps David simply did not like the job), for it is never mentioned anywhere again after 1884. David Holmes spent the rest of his working life involved in a mix of farming and clerical duties, the latter of which sometimes took him far from home. In 1896, he was preaching at Watsonville, California,<sup>28</sup> and in 1898 he was chosen by "unanimous vote" as rector of the parish at Gainesville, Texas.<sup>29</sup> Susan visited him at least once in Watsonville, but in general she remained at Cowichan, running Holmesdale, and taking fairly frequent trips to Victoria, both to attend to the business of selling parts of their land and to attempt to secure work situations for one or the other of her sons. David seems to have returned home for good by 1903. In both the 1891 and 1901 censuses, his occupation was listed as "clerk in holy orders,"<sup>30</sup> but the majority of his time (when at home in Cowichan)

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<sup>26</sup>British Colonist, 6 August 1884, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>British Colonist, 26 September 1868, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Letter from Susan Holmes to her children, 6 June 1896, Holmes family papers.

<sup>29</sup>Colonist, 28 February 1898, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Census of Canada, 1890-1; Fourth Census of Canada, 1901.

was probably spent in farming duties; despite his apparent lack of enthusiasm for these chores, he approached them with his customary energy, and Susan frequently worried that he worked too hard, a concern that could also have been applied to her. David did have temporary clerical duties at Cobble Hill, Shawnigan, and Ladysmith, and the latter post necessitated his absence from home from Saturday to Monday every week. By this point, both Holmes' had reached their early seventies.

Susan's religious inclination, always strong, became even more so as she grew older. She took seriously her role in the community as clergyman's wife, and David's troubles and consequent resignation had also been a great blow to her.<sup>31</sup> It seems that she continued to take the same kinds of community responsibilities throughout the rest of her life, visiting the sick, organizing and participating in fundraising events for the Church and missions, and so on. She was active with the King's Daughters, an Anglican women's group, serving on the board of directors, and acting as one of the driving forces behind the local group's major project of building a convalescent home.

Aside from these kinds of activities (as well as a number of money-making schemes) and all those involved in running the home and bringing up the children, often in the absence of her husband, Susan in her later years also applied herself to the writing she had long desired to do. She had kept a journal, with some gaps, for most

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<sup>31</sup>Bishop George Hills describes a meeting with the Holmes' the year after the "trouble," in which "her eyes were full of tears & he could barely speak from emotion." The Journal of Bishop Hills, Bishop of Columbia, Archives, Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia, 12 July 1885, p. 17.

of her life, and when her children were grown enough to do their part in the household work (and she was also able to afford a Chinese housekeeper), she began to work on other forms of writing. She composed songs<sup>32</sup> and wrote poems, children's stories, and articles, some of which were published in journals of the time.<sup>33</sup>

Susan's parents had both died in the 1880s (Jeremiah in Victoria and Catherine in Oakland, where she was living with her daughter Ella) and David, ill for the last few years of his life, died in the fall of 1915. By the time Susan followed, on January 24, 1921, she had been predeceased by all but two (Fred and Ella) of her siblings. Despite a perception of herself as precariously healthy over the course of her life, she had lived to almost eighty-one years of age.

### **Susan Suckley Flood**

The specifics of Susan Flood's entry into the world are somewhat more shrouded. In one respect, there is a similarity between her family of origin and that of Susan Holmes: both women could be said to have had interesting fathers and almost invisible mothers, at least in terms of public records. Catherine Nagle did at least acquire some fleshing-out in her daughters' journals, but of Susan Flood's mother little is known outside of her name and her parentage. Even her name, Cecilia, is most likely not the one she was given at birth.

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<sup>32</sup>Such as "Daughters of the Empire", words and music by Susan A. Holmes, copyright 1918, Holmes family papers.

<sup>33</sup>I have been unable to locate any of these, though the recording of approximate publication dates and other references indicate that some indeed were published.

After whites began settling in the Puget Sound area, Cecilia's father was commonly known as Big John; his Indian name was Cuo-dis-kid.<sup>34</sup> He was apparently considered the "last war chief of the Suquamish," one of the "old Indian nobility,"<sup>35</sup> whose lifetime encompassed "the almost total overturning of the way of life of the Salish peoples."<sup>36</sup> His wife, Martha, was a Skagit, and their economic activities included fur trapping as far north as the upper reaches of the Skagit River. Despite Cuo-dis-kid's reported fierceness, his warlike tendencies were generally directed against raiding parties from other tribes, particularly the Haida; the Suquamish were considered a group "friendly" to the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>37</sup> Due to the influence of the Duwamish chief Seattle, whom Cuo-dis-kid supported, the Suquamish were among the earliest of the Washington Territory Indians to give up war and their warrior traditions. A 1950 magazine article, written during the construction of the Agate Pass Bridge from Seattle to Bainbridge Island (the heart of Suquamish territory, and the area to which their land was confined when reservations were implemented), notes that:

history landed on Cuo-dis-kid with seven-league boots. After 1850, it narrowed down his tribe's wide, free domain to a few thousand acres in the Port Madison Indian Reservation. It freed his slaves. It divested him of his Indian name and substituted Big John. It ousted him from the smoky ancestral halls of huge Old

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<sup>34</sup>This is sometimes also spelled Qu-dis-kid.

<sup>35</sup>Ernest B. Bertelson, "The Land of Spooks," Seattle Sunday Times Magazine Section, 18 June 1950.

<sup>36</sup>George Pierre Castile, ed., Introduction to The Indians of Puget Sound: The Notebooks of Myron Eells (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), p. xiii.

<sup>37</sup>William Fraser Tolmie, Physician and Fur Trader: The Journals of William Fraser Tolmie (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1963), p. 216.

Man House and installed him in a frame home surrounded by a picket fence. It wiped out his career as a tribal warrior and left him only the hollow honor of being known as the 'last war chief of the Suquamish.'<sup>38</sup>

Susan's father, George Suckley, arrived in the Puget Sound area at the time when Oregon Territory was split into two parts, with the northern part becoming Washington Territory. Suckley had graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons (now part of Columbia University) in New York and had then served as resident surgeon in a New York hospital until early 1853. At that time, at the age of twenty-three, he was appointed surgeon and naturalist for the eastern portion of the Pacific Railroad Survey of the forty-seventh and forty-ninth parallels between St. Paul, Minnesota and Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, under the command of General Isaac I. Stevens (recently appointed first governor of the territory). After reaching Fort Vancouver in December 1853 (he had split from the main party to travel by canoe from Fort Owens to Fort Vancouver), he joined the U. S. Army as an assistant surgeon. He was first stationed at Fort Steilacoom and was transferred to Fort Dalles in the summer of 1854, but almost immediately received a leave of absence to continue his collection of natural history specimens.

Suckley's duties with the Survey had included ethnological studies, and he had sent translations of Indian vocabulary to the Smithsonian Institution along with his specimens and reports; he had also for a time considered taking a post as Indian agent.<sup>39</sup> As his professional activities took him among the Indians of the area, it

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<sup>38</sup>Bertelson, "The Land of Spooks."

<sup>39</sup>"Notes and Documents: Sidelights on the Stevens Railway Survey," Pacific Northwest Quarterly 36, no. 3 (July 1945).



is probably not surprising that he developed a liaison with an Indian woman, though virtually nothing is known of the nature of their relationship. Almost certainly they did not marry, either by church ceremony or by "the custom of the country," a custom no longer considered appropriate in the age of settlement.

In any case, it was during Suckley's stint in the army, from which he resigned in October 1856, that Susan Cecilia Suckley was born. Her birthdate and place of birth were the first elements of her identity that received a varied recording. In the 1881 and 1891 censuses, she is listed as twenty-three and thirty-three years old respectively, which would have made 1858 the year of her birth.<sup>40</sup> Her baptismal record, dated June 1876, states that she was born in July 1856;<sup>41</sup> this date was probably arrived at in keeping with the records of the Sisters of St. Ann, who had recorded her age upon her arrival at the Victoria convent in 1870 as fourteen.<sup>42</sup> The date that Susan herself gave to her family was April 13, 1855, and this is also the date specified on the 1901 census.<sup>43</sup> Given the record of Dr. Suckley's wanderings, it seems the most likely to be accurate. The place of birth is given variously as Olympia or Steilacoom; while the exact location may be difficult to ascertain, it was certainly somewhere in this area.

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<sup>40</sup>Census of Canada, 1881; Census of Canada, 1891.

<sup>41</sup>Baptismal record 246, June 1876, St. Andrew's Roman Catholic Cathedral (Victoria), Baptismal Register, BCARS. This record also listed her mother's name as "Maria," a name commonly given to native women.

<sup>42</sup>Letter from Sister Mary Martha, Registrar, Sisters of St. Ann, to Charles S. Flood, December 26, 1944, Flood family papers. Sister Mary Martha also noted that Susan's mother's name was not indicated.

<sup>43</sup>Fourth Census of Canada, 1901.

Virtually nothing is known of Susan's life from her birth until her admission to St. Ann's Academy in May 1870. Her son's reminiscences have her living in the Suquamish area with her mother and, since her grandparents were on the Port Madison Reserve, this seems possible, at least for a part of these fifteen years. It is known that Cecilia eventually married and had more children, but the timing of these events is unclear.<sup>44</sup> Whether Susan had any formal schooling during this time is also unknown, as is the extent of her father's involvement with his family. Dr. Suckley may have spent periods of time with Cecilia and their daughter, but these would have been limited. After his resignation from the army, he continued his work collecting specimens, writing the reports on mammals and salmonidae collected by the Northwest Boundary Survey of 1857,<sup>45</sup> and co-authoring with Dr. James Cooper The Natural History of Washington Territory.<sup>46</sup> He became well-known in natural history circles, and had a number of species, particularly of waterfowl, named in his honour.<sup>47</sup> During this time, Suckley also travelled farther afield--an expedition to Panama with Cooper, a sojourn in Paris, and apparently a trip to China, from which he returned to the eastern U. S., again crossing the continent via Salt Lake to San

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<sup>44</sup>Susan's halfbrothers were named John and Joe Pratt, and in later life she definitely kept in touch with them, though it is uncertain when their correspondence was initiated.

<sup>45</sup>George Suckley Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

<sup>46</sup>J. G. Cooper and G. Suckley, The Natural History of Washington Territory (New York: Ballière Brothers, 1859). The monograph was published simultaneously in London, Paris, and Madrid.

<sup>47</sup>Edgar Erskine Hume, Ornithologists of the United States Army Medical Corps (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), pp. 439-442.

Francisco in 1860.<sup>48</sup> When the Civil War broke out, he enlisted once more and was appointed Surgeon of Volunteers in 1861; after resigning for the final time in April 1865, he was appointed brevet Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel of Volunteers for faithful and meritorious service.<sup>49</sup> He never returned to Washington Territory, dying in New York in July 1869.

In May of the year following her father's death, Susan appeared at St. Ann's in Victoria. While St. Ann's took in many orphans on charity, Susan was a paying boarder, "at the rate of \$56.50 per quarter."<sup>50</sup> The person paying was not specified, but it was probably her father's uncle Rutsen Suckley, who had likely promised to deal with the undoubtedly unwelcome task of seeing to the well-being of his nephew's illegitimate and half-Indian daughter.<sup>51</sup> The reasons for the choice of St. Ann's are unclear. George Suckley was certainly not a Catholic, but many non-Catholics attended the convent school. A plausible explanation is that the school was suggested by William F. Tolmie, who, also a doctor and naturalist, was almost certainly known to George Suckley during the former's days with the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company at Fort Nisqually.<sup>52</sup> Tolmie, by this time resident in Victoria, was quite likely one of three trustees named for Susan in Suckley's will. It was not a position Tolmie took

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<sup>48</sup>Washington Standard, 17 February 1872, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>49</sup>Letter from U. S. War Department to C. S. Flood, 1947, Flood family papers.

<sup>50</sup>Boarders' Accounts, 1866-1876, Sisters of St. Ann Archives.

<sup>51</sup>Letters from G. Tillotson to Susan Suckley, 31 March 1874 and 20 August 1875, Flood family papers.

<sup>52</sup>That an acquaintance existed between these two men is confirmed in a letter from George Suckley to his aunt, Mary Suckley, dated 25 October 1856. Ms. no. 20, George Suckley Papers, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

on, but he did apparently take some interest in her progress through the years,<sup>53</sup> and it seems feasible that he may have offered this kind of advice, and perhaps to keep an eye on the girl to some extent.

In any event, Susan remained at St. Ann's until 1880.<sup>54</sup> In the summer of that year she wrote the B. C. teachers' examination, managing to acquire a third class certificate.<sup>55</sup> She was staying in Seattle in the fall of 1880, but was back in Victoria by March of 1881; at that time, the schoolteacher at Fort Hope had resigned and she was appointed to replace him.<sup>56</sup> Of course, she was required to rewrite the examination that summer and did not fare even as well as on the previous occasion, but did well enough to continue in her position.<sup>57</sup> However, the Fort Hope trustees had to request another teacher the following year,<sup>58</sup> as Susan married William Lewis Flood at some point in early 1882.

According to various accounts, William Flood was born in Woodstock, Ontario, in 1846. Towards the end of the American Civil War, he apparently volunteered to serve in the Union army and, although his time as a soldier was short, he never again returned to Ontario. Along with a number of other activities, he pursued mining

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<sup>53</sup>Letter from W. F. Tolmie to Susan Suckley on her marriage (undated), Flood family papers.

<sup>54</sup>Pupil Registration, Sisters of St. Ann Archives. Susan did apparently withdraw October 22, 1873 and re-registered in September of the following year.

<sup>55</sup>Register of Teachers' Certificates, 1880, British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, BCARS.

<sup>56</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Correspondence Inward, 10 March 1881 and 12 March 1881; C. C. McKenzie to Susan Suckley, Correspondence Outward, 14 March 1881, BCARS.

<sup>57</sup>Register of Teachers' Certificates, 1881.

<sup>58</sup>I could not determine whether or not Susan Suckley finished out the year (or would have been allowed to). It seems that she probably did, given the date of the trustees' request, in June of 1882.

opportunities,<sup>59</sup> and while in San Francisco (supposedly en route to Australia), he heard of the discovery of gold in the Skagit Valley and headed in that direction instead.<sup>60</sup> By the time Susan Suckley arrived in Fort Hope, he had by and large given up his pursuit of mining in favour of working in construction. His occupation is listed as a carpenter in the 1881 census,<sup>61</sup> and he soon had his own sawmill, which was a considerable aid to him as he sought numerous building contracts.

The Floods' first child, Charles Suckley Flood, was born in late November of 1882; their daughter Leila did not follow until ten years later. A bit of a mystery surfaces in the 1891 census--at that time the household was described as consisting of William, Susan, Charles, and Louise Flood. Louise, twelve years old, is listed as the daughter of the head of the household.<sup>62</sup> However, I have been unable to find any record besides this one of Louise Flood, and she certainly could not have been the daughter of both William and Susan (as would seem to be indicated by some of the census information) since she would have been born in 1879, before they met. It seems most likely that she was William Flood's daughter from a previous relationship, though she could have been a niece (or some other relation) or even a non-relative that the Floods had taken in.<sup>63</sup> She

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<sup>59</sup>According to some accounts, William Flood prospected with his brother James, who would later have considerable success with silver in Nevada.

<sup>60</sup>Morley Gillander, "The Skagit Saga," unpublished manuscript, Flood family papers.

<sup>61</sup>Census of Canada, 1881.

<sup>62</sup>Census of Canada, 1890-1.

<sup>63</sup>There is not much possibility that Louise was Susan's daughter. Given the strictness of rules governing teachers, the already existing impediment of her racial background, and her uninterrupted residence at the convent, there seems to be little chance of her having had a child or of being allowed to teach if she had.

probably either died within the next few years or went to live elsewhere, as Charles Flood's daughter has no knowledge whatsoever of this girl who would apparently have been her aunt.

The Floods lived in Hope until about 1900, at which time they moved to the homestead five miles west of there that they had been clearing over nearly ten years. This area later became the village of Flood. The original log house William had built was added to, and both the elder Floods remained there for the rest of their lives. William's construction business apparently flourished and often took him away from home for lengthy periods of time; Susan was kept busy with the family and the farm.

In 1917, the Floods' daughter died of bone disease. It appears that William never recovered from this loss, as he withdrew into himself until he too died eleven years later. Susan lived on at their homestead on her own, with help on the farm from her son and his family, until her own death at the age of eighty-eight in 1943.

### **The Question of Race**

Although a greater understanding of genetics has led to a late twentieth-century perception that "'races' are socially imagined rather than biological realities,"<sup>64</sup> the discursive category of "race" remains powerful in its "common sense" effects.<sup>65</sup> In nineteenth-century Europe, as western nations were consolidating overseas empires, the question of race was a major preoccupation, given the increasing contact between Europeans and the people they colonized. Robert Young argues that Victorian racial theories were driven by

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<sup>64</sup>Robert Miles, Racism (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 71.

<sup>65</sup>See James Donald and Ali Rattansi, eds., 'Race', Culture and Difference (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1992).

"colonial desire," a fascination with the idea of "interracial transgression." This in turn led to an obsession with the possibility of "hybridity, grafting, of forcing incompatible entities to grow together (or not)."<sup>66</sup> The rising discipline of anthropology was divided on this question: since a true "hybrid" was by definition the result of the crossing of two species, hybridity as such could only be possible if the races were separate species. Polygenists argued that this was the case, while monogenists claimed one origin and species for humanity and therefore explained the children of mixed-race relationships as "mongrels" of a sort.

Darwin argued that there was no "essential distinction" between species and varieties, and that an acceptance of evolutionary theory would obviate the polygenist/monogenist debate. His theory dealt specifically with changes in species (or varieties) and, as the century wore on, such changes, particularly "the alleged degeneration of those of mixed race," became more the focus of concern.<sup>67</sup> Public attitudes were increasingly affected by a belief in hierarchical differentiation, and racial "purity" took on more importance. Thus, "racialism operated both according to the same-Other model and through the 'computation of normalities' and 'degrees of deviance' from the white norm, by means of which racial difference became identified with other forms of sexual and social perversity as degeneracy, deformation, or arrested embryological development. But none was so demonized as those of mixed race."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Robert J. C. Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>67</sup>ibid., pp. 11-16.

<sup>68</sup>ibid., p. 180.

While "hybridity" was a nineteenth-century term, it is once again in common circulation, now with a more cultural connotation. In this incarnation, hybridity theory has been influenced by Bakhtin's linguistic model, in which hybridization is perceived as a "double-voiced" discourse in which "each voice can unmask the other." Hybridity is thus not only a fusion into one, but also a dialogic, politicized, and contestatory process, "a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation."<sup>69</sup> Such a perspective reflects a positive valuation, as indicated by contemporary discussions of the "new mestiza."<sup>70</sup> The new mestiza consciousness is seen as providing a "counterdiscourse of hybridity" (or "mixedness") which "subverts metaphysical, cultural, and racial boundaries and works against the imperialism of 'purity' that has lethally oppressed so much of humankind."<sup>71</sup> Julia Emberley draws a comparison between the figure of the mestiza and that of the Canadian Métis; however, she sees the value of this figure as ambiguous. While "the construction of Métis subjectivity as internally 'hybridized' destabilizes the law of representation in which hegemonic inscriptions of subjectivity are unified around a white centring of the subject," there is also a danger that the Métis "marginal experience will become valued primarily for its function as a sign, and thus commodified."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>ibid., pp. 20-22.

<sup>70</sup>Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

<sup>71</sup>Laura E. Donaldson, Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-Building (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 116.

<sup>72</sup>Julia V. Emberley, Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 163-164.



The mestiza, métis, or halfbreed is seen to occupy a third or border position. Gloria Anzaldúa writes that the resultant alienation creates a "dual identity" whereby individuals identify totally with neither set of cultural values. They are "caught between the spaces" of two different worlds, both of which they inhabit. Anzaldúa believes that such people are more likely to develop a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity that may lead to a new "mestiza consciousness" which can eventually break down the dualistic thinking which has to this point characterized the collective consciousness--the future, she feels, will be dependent on the ability to "straddle cultures."<sup>73</sup> Maria Campbell, author of the autobiographical Halfbreed,<sup>74</sup> describes a similar process when she states that the play Jessica "was supposed to be a play about a woman struggling with two cultures, and how she got them balanced; because when she leaned into one, a part of her got lost, so she had to lean into the other one and try to understand and find a balance."<sup>75</sup>

### **Racial Identity on the Western Frontier**

Analyses of fur trade society in Canada, and in particular of its family relations, have been presented in the works of Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer S. H. Brown.<sup>76</sup> Although there were important policy differences resulting in varied social configurations between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company, both groups

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<sup>73</sup>Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera.

<sup>74</sup>Maria Campbell, Halfbreed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

<sup>75</sup>Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell, The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>76</sup>Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1980); Jennifer S. H. Brown, Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country (Vancouver: University of B. C. Press, 1980).

were eventually characterized by unions between traders and women of Indian descent. While variable in nature, many of these unions "à la façon du pays" were long-lasting and considered to be as serious as any marriage sanctioned by clergy. In these cases, traders took pains to inculcate "civilized" European values and behaviour in their mixed-blood children. Sons took jobs within the company and daughters, closer both in looks and behaviour to the European ideal of womanhood than their fully Indian mothers, married other traders, thus providing links in the business ties of fur trade society.

After the merger of the two companies in 1821, the situation began to change, particularly among the former Nor'Westers, as the merger brought with it the more authoritarian structure of the Hudson's Bay Company. It also brought a new governor, George Simpson, whose own prejudiced attitudes towards native women eventually had a considerable influence on fur trade domestic relations. The churches, too, had begun to send representatives to the frontier, and the clergy were deeply opposed to the customary marriages in place there; after 1821, many of these unions were solemnized in Christian ceremonies. The beginnings of white settlement, coupled with the emerging racial theories and attitudes, were the death knell for fur trade society as it had previously existed.

In particular, mixed-blood women were placed in an ambiguous position by the increasing racial categorization: "'Halfbreed' women were not only part-Indian and largely lacking in the education or civilized arts that respectable European ladies were assumed to

possess; they were also the daughters and partners of unchristianized unions and had matured in circumstances in which their chastity seemed unprotected."<sup>77</sup> Their status in question, mixed-blood women may have been placed in a particularly vulnerable position by their fathers' very desire to "acculturate them to British standards of womanhood": when there were white women available, the mixed-blood women's racial background would ultimately deny them the status of "British womanhood," but having been pressed into "the increasingly passive and dependent mould that was deemed appropriate to the function of women in nineteenth-century European society," they may have been ill-prepared to cope with the changing society, especially if they lacked strong parental resources.<sup>78</sup>

While it has been common to view the halfbreed or Métis population as a people "in-between" Indian and white society, Juliet Pollard argues that this could not have been the case in the Pacific Northwest. Here, the decimation of many tribes (due largely to disease, but also, she claims, to the fact that, as many women allied themselves with white traders, fewer native babies were born) meant that in many cases there was virtually no mother's people to turn to. And although it has been typically thought that halfbreeds were welcome in their mothers' societies, Pollard provides evidence that this was not necessarily true in the Pacific Northwest. Indeed, attitudes among the Coast Salish, while not consistent, were often quite hostile, particularly when the children in question were

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<sup>77</sup>Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 212.

<sup>78</sup>Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties", pp. 7, 152-153.

illegitimate. In these patrilineal societies, children without a recognized father were deemed to be without assets or status, and the native community felt no responsibility for them: they belonged to their fathers. Furthermore, as Indian/white conflict increased and native populations declined, such children were probably constant reminders of the negative effects of white settlement. In short, "Halfbreed children among the tribes upset the existing hierarchical social and political order. They violated the Chinook's ethnocentric concepts of race and cultural superiority, which deemed white men inferior to themselves."<sup>79</sup> Given that both sides of the European debate on race considered the white race superior to all others, halfbreed children in this area appear to have been thought "inferior" by both sides.

The popular nineteenth-century image of halfbreeds as people "suspended between two cultures" and incapable of adapting fully to either developed alongside the somewhat paradoxical notion, buttressed by hybridity theory, that people of mixed-blood would inevitably revert to one or the other of their parental races, thus "becoming white" or "Indian." In reality, James Clifton claims, they became "identified as a member of one, two, or no ethnic groups, depending on the nature of the cultural frontier where they were born and lived," and on their own individual circumstances.<sup>80</sup> In many cases, assimilation into mainstream white society was

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<sup>79</sup>Juliet Thelma Pollard, "The Making of the Métis in the Pacific North West Fur Trade Children: Race, Class and Gender" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1990), p. 9. Pollard notes that this situation sometimes led to abortion and infanticide.

<sup>80</sup>James A. Clifton, "Alternate Identities and Cultural Frontiers," in Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers, ed. James A. Clifton (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1989), p. 28.

impossible due to a variety of factors, which often included physical appearance. However, many people of mixed-blood met the challenges of their racial identity in highly creative fashion, taking on whichever identity was most favourable for them at any given time throughout their lives or "operating . . . on the edges between both." Clifton argues that "such people [became] not diminished, but culturally enlarged."<sup>81</sup> By no means was the native cultural identity always rejected whenever it was possible to do so.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, for many it seemed expedient or preferable to at least downplay that side of their identity. For instance, Van Kirk notes that James Douglas urged his daughters not to mention their Indian ancestry at school in England, and his wife Amelia was officially recorded as being Irish.<sup>83</sup> The Interior Salish woman Christine Quintasket (Mourning Dove), who appears to have chosen an identity as a "cultural mediator," also took on a halfbreed identity, as she seemingly invented a white grandfather, probably in order to better appeal to white readers.<sup>84</sup>

The official obscuring of Indian blood would have been a fairly simple task, especially for those with the right connections. It is likely that some enumerators listed the mixed-blood children of friends or prominent community members as white and of the same

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<sup>81</sup>ibid., p. 29. The edited book provides biographies of fourteen such individuals.

<sup>82</sup>See David Peterson-del Mar, "Intermarriage and Agency: A Chinookan Case Study," *Ethnohistory* 42, no. 1 (Winter 1995).

<sup>83</sup>Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, p. 237. This was in the 1881 census, which did not specifically ask for "racial origin." It would have been interesting to see how she would have been listed in the 1901 census, the first to record such data.

<sup>84</sup>See Jay Miller, "Mourning Dove: The Author as Cultural Mediator," in *Being and Becoming Indian* (1989) and Mourning Dove, *A Salishan Autobiography*, ed. Jay Miller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

"racial origin" (ethnicity) as their fathers. It is particularly interesting, then, that on the 1901 census Susan Flood's colour is listed as "red" and her racial origin as "OB," while her children, also "red," are described as "IB."<sup>85</sup> Her husband William Flood himself was the enumerator; thus it would seem that neither of them had any qualms about representing Susan or the children as part-Indian. In the physical sense, Susan would have had difficulty identifying herself as white, for her features bore a characteristic "Indian look" and she was definitely not fair-skinned. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that she desired to hide this side of her heritage, and the surviving knowledge of at least some of her background indicates that she not only informed her children about it but also fostered some pride in it. In some ways, as we shall see, she too acted as a "cultural mediator," though not in a particularly self-conscious way. Finally, although by then her "identity" as a white man's wife in British Columbia had removed her from a more Indian milieu, she may have strategically maintained the Indian side of her identity in order to benefit from the American General Allotment Act as an heir to her grandfather's allotment.<sup>86</sup>

Susan Holmes' racial identity as a white woman in a society where these were relatively scarce was compounded by her role in the church. Adele Perry claims that colonial discourse constructed white women as "civilizing agents," and the Church of England in

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<sup>85</sup>Fourth Census of Canada, 1901. The request for this information is in itself probably a reflection of the increased racialization of Canadian society. The description of Susan as "OB" is puzzling, as George Suckley's background would seem to have been English.

<sup>86</sup>Whites did benefit from the allotments too (see Clifton, "Alternate Identities"), but she probably was not aware of this.

particular was concerned with their emigration to British Columbia. These "women were necessary participants in the process of colony-building in three ways: they would raise the moral tone of the white, male-dominated society, quell the rapid development of a mixed-blood community, and ensure that British law, mores, and economic development flourished."<sup>87</sup> Having married an Anglican clergyman, and especially one who ministered to natives, Susan herself of necessity became a missionary, performing such functions as teaching domestic skills to Indian girls in her husband's "Indian school." As a female missionary, she would be expected to act as a "role model" for Indian women.<sup>88</sup> Thus, in many ways, her racial identity was constructed not only in relation to, but also in direct opposition to, that of native women, and especially to that of mixed-blood women.

### **Class**

Nineteenth-century England is generally, and for good reason, considered to be a remarkably rigid class-driven society, and within that society the middle-class was decidedly ascendant, even though it lacked direct political power at the beginning of the century. Despite its evident importance, the middle-class was hardly unitary; indeed, "the most pluralistic part of an increasingly pluralistic society" would more accurately be described as the "middle

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<sup>87</sup>Adele Perry, "'Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men': Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality, and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," *BC Studies*, nos. 105 & 106 (Spring/Summer 1995), p. 34. Perry notes that the combination of skewed demography and colonial discourse seriously restricted white women's social opportunities outside of the "heterosexual nexus."

<sup>88</sup>Margaret Whitehead, "Women Were Made for Such Things: Women Missionaries in British Columbia 1850s-1940s," *Atlantis* 14, no. 1 (1988).

*classes*."<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, membership in the middle-class often seems to have been subjectively determined: from our historical vantage point, "it might almost be said that the best definition of the middle class is that it was made up of those people who thought themselves to be middle class and were allowed by their neighbours to be so, or were accused of it."<sup>90</sup> However, this oversimplifies a system in which the markers (if not always the exact boundaries) of class were readily apparent, if sometimes intangible, to those who lived within it. Thus,

whether a man might be considered to be middle class might be decided by the education he had received, by the style of his life, by his manners, by the district in which he lived, by whether he went to church or chapel on Sunday, by the way he dressed, or by any number of possible tests some of which it would be quite impossible to recover.<sup>91</sup>

Men who worked in commerce, the professions, certain trades, and farming could be seen to be middle-class, though there were definite differences in status among these occupations. In their study of the articulation of gender and class in the first half of the nineteenth-century in Britain, Davidoff and Hall describe the "gendered form" taken by class consciousness. They argue that the middle-class "enterprise" was underpinned by the sexual division of labour and support within families.<sup>92</sup> To a great extent, the definition of a family as middle-class rested as much on the

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<sup>89</sup>Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), p. 27.

<sup>90</sup>G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 119.

<sup>91</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>92</sup>Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes.



"femininity" of the women as on the occupations of the men. As "refined" femininity became more and more identified with separation from the "public sphere," middle-class status required that women not be employed gainfully (or otherwise, except in certain stringently defined areas) outside the home, unless they were in dire financial circumstances. (And in these situations, few occupations were considered acceptable for them, that of governess being the most common fallback.) Middle-class women were the keepers of the Victorian "moral code," for whom "convention dictated a rigorously stereotyped personality."<sup>93</sup>

The fur trade society of the Canadian west (especially within the Hudson's Bay Company) was also strongly stratified, and the early part of the nineteenth-century saw a solidifying of the social distinctions drawn between the "gentlemen" and the lower employees of the company.<sup>94</sup> This class structure was transferred to the colony of Vancouver Island, where Company men held most administrative posts, and coloured social relations throughout British Columbia for some time as well.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, the relationship of class and gender was blurred due to two factors in particular. First, frontier circumstances dictated that many people would have a higher social status in the colonies than they would have enjoyed in England. Since conditions were more primitive, domestic servants less available, and economic opportunities

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<sup>93</sup>Altick, Victorian People and Ideas, p. 53.

<sup>94</sup>See Brown, Strangers in Blood, and Elizabeth Vibert, "Real Men Hunt Buffalo: Masculinity, Race and Class in British Fur Traders' Narratives," Gender and History 8, no. 1 (April 1996).

<sup>95</sup>See Margaret Ormsby, British Columbia: A History (Vancouver: Macmillan of Canada, 1958).

perhaps more unstable, women were more likely to be required both to perform unaccustomed domestic chores and to work outside the home; indeed, "the social value to the colonies of single women, and more especially of educated women, was too great for them to lose caste simply by performing menial work."<sup>96</sup>

A second ambiguity occurred with regards to race. Elizabeth Vibert notes the "profound ambivalence" that surrounded the fur trade gentlemen's "attempts to draw boundaries around themselves." The definition of their masculinity was predicated on class and race distinctions, but at the same time most of them had Indian or part-Indian wives. While "ultimately . . . marriages to women of the country came to be seen as a threat to the traders' gentlemanly self-fashioning,"<sup>97</sup> many of these wives became part of the new colonies' establishment by virtue of their husbands' administrative positions, and their daughters also married the most prominent colonial settlers. Their race may seldom have been alluded to, but it was nonetheless a matter of awareness and therefore of tension in an increasingly racist society.

Susan Nagle's family was one rung down the social ladder from the "administrative classes" of Victoria, but they would certainly have been among those to whom Bishop Hills referred in his journals as "our better people" (even in spite of Jeremiah's "Irish" characteristics). They were a respectable Church of England family with high moral standards who participated in all the important

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<sup>96</sup>A. James Hammerton, Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914 (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 82. He is speaking specifically of the case of Mary Taylor in New Zealand.

<sup>97</sup>Vibert, "Real Men Hunt Buffalo," p. 8.

aspects of their community. Many of the prominent figures of Vancouver Island and British Columbia society moved through the pages of Susan's and Jessie's diaries: the Moodys, the Creases, the Bushbys, Matthew Baillie Begbie, and many others. Yet because of the family's frequent financial hardships, both Susan and Jessie needed to work outside the home, usually as schoolteacher or governess, whenever possible. They were also certainly no strangers to "menial" domestic labour within their own homes. Thus, they might go to the dance at Government House, but it was likely in "worn out" dresses.<sup>98</sup> And they were in a lower social position than a number of women who in different circumstances would, by virtue of their race, have been their inferiors.

In many ways, Susan's class status remained much the same after she married, though David Holmes' position as an Anglican clergyman, and hers as his wife, would have added to her overall middle-class "respectability." Even as a "clerk in holy orders" who had to work at farming, David maintained the credentials that his education and his affiliation with the Church of England afforded him; in the mainly rural society of the Cowichan valley the Holmes' were prominent figures socially. Economically, too, Susan's situation in married life was not much different than it had been in her family of origin. While the Holmes' at times were able to afford domestic help, they were also often in a tenuous situation financially, which forced them to employ various strategies to make ends meet. In short, throughout her life, the social side of Susan's

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<sup>98</sup>Jessie Melville Nagle Diary, 12 July 1867, BCARS.

class status was often somewhat inconsistent with the economic side.

Susan Flood's class status was further complicated by the variable of her race. Until she was a teenager, she was most likely at least sometimes a part of the society of her mother's Suquamish people--traditionally a highly stratified and class-conscious society, but also one in which the markers of class status were being overturned. Her white father was evidently middle-class and through his acknowledgement (limited as it may have been), she would have acquired some social standing, though not as much as those daughters of the fur trade who were actually brought up by their fathers. At least she was provided for economically, both by George Suckley and (however reluctantly) by his uncle Rutsen Suckley. At St. Ann's, which made remarkably few distinctions among students during its earlier days, she was among the paying boarders rather than the charity orphans, and her friends included girls like Louisa Helmcken (as James and Amelia Douglas' granddaughter, also a mixed-blood girl, though to a lesser degree, and certainly of a higher social standing). Eventually, she too had to earn her keep.<sup>99</sup>

Since he had not managed to strike it rich, William Flood's earlier occupation as a prospector and miner would likely have put him in the category of the "rougher" types Bishop Hills described in detail in his journal entries about his travels through Columbia. After his marriage, however, William would have fit more or less

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<sup>99</sup>While Susan Suckley was at St. Ann's, she apparently at times did help out with the orphans. In 1877, she appears on the staff lists at Nanaimo as a "helper"; the Boarders' Accounts still have her as a paying student at the same time.

into the middle classes, as a sawmill owner, building contractor, and farmer. In the community centring on Hope, a large proportion of people had Indian blood,<sup>100</sup> so Susan's racial background was less of an impediment to her status than it might have been in other areas, and her original position as schoolteacher would have carried some respectability. Later, when the town and area's composition changed and racial boundaries may have hardened, her place within society, particularly given that her husband was a well-known local white man, would already have solidified to such an extent that it would not be questioned. Thus, while her race (and the conditions of her birth) definitely lowered her status from what it would have been had she been George Suckley's white, legitimate daughter, at the same time his economic concern for her led to a greater degree of acceptance within white society than she would otherwise have enjoyed.

## Religion

Religion was a major component in the identities of both women, and was also connected to class status. Susan Holmes had been born into a Church of England family and became even more strongly Anglican after her marriage to a clergyman; her religious beliefs were central to her actions throughout her life. If in nineteenth-century Britain "it was migration to the Church of England that finally certified one's fitness to mingle in the best Victorian circles,"<sup>101</sup> this requirement was probably somewhat less

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<sup>100</sup>This (while something I had been vaguely aware of before) became clear through reading the biographical sketches contained in a local history for the area, Forging a New Hope: Struggles and Dreams 1848-1948 (Hope: Hope and District Historical Society, 1984).

<sup>101</sup>Altick, Victorian People and Ideas, p. 33.

stringent in British Columbia. While religious activity was encouraged here, the colonial governments were determined not to have an established church, and gave support to three other denominations besides the Church of England.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, it could be said that an unofficial hierarchy existed, with most in the governing circles adhering to Anglicanism. Catholicism was definitely far down in that hierarchy, reflecting that religion's status in Britain. Churchmen might admire the missionary zeal and hard work of priests among the Indians, but such admiration was inevitably overshadowed by the deep prejudice against Roman Catholic doctrines and activities. It seems unlikely that Susan Suckley's father was a Catholic, although there is no definite confirmation of his religious leanings,<sup>103</sup> and it would be difficult to determine what religious training, if any, she would have been exposed to prior to her schooling at St. Ann's. However, six years after she arrived at the convent she was baptized into the Roman Catholic faith. Her baptismal record notes that she had abjured her Anglican faith before this event, but this more than likely indicates merely that she had not been a Catholic since birth.<sup>104</sup>

In any case, Susan took her adopted faith seriously and maintained it until her death. Even her marriage to a non-Catholic

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<sup>102</sup>Ormsby, British Columbia: A History, p. 179.

<sup>103</sup>There are letters which indicate a connection to a Protestant church, but the denomination is not clear.

<sup>104</sup>St. Andrew's Baptismal Registration, BCARS. The baptismal record indicates the date of confirmation as June 13, 1876; the St. Ann's register for confirmation (Sisters of St. Ann's Archives, document 35-1-16) records the date as June 15, 1876. That her faith had been "Anglican" at least seems unlikely, although her father could have been Episcopalian.

did not affect her adherence; indeed, W. L. Flood, listed as Church of England on the 1881 census, was listed as Roman Catholic in 1891 and 1901 (by himself as enumerator). Her husband probably did not officially convert,<sup>105</sup> but they were married by a Roman Catholic priest, and Susan insisted that both their children and grandchildren be baptized into the Catholic religion.<sup>106</sup> For these or other reasons, he apparently saw fit to represent himself as belonging to the same faith as the rest of his family.

### **Nationality**

The matter of nationality was not a simple one at this time or in this place. At their deaths, both women would more than likely have been considered Canadians, yet the degree to which either may have thought of herself as such seems to have fluctuated at various points in their lives. Both had lived in the future province of British Columbia since their teenage years, but Susan Holmes came to the colony as a British citizen and it is probable (and by no means unusual) that she maintained that national orientation all her life, even though she never set foot in England.<sup>107</sup> She is described as Canadian in the 1901 census (though that record makes the mistake of claiming that she immigrated in 1864, the same year her husband

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<sup>105</sup>William Flood's granddaughter expressed surprise that he was listed as a Catholic on the censuses, as he was known to his family to be a Protestant. Sister Mary Providence of St. Ann's apparently knew he was a Protestant (letter from W. F. Tolmie to Susan Suckley), though another of the Sisters seems to have been informed (by Susan?) that he was Catholic (letter from Sister Mary Florence to Susan Suckley, 8 May 1882, Flood family papers).

<sup>106</sup>Their daughter-in-law was also a Protestant.

<sup>107</sup>Technically, Canadian "citizenship" did not exist until after the passing of the Statute of Westminster in 1931. However, the notion of Canadian "nationality" did exist, as attested by the categories of the 1901 census.

arrived in the colony),<sup>108</sup> but in her diaries she still refers to the eastern part of the country as "Canada" long after B. C. joined Confederation. She did seem to feel that the colony was her home, but would have preferred that it remain fully in the British sphere. In April of 1869 she reported the "long faces and black looks" due to the impending closure of the naval station at Esquimalt, for "every thing seems conspiring against us, in this poor little place, & there will be nothing for us but Confederation or joining the Yankees equally disagreeable measures."<sup>109</sup> Despite a strong lobby for Confederation among some of the population, she was far from alone in this sentiment.

Susan Flood also spoke of "Canada" as a separate place even after she was living there. While at the convent in 1875 she wrote that "9 sisters of St. Ann are on their way from Canada to Victoria."<sup>110</sup> In her case, this was probably due more to the way the Sisters would have spoken than to her own habitual way of thinking.<sup>111</sup> To someone brought up at this time in a Coast Salish milieu, even one limited to a reserve, the idea of a border along the forty-ninth parallel was probably still not ingrained. The native groups from this part of the continent were divided more between coastal and interior groups than between north and south, and

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<sup>108</sup>Fourth Census of Canada, 1901.

<sup>109</sup>SAH, 2 April 1869.

<sup>110</sup>Susan Suckley's "Pacific Diary," Flood family papers. The sisters' arrival is mentioned in Sister Mary Margaret Down, A Century of Service: A History of the Sisters of Saint Ann and Their Contributions to Education in British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska (Victoria: The Sisters of Saint Ann, 1966), p. 73. (Their number is given as eight here.)

<sup>111</sup>Having originally come from Quebec, the Sisters sometimes used the term "Canada" when referring to that province.



crossing what became the "border" had been done largely without thought--as when Susan's grandparents had tended their traplines.<sup>112</sup> She likely identified with a specific "place" and thought of herself as neither American nor Canadian (and certainly not British like the other Susan); rather, she seems to have taken a consciously pragmatic approach to the question of her nationality.

In the 1901 census, William Flood recorded Susan's nationality as American, although an examination of the census for B. C. overall shows that, in most cases, where husbands were "Canadians," their wives were listed that way too, regardless of where they were born or how long they had been in the country.<sup>113</sup> Susan's description as an American was somewhat unusual, then. One plausible explanation for this situation for a woman who almost certainly never intended to return to the United States for more than a visit (and did not likely have any attachment to that country as a political entity) lies in the American allotment laws of the late nineteenth-century. The General Allotment Law (Dawes Act) of 1887 provided Indians with allotments of land which were held in trust for twenty-five years, at which point the Indian received the land in fee simple. Upon receiving an allotment, the Indian became a U. S. citizen.<sup>114</sup> Susan eventually received part of the Big John Allotment on Bainbridge

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<sup>112</sup>See Robin Fisher, "Indian Warfare and Two Frontiers: A Comparison of British Columbia and Washington Territory During the Early Years of Settlement," Pacific Historical Review 50, no. 1 (February 1981), pp. 32-34; and Mourning Dove, A Salishan Autobiography.

<sup>113</sup>Fourth Census of Canada, 1901. It appears that people from Britain were "naturalized" upon their arrival in Canada, while others had to go through the official process.

<sup>114</sup>Francis Paul Prucha, The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians, abridged ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 226.

Island, and it is likely that both she and William chose to maintain her national identity as an American in order to avoid any potential jeopardizing of her ownership of this land.

For both Susan Holmes and Susan Flood, the "markers" of identity were sometimes ambiguous and sometimes changing. Even those by which they unequivocally would have defined themselves were anything but uncomplicated categories. As Joy Parr remarks in her study of two industrial towns in Ontario:

The referents by which class, gender, and ethnic identities were understood, and solidarities in ethnicity, gender and class were formed, were changeable and often interchanged. The processes by which these meanings were made and the institutions through which they were articulated were neither singular nor settled. The mainstream ideological categories of that time were present, but as taut threads shot through the ordinariness of daily life, frequently distinguishable from the pattern itself.<sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, "changing identities do assume specific, concrete patterns, as in a kaleidoscope, against particular sets of historical and social circumstances. Our cultural identities are simultaneously our cultures in process, but they acquire specific meanings in a given context."<sup>116</sup> In the chapters which follow, I hope to capture the workings of some of these processes and their meanings in the "ordinariness" of these women's "daily lives."

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<sup>115</sup>Joy Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 231.

<sup>116</sup>Avtar Brah, "Difference, Diversity and Differentiation," in Donald and Rattansi, eds., 'Race,' Culture and Difference, p. 143.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Men, it seemed to me in those days, were uniquely honored by the stories that erupted in their lives, whereas women were more likely to be smothered by theirs . . . The stories that happen to women blow up as big as balloons and cover over the day-to-day measure of their lives, swelling and pressing with such fierceness that even the plain and simple separations of time--hours, weeks, months--get lost from view.<sup>1</sup>

One of the challenges of looking at the lives of people in the past lies in determining how to structure the results of the examination. Any attempt to categorize the events and aspects of a life will lead to an artificial sense of how that life was lived, since none of these events and aspects exist in isolation from the others. Yet such categorizations must be made, some kind of "order" brought to bear where it might not have been perceived by the people in question. The challenge, then, is to make use of the order without allowing it to overshadow the lives.

Works on women's history often use a thematic approach, with the themes chosen focusing most frequently on the stages of the life cycle and/or the notion of the division between public and private "spheres."<sup>2</sup> While this approach certainly poses problems, it is difficult to abandon it entirely. Women's lives in the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup>Carol Shields, The Stone Diaries (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 121-122.

<sup>2</sup>See Beth Light and Alison Prentice, eds., Pioneer and Gentlewomen of British North America 1713-1867 (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1980), p. 2. An example of the life cycle approach in Canadian women's history can be found in Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada 1919-1939 (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988).

century were bound up in their relationships with, and roles within, their families at all points. This is not to say that men's life stories could not be viewed in the same way--they could; however, by and large they are not. With men's life histories, there is usually more of an option to focus on activities outside of family relationships (often in fact ignoring the effects of these relationships on such activities).<sup>3</sup> For women of this time period (outside of the very few noted for their public lives), this is impossible--no matter what aspect of the life is considered, the consideration leads back to the woman's family relations. There is no possibility of the illusion of transcendence, as there may be for men.

This chapter will examine the influences of such relationships on the earlier lives of Susan Nagle and Susan Suckley, up until the time of their marriages. In general, the relationships in question are within the family of origin, but not exclusively so. Especially in Susan Suckley's case, there were some important connections which could be considered family "surrogates," and these also had significant effects. The two major areas discussed will be education and the considerations and circumstances leading to marriage. Although economic issues were certainly also connected to these family dynamics, they will not be specifically examined until the next chapter.

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<sup>3</sup>Hopefully, more studies on the construction of masculinity may mean that more attention is paid to these relationships.

## Family History

For several years now, many historical works have questioned the more traditional assumptions about the nature and functions of the family as a historical entity. For instance, Davidoff and Hall claim that, while the family provided the frame for nineteenth-century middle-class life in Britain, and specific roles within it were fairly formalized, its boundaries were quite fluid.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, a view of the family as an active rather than passive agent in social change entails a more dynamic approach to the "constantly changing" family:

Social scientists have often studied the family as a monolithic institution. In reality, the family is in constant flux. It is the scene of interaction between various fluid individual lives. Individual transitions into and out of different family roles . . . are interrelated with changes in the family as a collective unit . . . At issue here is the synchronization of several concepts of time--individual time, family time, and historical time.<sup>5</sup>

According to Tamara Hareven, "individual time" and "family time" (the timing of transitional events such as marriage or moving into different roles within the family) are not always harmonious, and both can be impinged upon by "historical time," the outside conditions under which such transitions take place. In the nineteenth century, when "most of the educational, economic, and welfare functions [were] concentrated in the family," the timing of transitional events had more significance for the family as a

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<sup>4</sup>Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 321.

<sup>5</sup>Tamara K. Hareven, "Family Time and Historical Time," Daedalus 106 (1977): 58.

collective unit than is usually the case now, and individual timing was more likely to be subordinated to family timing whenever there was conflict. Decisions and moves which would generally be considered individual concerns in late twentieth-century western societies would have been seen as family matters one hundred years ago, and would have had to be synchronized with the family's collective agenda and needs at the time.<sup>6</sup>

That such conflicts existed indicates that the family's interests were not always uniform with those of the individuals comprising it. The tendency to assume harmony of interests within the family has been a corollary of a more general acceptance of the family as a natural unit separate from the outside world, rather than as a social construction in continual interaction with that world.<sup>7</sup> The distinction between private and public "spheres," so important a part of Victorian ideology (and such a cornerstone of historical writing on women of the time), was one result of this acceptance.

Twentieth-century women's historians who investigated the operations of the "separate spheres" of nineteenth-century men and women at first tended to view these as strictly negative and oppressive. Barbara Welter described the characteristics of the ideal or "true woman" as piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity; together, these formed a stereotype so ideologically compelling that it stifled almost all creativity or non-conformity in

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<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 64.

<sup>7</sup>Rayna Rapp, Ellen Ross, and Renate Bridenthal, "Examining Family History," in Sex and Class in Women's History: Essays from Feminist Studies, eds. Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan, and Judith R. Walkowitz (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 233.

women.<sup>8</sup> Although women may have valued their roles in their "proper sphere" (that is, the home), the rhetoric propounding their seclusion in this sphere was perceived by these historians to have "trapped" or "locked them into a restricted realm of endeavour."<sup>9</sup>

In her 1975 study of female friendships, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg offered an opposing interpretation of the separate spheres, one that accorded the women's sphere a more positive valuation. Rather than being simply oppressive, the separate women's sphere made possible a distinctive and supportive "women's culture." Thus,

women . . . did not form an isolated and oppressed sub-category in male society. Their letters and diaries indicate that women's sphere had an essential integrity and dignity that grew out of women's shared experiences and mutual affection and that, despite the profound changes which affected American social structure and institutions between the 1760s and the 1870s, retained a constancy and predictability. The ways in which women thought of and interacted with each other remained unchanged. Continuity, not discontinuity characterized this female world.<sup>10</sup>

Although separate, the women's sphere could thus be viewed as a place where women could exercise their own power, status, and creativity, and where they could develop deep and lasting bonds and networks with other women.

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<sup>8</sup>Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly XVIII, no. 2, pt. 1 (1966).

<sup>9</sup>Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," Signs 1, no. 1 (1975): 9-10.

These negative and positive perceptions of the women's sphere as either oppressive or liberating created a dualism since challenged by a "third stage" in thinking about the metaphor of separate spheres. This newer perspective sees the public and private spheres as intersecting:

taking an interactive view of social processes, historians now seek to show how women's allegedly 'separate sphere' was affected by what men did, and how activities defined by women in their own sphere influenced and even set constraints and limitations on what men might choose to do--how, in short, that sphere was socially constructed both *for* and *by* women.<sup>11</sup>

The socially constructed nature of the women's sphere is thought to be indicated by the vast amount of ideological work that went into maintaining its boundaries.

The rigid division between public and private, and its increasing identification with gender, was decidedly intertwined with the process of middle-class self-definition. Although the ideology of separate spheres was promoted later in the century among working-class and non-white families as a necessary corollary of upward mobility and respectability, the operation of anything approaching its ideal would have been virtually limited to the middle-classes, and even there only in certain circumstances. Certainly, such a separation would have been next to impossible in a

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<sup>11</sup>Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," The Journal of American History 75, no. 1 (1988): 18.



frontier society, except perhaps among the few very elite families.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Nagle Family**

In many ways, the Nagle family fit the ideal picture of the Victorian middle-class family as a collective unit providing support and security for the individuals within it. The strong ties among parents and siblings are apparent throughout Susan's and Jessie's journals, even as physical scattering and deaths broke apart the original family nucleus. Indeed, the pain incurred by such partings (with both family members and close friends) was a common subject of the poems that Susan wrote.<sup>13</sup> Connections were kept alive through frequent letters and the sharing of news with the entire family, and visits were longed-for events, immensely savoured when they finally arrived.

At the same time, there were ways in which the family did not function exactly according to the norm described by Davidoff and Hall. (Of course, this norm itself was built on these kinds of interior contradictions.) Jeremiah Nagle certainly enjoyed the familial authority granted to the Victorian father, and his influence on the major decisions made by his children is evident. Still, even his daughters exercised a fair amount of autonomy, although an autonomy decidedly formed within the parameters of the family's

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<sup>12</sup>Robert L. Griswold claims that western Anglo-American women's "domestic ideology" was more fluid than that of their eastern counterparts, since a separation of spheres was "virtually impossible to establish on the plains and in the mining towns of the West." "Anglo Women and Domestic Ideology in the American West in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in Western Women, eds. Schlissel, Ruiz, and Monk, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup>Several of these poems were written in the back of Jessie's journal, which Susan preserved.

interests. His power and control were not likely wielded in a domineering manner, though his generally easygoing and genial nature (he was described as "a jolly good natured gent" by someone who had met him in New Zealand<sup>14</sup>), leading as it did to rashness and occasional emotional eruptions, in itself probably also made him somewhat difficult to live with. Aside from his volatility, he could have been perceived as not possessing (at least not perfectly) "the main strand in defining the good father": the expectation of financial support.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of this, there is no evidence that Jeremiah suffered any diminution of his children's respect. They appear to have taken a realistic measure of both his capabilities and his shortcomings, and to have accepted the necessity for their own financial contributions to the family's well-being as a fair trade-off for the overall support they received from being a part of it. Possibly his flaws were only perceived as factors of his lovable nature, for his daughters undoubtedly did love him. There was only one instance in either Susan's or Jessie's diaries in which he was criticized. This occurred in April 1870 when Jessie, in turmoil because of a crisis in her engagement to Christopher Berkeley (whom she called "Willie"), was late in getting home to prepare the family's dinner. She explained that, "in consequence it was so late that it made Papa very angry as he dislikes to eat his dinner when it is too light for lamps & almost too dark to see without." However, she quickly added, "I'm sorry to say, I was very cross too and spoke disrespectfully to him I must

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<sup>14</sup>Holmes family papers.

<sup>15</sup>Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 334.

not do it again." A few days later, she noted that she was again angry with her father because of his comments about Willie, but once more she concluded with a judgement of her own behaviour: "I know I was wrong but he does say things in such a way."<sup>16</sup> The dutiful and loving daughter had the last word.

In contrast with the financial expectations placed on fathers, "mothers were to be relied upon for personal care and emotional rather than economic support."<sup>17</sup> There is ample evidence in their writings that Catherine Nagle's daughters received such support from their mother, and that they enjoyed the kind of "intimate mother-daughter relationship" that Smith-Rosenberg describes.<sup>18</sup> Both Susan's and Jessie's diaries at various points indicated a conflict between the sisters' desire to ease their mother's life through economic contributions (which tended to take them away from home) and their longing to be there with and for her physically. In Susan's case, this yearning did not end upon her own marriage, but had then to be balanced with caring for her own growing family. Still, there was no question of her not giving Catherine whatever support she could, such as spending six weeks with her during a "severe illness" in the autumn of 1876 and not returning home to Cowichan until Catherine was out of danger.<sup>19</sup> Earlier in that year, Susan had reported on her mother's loneliness now that all her children were living away from home, Ella having been married on

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<sup>16</sup>Jessie Nagle, 25 April 1870 and 27 April 1870.

<sup>17</sup>Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 335.

<sup>18</sup>Smith-Rosenberg, "Love and Ritual", pp. 15-19.

<sup>19</sup>SAH, 1 January 1877. Catherine seems often to have been in precarious health throughout the latter thirty years of her life.

March 18th (a wedding Catherine was apparently too ill to attend). She went on to muse, "I do not think if I had been the last one at home that I could have gone away & left them alone," hastening to add that "it is perhaps hard to judge."<sup>20</sup>

Catherine Nagle seems to have fulfilled the major educational functions prescribed for the nineteenth-century middle-class mother, to provide both spiritual and moral training for her children and an "apprenticeship" in domestic duties for her daughters. In addition to this, she was probably the major influence in Susan's schooling. Unfortunately, there is no specific record of Susan's educational history, but she certainly acquired enough schooling to be able to teach school herself. It is likely that she attended a school for a time while the Nagle family was in San Francisco, but they had lived in an isolated area in New Zealand and would not likely have been able to afford boarding schools. Thus, Susan's grandson's understanding that Catherine, herself a fairly well-educated woman, provided much of at least her daughters' educations, seems well-founded.<sup>21</sup>

Susan's education went beyond the basics to encompass some of the "accomplishments" deemed so valuable to the middle-class woman's instruction.<sup>22</sup> Her mother definitely taught her to play the piano (as she would in turn teach all of her own children), and Susan's knowledge of music was obviously deep enough to enable her

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<sup>20</sup>SAH, 18 May, 1876.

<sup>21</sup>Don Roberts, personal communication, 1 May 1996.

<sup>22</sup>See Marjorie R. Theobald, "'Mere Accomplishments'? Melbourne's Early Ladies' Schools Reconsidered," in Women Who Taught, eds. Prentice and Theobald.

to compose songs later in life.<sup>23</sup> She also knew French, although her expertise was not what she wished it to be--at age twenty-seven, she noted that she would "like very much" to take further French lessons, a possibility made unlikely by the family's financial condition. She may have passed up an earlier chance to improve her skills, for she concluded: "how little any of us think of our opportunities when we have them & when they are gone lament them like all other unattainable [sic] things."<sup>24</sup>

Despite this self-criticism, Susan evidently perceived herself as an educated woman, an estimation only confirmed by her desire to continue her pursuit of learning throughout her adult life. In February 1868, she wrote of her preference for reading both a book on the French Revolution and Plutarch's Lives: "such works are far more interesting to me than novels tho some of them are constructive, but continual reading of light litriture [sic] I find unfits me for more useful & solid reading."<sup>25</sup> Her curiosity also led her into speculations in the realm of science, especially in its practical applications. While in Yale, she was surprised to see sparks emanating from her comb when she touched it to her head. Further experimentation piqued her imagination even more, and she

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<sup>23</sup>Marjorie Theobald has claimed that "in the iconography of nineteenth-century female education, a central figure is the woman at the piano." [Marjorie R. Theobald, "The Sins of Laura: The Meaning of Culture in the Education of Nineteenth-Century Women," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association 1 (1990), p. 258.] The importance of the piano to Susan's sense of herself as an accomplished, educated woman was clearly expressed in a journal passage in which she referred to the lack of a piano as a "great detriment" and then remarked, "I often think if Algy & I marry, if we cannot afford to have any other piece of furniture, he will manage to get a piano someway or other." These comments were made in the context of a discussion of the historical reading she had been doing (SAH, 1 February 1868).

<sup>24</sup>SAH, 12 December 1867.

<sup>25</sup>SAH, 1 February 1868.

concluded, "I have always been so interested in Electricity and should like much to know more about it, there is so much to learn in this world and we know so very little. How I should like to make some discovery in this wonderful Science."<sup>26</sup> So much a part of her was this kind of attitude that she found it puzzling when it seemed to have abated during the first few months of her marriage. After her New Year's Eve musings on the changes wrought by the previous year, she continued, "I sometimes wonder at myself for caring so little, to what I used, for study, perhaps it will come back to me now that I am getting so much stronger." She would not be content to let this side of herself be subsumed by her new duties; indeed, she went on to resolve: "I wish too that I could get into the way of writing. I really will make an effort & see if I cannot write something worth reading--we none of us know what we can do till we try, & I fear I have been to[o] negligent for long in this matter."<sup>27</sup>

In her studiousness, Susan seems to have been alone among her siblings, but the differences in their natures did not keep her from being fiercely attached to them, especially to her sisters Jessie and Isabel (Belle). Throughout her life, she recorded in her diary all the news she received of any of her brothers and sisters in the frequent letters that passed among them. She worried about their health and the paths they were taking in life. She revelled in the brief visits she had with them and grieved over their misfortunes, losses, and deaths. In spite of the distances that eventually separated her from most of them, she seems to have been perceived as a sister to be

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<sup>26</sup>SAH, 13 April 1870.

<sup>27</sup>SAH, 31 December 1871.

depended on for support and advice. On the few occasions the two were together during the timeframe of Jessie's diary, Jessie eagerly welcomed the arrival of "dear Sue" as a companion with whom she could "chatter" till two or three in the morning.

Both Susan and Jessie sometimes contrasted their own situation with those of their other sisters, particularly Belle. Belle had married at nineteen, a much younger age than either Susan or Jessie. Her husband, Philip Hankin, Superintendent of Police in Victoria when they married in 1865, soon after embarked on a diplomatic career which took both of them around the world. His connection with the Duke of Buckingham was probably instrumental to his appointment as Colonial Secretary for British Honduras, and he and Belle both worked on gaining some posting for Susan's first fiancé Algy Hill through the Duke's influence. In 1869, Philip was sworn in as Colonial Secretary for British Columbia; however, his appointment was controversial, and in the end it seems he only served as Administrating Officer of the government for the four months between Governor Frederick Seymour's death and Governor Anthony Musgrave's arrival in the colony. (Family tradition has it that part of the objection of "officials as well as . . . towns-people" may have been due to his familiarity to the people of Victoria, who could have felt that someone who had seemed to rise from nowhere and had married into a struggling local family did not fit their loftier ambitions for the colony's status.)

Whatever Victorians may have thought about her position in the hierarchy, clearly Belle's situation was far removed from that of her sisters. In the midst of her second winter at Yale, and shortly

before she agreed to marry David Holmes, Susan received word of her sister and brother-in-law's latest movements:

Philip has applied for another appt. and thinks he will get a Lieut. Gov. Ship on some of the Islands Bella is visiting at the Duke of Buckingham's What a contrast between us two--one a guest at a Duke's the other teaching a (I might almost say) a ragged school, or next door to it, in a little out of the way part of the world I hope I am not envious, I have the consolation of knowing I have only done my duty.<sup>28</sup>

In the long run, Susan probably envied Belle neither her life, glamorous though it may have been, nor her husband. Philip remained closely connected to his wife's family even after her death, and he and Belle from time to time probably helped both the elder Nagles and the Holmes' financially, but he comes through in both Susan's and Jessie's diaries as impetuous, overbearing, and somewhat undependable--someone perhaps both lovable and exasperating at the same time. In fact, Jessie, Susan, and Catherine Nagle all expressed similar sentiments: Philip "makes so many promises that he does not fulfil that I cannot trust what he says"; he wheedles others into getting involved with his latest plans only to abandon them himself since "he is so changable that he may change his mind [about the latest place he thinks of settling] by the next time we hear from him."<sup>29</sup> There are hints that Susan held him partly responsible for her sister's death in 1903, as he had yet again persisted in dragging her off with him when "there is something

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<sup>28</sup>SAH, 30 January 1871.

<sup>29</sup>Jessie Nagle, 6 July 1870; SAH, 25 April 1903; letter from Catherine Nagle to Susan Holmes, 15 December 1884, Holmes family papers.



radically wrong with her, & her husband can't see it."<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, he continued to be a part of the family, in more or less the same capacity as a brother; indeed, Susan seemed to see and hear more of him than she did of Harry, Fred, or Eddie.

### **Family Surrogates**

Clearly, her "family of origin" was as influential in shaping Susan Suckley's life course as was Susan Nagle's. However, it could also be said that the family of origin did not exist for her in the same way that it did for the latter. Her relationship with her father was indirect at best, and it seems likely that she was removed from her mother's care for large portions of her early life, at least. She was viewed as an "orphan" by those in mainstream society (though it is unclear whether or not her mother was still alive), and it appears that her father (and his uncle after him) chose to place her in "surrogate" family situations, first in Washington Territory and later at St. Ann's.

Like the Nor'Westers, George Suckley "came from the . . . societies of eastern Canada and the United States where, for a long time, the Indian had been regarded in an unfavourable light."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, as a naturalist and ethnologist he would almost certainly have been interested (and probably involved) in the racial debates of the day, and as a military doctor (even though his main interest lay in his gathering of natural specimens) he would have been a participant in the Indian wars which broke out in Washington Territory in the very year of his daughter's birth. All of these

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<sup>30</sup>SAH, 14 June 1903.

<sup>31</sup>Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties", p. 13.

factors would have had profound implications for his attitude towards Susan.

George Suckley's letters written to his family in New York while he was on the railroad expedition and then an army doctor in Washington Territory indicate that he was an ambitious young man. Both his stint in the army and his scientific pursuits he saw as "stepping stones" in much the same way he had used other connections and situations to get to where he was at that point. He wanted travel and adventure first and then to marry, continue with his scientific interests, and perhaps ultimately enter public life--he confided to his aunt that he had "often had a dreamy misty sort of castle rearing itself in the future & it very often would seem to arise in a political style of architecture," the U. S. Senate being his neighbourhood of choice.<sup>32</sup> Undoubtedly, a halfbreed daughter would have been a liability for him in these endeavours. Still, he did not completely abandon Susan, as many of his contemporaries did their Indian offspring.

While Susan would seem to have been in the care of her mother for at least some small part of her first fifteen years, there is evidence that George Suckley made some additional arrangements for the involvement of others in her upbringing. A letter he received in 1858 from an unknown correspondent in Fort Steilacoom contained the following coded message:

I saw your Tenass<sup>33</sup> a short time [ago]; she was well, and for her age, exceedingly robust. She has grown a great deal and I think will weigh nearly

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<sup>32</sup>"Notes and Documents: Sidelights on the Stevens Railway Survey," p. 236.

<sup>33</sup>Chinook for "little"; in this context, "little one."

fifty lbs. She will be quite pretty, is very intelligent --and they call her Susan. Maly<sup>34</sup> goes to see her occasionally but the little one has almost forgotten her mother, who seems to have become reconciled to leave her where she is. Maly does not seem disposed to provide her with another Tyher,<sup>35</sup> and seems to prefer a life of intrigue.

This passage certainly indicates that Susan had been taken from her mother at this point and placed in someone else's care--probably the "Mrs. Diggs" mentioned a few sentences later.<sup>36</sup>

About ten years later, George Suckley received a letter from Nisqually, written by Edward Huggins, who was apparently taking care of the taxes on Suckley's many properties in the area.<sup>37</sup> Towards the end of this letter, Huggins mentioned speaking with a "Mr. Prosch" regarding Suckley's "affairs"; he then added, "The girl is, I believe, doing well, at least Mr. Prosch gives a very good account of her." Her photograph had been taken, and the "cartes" were to be forwarded to Suckley. Huggins himself "saw little Sue some few weeks ago, in company with Mrs. Prosch, at a public lecture in Olympia, when she looked well, and was respectably draped."<sup>38</sup> Susan's halfbrothers were surnamed Pratt, so it does not seem likely

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<sup>34</sup>The Salishan form of "Mary." As mentioned earlier, this is not the name by which Susan knew her mother (Cecilia), but was a name commonly applied by whites to native women. The name given to her at birth was most likely neither Mary nor Cecilia.

<sup>35</sup>Chinook for "father." The writer's subsequent comments indicate that Susan's mother had become one of many native women living around the fort, possibly engaged in prostitution--or at least resisting pressures to form another "marriage."

<sup>36</sup>Letter to George Suckley, 29 August 1858, ms. no. 21, the George Suckley Papers, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

<sup>37</sup>This was most likely the Edward Huggins who was married to one of John Work's daughters. See N. de Bertrand Lugin, The Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island 1843-1866 (Victoria: The Women's Canadian Club of Victoria, Vancouver Island, 1928), p. 63.

<sup>38</sup>Letter from Edward Huggins to George Suckley, 27 February 1868, the George Suckley Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

that Mr. Prosch was her stepfather. Whether she had been sent to live with the Prosch's now or they were merely asked to take charge of certain aspects of her life cannot be ascertained, but both of these letters make it plain that she was on more than one occasion separated at least to some extent from her mother's family as well as from her father. Cecilia herself may have been dead by this time, of course, but her parents were definitely still alive.

It would not be difficult to envision Susan as engaged in a "search" for her father throughout much of her youth. She probably did not remember him at all in a physical sense, and any mementos of him in her possession seem to have been limited to one photograph taken during his army days.<sup>39</sup> The evidence available suggests that he did not write directly to her, a policy his uncle continued when he apparently took over responsibility for her situation. Like many fur trade fathers, George did not leave any public record of his mixed-blood child (none of the published accounts of his life and work offers the slightest clue that she even existed), and it is most likely that not even his family, with the possible exception of his uncle Rutsen, was informed about her. Rutsen certainly knew of her at the time of George's death in 1869, and may have been an earlier confidant. Although he was prepared to fulfil a material duty towards his grand-niece, it appears he had no desire for any other relationship with her, preferring to channel all contact through Mr. G. Tillotson, a lawyer in New York.

Susan obviously attempted to initiate a direct correspondence with Rutsen and even broached the possibility of visiting him.

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<sup>39</sup>Flood family papers.

Rutsen did not reply himself; instead, Susan received a letter from Tillotson, who informed her that he had been instructed to answer her letter to her great-uncle. Rutsen was

much pleased to hear of the progress you have made in your studies and of your general improvement, and thinks it best that you should remain under the kind care of the Sisters of St. Ann a while longer. He desires me however to say that he is not in a condition to receive you in New York--indeed he remains in the country during the greater part of the year. But he is so situated that it is impossible for him to receive you.<sup>40</sup>

One year later, Tillotson again wrote (apparently in response to another letter from Susan) to inform her of Rutsen's death. Just prior to this event, Rutsen had sent \$500.00 to Tillotson "to be forwarded to Dr. Tolmie for [Susan's] benefit"; this would seem to have been in lieu of any recognition in her great-uncle's will.<sup>41</sup>

Certainly, Rutsen may have been too ill to deal with his correspondence, but the fact that he delegated the job to a lawyer rather than to another family member suggests either that he was the only one who knew about Susan or that no one in the family wished to encourage her in her quest for contact. That she had no previous knowledge of what relatives she had is indicated by Tillotson's enumeration, evidently in answer to Susan's query, of those left behind by Rutsen Suckley--a brother, a sister, four grand-nieces (not including Susan), and a nephew; that is, George Suckley's uncle, aunt, nieces, and brother. Aware of her existence or not, no

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<sup>40</sup>Letter from G. Tillotson to S. Suckley, 31 March 1874, Flood family papers.

<sup>41</sup>Letters from G. Tillotson to S. Suckley, 20 August 1875 and 10 April 1877, Flood family papers.

one in the family made any attempt to contact her: either way, it would seem she held the status of the "family secret." Eventually, she must have given up her quest, and it is difficult to determine how much she ever actually knew about her father's life and accomplishments. She was in effect denied that part of her heritage.

As Susan's great-granddaughter and George's great-great-granddaughter, I have had an interesting mix of reactions to my own uncovering of George Suckley's life. My grandfather, Charles Flood, had expended a good deal of energy in trying to learn more about his grandfather, with little more to show for it than George's military record. When my own search (aided by a much greater resource base) revealed a snowballing amount of material, my immediate reaction was wonder and elation. There were entire collections of George Suckley's papers at the Smithsonian Institution, the Bienecke Library at Yale University, and the Huntington Library in San Marino, California; he was mentioned in books and articles; he was the subject of other articles. But then I thought again of Susan and Charles and their fruitless searches, and I found that this plethora of information annoyed me rather more than anything else. If it meant so much to me, how much more might it have meant to them? How much was their ignorance deliberately imposed on them by a family that did not want to own them, and thus robbed them of their legacy? For example, the materials in the Huntington collection were donated by M. F. Savage in 1923; permission must be requested to reproduce or cite any of the materials. M. F. Savage was likely a relative of Susan's--one definitely not as closely related to her

father as she was, yet with the power to control possessions of his that she could never see. Such a situation says a great deal about race relations in nineteenth-century (and on into the present) North America.

How much her search for her father was accompanied by a "denial" of her mother is another question. Juliet Pollard notes the potentially negative implications for mixed-blood children's self-images of the prevailing attitudes towards race to which their daily lives exposed them. The upbringing of many of these children was strongly influenced by their fathers' attempts to eradicate the effects of their mothers' cultures and heritage and the tendency to blame that heritage for any perceived shortcomings in their children.<sup>42</sup> The current scientific beliefs with regards to different racial capabilities were likely disseminated in the schools (they were discussed in textbooks of the time), and this must also have caused some inner conflict for such children, for "in effect, they were being taught that they were superior to their Indian mothers, but inferior to their white fathers."<sup>43</sup> While the potential for long-term impact of these attitudes on the children's self-esteem may seem evident, the situation must also have created contradictory feelings about the native mothers. How often was love mixed with a deliberate distancing from the mother, as the only means of being dutiful to the father's vision of what his children should be?

Although he himself was not present to inculcate white values and "respectability," George Suckley did what he could to ensure that

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<sup>42</sup>Pollard, "The Making of the Métis in the Pacific North West Fur Trade Children," pp. 398-400.

<sup>43</sup>ibid., p. 392.

Susan became as "proper" a young lady as she could. He did this through appointing for her a string of white caretakers--Mrs. Diggs, Mr. and Mrs. Prosch, Dr. Tolmie, Tillotson, and finally the Sisters of St. Ann--whose influence could serve to counteract or even to replace completely that of her mother. If her mother was still alive at the time she went to Victoria, then Susan would seem to have been finally removed not only from her care, but also from her sphere of influence. The elision of Cecilia in Susan's baptismal records would seem to correspond with her elision in Susan's life.

If Susan did to some extent "deny" her mother, and I think that she did, she also (though perhaps not at this early time) resisted the pressures to do so. Certainly, she strived to fulfil the image of the white lady--the proper dress, the educational efforts, the observance of a Christian religion. However, at least later in life (perhaps when she was more secure), she acknowledged her Indian side in many ways. Indeed, she never tried to hide her background (and perhaps could not have done so, in any case) and passed on what she knew of it to her children. She obviously instilled a pride in that side of his heritage in her son Charles, who identified himself in photographs as the grandson of Cecilia and great-grandson of Cuo-dis-kid and Martha Skagit.<sup>44</sup> Reminiscences of younger settlers in the Hope area included the recollection of her telling stories of "Indian life" in the Puget Sound area.<sup>45</sup> She also maintained a connection with her halfbrothers and their families, visiting and corresponding with them until the time of her death. Had she not

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<sup>44</sup>Flood family papers.

<sup>45</sup>Morley Gillander, "The Skagit Saga," Flood family papers.



felt some pride in that side of her identity, it is doubtful that any of her story would have come down to the level of her great-grandchildren. At most, her "Indian blood" may have been something whispered, with the admonition not to let anyone know.

Nevertheless, at the time Susan Suckley was enrolled at St. Ann's, it is plain that the Sisters and other students came to function in many ways as a surrogate family for her. As such, they probably helped to assuage both any ambivalence or anxiety she felt due to separation from her birth family and the longing she evinced for some connection to her father through his family. The convent school was structured in such a way as to emphasize a family setting. Boarders lived in close contact with the nuns, who until the 1880s were called "by their name in religion prefixed by 'Aunt.'"<sup>46</sup> The older boarders would help out with the younger girls, taking on the role of elder sister; for example, in August 1875 Susan noted that she had "charge of the little boarders, they are 12 in number."<sup>47</sup> Accompanied by the lay assistant Mary Mainville and/or one or two of the Sisters, they would go on picnic outings to Beacon Hill, spend evenings in the music room where "Aunt Lucy" would play the piano and sing duets with another Sister, and prevail upon Miss Mainville, Sister Mary Patrick, or Sister Mary Romuald to exercise their storytelling abilities. Years later, Susan recalled: "They could hold us spellbound at a whole week's recreation period, with one story

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<sup>46</sup>Down, *A Century of Service*, p. 91.

<sup>47</sup>Susan Suckley's "Pacific Diary," Flood family papers.

alone--the longer, the better; the greater the suspense, the greater the fascination."<sup>48</sup>

The memories Susan held of her years at St. Ann's were clearly fond ones, and focused more on her relations with the other people there than on her schooling as such. The friendships she developed with many of the other girls were very close, as attested to by the correspondence, photographs, and other keepsakes that she obviously treasured for years. Many of these artifacts reflect the same kind of intense relationship described by Smith-Rosenberg.<sup>49</sup> And although it is doubtful she was ever able to visit Victoria again after writing her second teachers' examination in 1881, she did try to remain in touch with the Sisters there. No doubt her letters to them echoed the same kind of affection they expressed to her, as when Sister Mary Florence told her that every time she played the pieces of music Susan had sent to her, "I think of you and wonder how you are" and then continued, "I need not say, dear Susan, that I was truly rejoiced to hear of your marriage, for you know that any advantage or good fortune that happens to you, cannot fail to interest us and give us pleasure." That the Sisters and their former charges felt an abiding connection seems plain: even as late as 1919, forty years after Susan's departure from the school, Sister Mary Theodore wrote to her: "I think if you paid the convent a visit we would be so glad to see you, we would hardly let you walk."<sup>50</sup> For her part, Susan, like many other former students, was more than

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<sup>48</sup>A Chaplet of Years - 1858-1918 (Victoria, The Sisters of St. Ann, 1918).

<sup>49</sup>Smith-Rosenberg, "Love and Ritual."

<sup>50</sup>Letters to Susan Flood from Sister Mary Florence, 8 May 1882 and from Sister Mary Theodore, 14 May 1919, Flood family papers.

willing to furnish materials for the souvenir book commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Sisters' arrival in Victoria.<sup>51</sup>

Like other educational institutions in British Columbia, St. Ann's Academy was founded and developed in response to the perceived needs of children (of both white settlers and natives) for schooling as "preparation to maintain existing place within the social order, and inculcation of denominational religious beliefs."<sup>52</sup> The first schools on Vancouver Island were "fee-based denominational structures," the need for which increased dramatically with Victoria's burgeoning population at the time of the Gold Rush in 1858. It was at this time that the Catholic Bishop Modeste Demers persuaded four Sisters of St. Ann to come west from Quebec in order to open a school for girls. Their student population grew rapidly, and within a year the original Log Cabin School was overcrowded. In 1860, a new convent on View Street with facilities for boarders was opened; the Log Cabin still operated as a free school until 1863. Ten years later, expansion was again necessary, and the 1871 laying of the cornerstone for the Humboldt Street convent, which would operate as St. Ann's Academy until 1974, saw "the gathering of state and church officials together with a large number of Victoria's citizens."<sup>53</sup> Having arrived in Victoria the previous year, Susan Suckley would have been present at this

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<sup>51</sup>This was A Chaplet of Years. Susan had apparently sent the material in 1908, presumably for the fiftieth anniversary, but the booklet did not materialize until the sixtieth anniversary in 1918.

<sup>52</sup>Jean Barman, "Transfer, Imposition or Consensus? The Emergence of Educational Structures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," in Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History, eds. Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1986), p. 242.

<sup>53</sup>Down, A Century of Service, p. 68.

ceremony, one of several important events in the 1870s that created exciting diversions in the daily lives of students.<sup>54</sup>

In terms of the education received within the school, as a Catholic institution St. Ann's would have situated its instructional endeavours within the framework of Catholic philosophy: "since education consists essentially in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do, here below, in order to attain the sublime end, for which he was created, it is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end."<sup>55</sup>

However, the school insisted that "difference of religion" was no "obstacle to admission," and many non-Catholics did indeed attend. From the beginning, the curriculum was described as more or less the same as that in other schools of the time and, in fact, based on the Ontario Educational System.<sup>56</sup> This would also have been consistent with the curriculum and textbooks introduced after the B. C. Public School Act of 1872 by the new (and Ontario-trained) Superintendent of Education, John Jessop. The second prospectus for St. Ann's (in effect from about 1872 to 1890) listed the following courses comprising the school's "system of education":

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<sup>54</sup>Susan's response to this particular event is unknown, but she did mention attending the opening of St. Joseph's Hospital in 1876. On this occasion, she was most impressed by Dr. Helmcken's "patronizing speech on the Charitable zeal [sic] of the Sisters of St. Ann in undertaking such a difficult important and such a truly charitable task upon themselves . . . [He] closed his speech with these words 'O death! where is thy sting. O grave where is thy victory.'" Susan Suckley's "Pacific Diary," Flood family papers.

<sup>55</sup>Pope Pius XI, Christian Education--A Papal Encyclical on Education (New York: McGrath Publishing Company, 1903-1933), p. 206, quoted in Edith E. Down, S. S. A., "An Overview of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Victoria, B. C. 1847-1960," paper given at the St. Andrew's Cathedral Centennial Conference, Victoria, B. C., November 13, 1992, p. 5. While this is taken from a 1929 encyclical, it was doubtless the same attitude towards education that prevailed in the 1870s.

<sup>56</sup>Down, A Century of Service, p. 113.

"Orthography, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, and the use of the Globes, History, Botany, Natural Philosophy, Composition, French, Music, Drawing, Painting, Plain and Fancy Needlework in all its variety." Some of these courses, such as music, drawing, and painting, were not part of the regular curriculum, and students who took them were assessed additional fees.<sup>57</sup>

The implementation of this curriculum is indicated by one of Susan's notebooks, and part of another, that have survived.<sup>58</sup> They are full of her answers to questions on, for example, Roman history, geography (complete with longitudinal and latitudinal readings for locations around the world), the causes of tides and avalanches, and the "characteristics" of the Chinese. Her tiny, flourishing handwriting is evidence of the Sisters' emphasis on penmanship. A reliance on memorizing passages deemed to be "classic" as a means of learning "refined correct language" is also apparent.<sup>59</sup> In 1874, Susan began taking drawing lessons. In this area, she clearly had some talent, as a number of her drawings and watercolour paintings that still exist can attest. Her artistic nature was also expressed through the fancy needlework in which she "excelled"--an embroidered table cover still in her granddaughter's possession was awarded a prize at the "Annual Exposition of the King County Industrial Association" at Seattle in the fall of 1880. On the other hand, her scholastic abilities were probably not spectacular, as

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<sup>57</sup>Second Prospectus, St. Ann's School for Young Ladies, Humboldt Street, Victoria. Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann, doc. #35-1-7.2.

<sup>58</sup>Flood family papers.

<sup>59</sup>Down, A Century of Service, p. 48.

shown by her marks on the teachers' examinations,<sup>60</sup> though it is interesting to note that her highest scores were achieved in composition and reading, areas that held an "honoured place in the St. Ann's curriculum."<sup>61</sup>

The Sisters of St. Ann took pride in the lack of distinctions they made among students on the basis of race or class, and in the early days there certainly was parity to a large extent. However, distinctions did start to creep in when a division was made between the "Select School" and the free school, though what was taught at both may have remained quite similar. By the mid-1870s, native and halfbreed girls were moved to Cowichan, though differences in their educational treatment were probably relatively minimal until later in the century, when the demands of white society caused a complete separation and growing inequality (both in quantity and in quality) in both Catholic and Protestant schools.<sup>62</sup> Even so, the Sisters' consciousness of their "civilizing mission," which allotted to them "the trying task of preparing the minds of Indian and half-breed children for the rudiments of learning"<sup>63</sup> (which would also include domestic training), must have had some effect on their instruction of these children. No matter how indulgent or affectionate they felt towards them, the Sisters would remember that "in those days, the half-breed children were not even a generation removed from savagery."<sup>64</sup> And it is hard to imagine that

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<sup>60</sup>Register of Teachers' Certificates, 1880 and 1881.

<sup>61</sup>Down, *A Century of Service*, p. 48.

<sup>62</sup>See Jean Barman, "Separate and Unequal: Indian and White Girls at All Hallows School, 1884-1920," in *Rethinking Canada*, eds. Strong-Boag and Fellman.

<sup>63</sup>Down, *A Century of Service*, p. 39.

<sup>64</sup>*ibid.*, p. 89.

one of these students, trying to conform to the ideals of her "white" education yet aware of her distance from it in her racial heritage, could copy even such a relatively innocuous statement as "The English adventurers, instead of endeavouring to cultivate the rude manners of the natives . . . suffered them to remain ignorant, and finally fall back into their ancient mode of life"<sup>65</sup> without some confusion in her own self-evaluation.

### **Family Influence on Marriage**

Statistical studies have indicated that marriage in Canada in the nineteenth-century generally conformed to the "Western European marriage pattern"; that is, age at first marriage was relatively late, and the number never marrying was relatively high. However, in British Columbia, the average age at marriage for women was considerably lower than in most other parts of the country: 20 years in 1881 compared with 26.9 in Prince Edward Island or 25.3 in Ontario and 22.3 years in 1891 compared with 27.9 and 26.6 for the other two provinces, respectively.<sup>66</sup> This tendency is generally attributed to the high (white) male to female ratio in B. C. which, along with the colonial construction of white women as agents of civilization on the frontier, probably resulted in "substantial pressure" for these women to marry, and to marry young.<sup>67</sup> There were regional variations within the province, as well as differences according to race and religion. For example, John Belshaw notes that women in the Kamloops area tended to marry

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<sup>65</sup>Susan Suckley's school notebook, Flood family papers.

<sup>66</sup>Ellen M. Thomas Gee, "Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 19, no. 3 (1982): 320.

<sup>67</sup>Perry, "Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men," pp. 37-40.

later than their counterparts in Nanaimo (a tendency he feels was largely related to "variations in the marketplace" and perhaps the carryover in Nanaimo of English coal-mining community traditions). As well, in Kamloops, Anglican women generally married later than Methodists (though still at an average of 22.09 years from 1885 to 1888), and native women earlier than white women, at around 17.33 and 21.5 years, respectively.<sup>68</sup>

These figures suggest a variety of factors--societal, familial and individual--underlying marriage for the nineteenth-century woman. Whether they would marry at all, when they would marry, and who they would marry were all questions in which more people than the women themselves and their eventual partners had an interest. In his study of marriage in nineteenth-century (eastern) English Canada, Peter Ward points out that "long after the young had assumed the lead in making their marriage arrangements, basing their choice of partners on sentiment more than prudence, society preserved great influence over the process of taking a spouse."<sup>69</sup> This was achieved through a nexus of religious, legal, and community constraints.

According to the tendencies in their particular social milieu, Susan and Jessie Nagle (at thirty-one and twenty-seven) and Susan Suckley (at almost twenty-seven) all married at ages considerably older than the norm. The paths they took to arrive at that point are suggestive of "the system of individual choice of partner under

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<sup>68</sup>Belshaw, "Cradle to Grave," pp. 51-53. The latter figures are based on extrapolations from data on first births, rather than specific marriage statistics.

<sup>69</sup>Peter Ward, Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), p. 169.



careful monitoring" described by Davidoff and Hall,<sup>70</sup> particularly in the cases of Susan and Jessie Nagle. They were strongly influenced in their choices by their parents, though there was never any overt coercion. In turn, their parents' wishes were both conditioned and constrained by their position within the colonial society.

While Susan and Jessie's sister Isabel fit the prevailing norm by virtue of marrying at nineteen, the two older sisters both took a lengthier and more circuitous route before finally wedding. This situation was likely the result of a confluence of factors, which together undermined the simple equation of a high male to female ratio with the probable early marriage of white women. The Nagles were relatively high in social status, and their respectability would demand that any serious suitors would have to be of a certain class and equally respectable. It would not be considered suitable for the Nagle daughters to marry any of the miners for whom the Church of England sought wives and a stable family life. On the other hand, the Nagles were generally in poor economic circumstances. This did not stand them in good stead with the limited pool of young men who would have been suitable for them, especially given that such men were more often than not scrabbling with their "letters of introduction" to make contacts and gain what posts they could. The marriage of two people in "genteel poverty" would not be considered very fortuitous. Regardless of their abilities and characters, and even regardless of Jessie's reputation as one of "the belles of the

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<sup>70</sup>Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 323.

Fraser River,"<sup>71</sup> the Nagle sisters were not positioned to marry easily.

Shortly after her twenty-fifth birthday, Susan wrote in her diary: "I suppose people will soon begin to call me an old maid. Dear me. How dreadful!!! I am afraid that I shall never get over it, but perhaps, indeed most likely, die of the complaint."<sup>72</sup> Her tongue-in-cheek remark notwithstanding, she apparently felt some concern that she was less helpful to her family in her single status than she might be if married. In particular, she wanted to be able to help her mother, as "Poor Mama needs a regular change. I never wished before so much that I had a home of my own that I might be able to have Mama with me for a perfect rest." Her next words suggest that she had turned down a proposal in the past: "I believe I have been very foolish when I had everything that I could wish in a comfortable home offered to me and not take it. It's strange how one's ideas change between 20 and 25, at which dignified age I have now arrived."<sup>73</sup>

Susan and Algernon (Algy) Hill seem to have become engaged sometime late in 1867, though whether this occurred before or after he left Victoria to seek a posting in the Colonial Service is unclear. There is a gap in her diaries between 1865 and December 1867, and Algy had already departed by the time of his first mention on December 9th. However strong her feelings for him may have been, it is plain that she hoped that their eventual marriage would help to

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<sup>71</sup>Ormsby, ed., A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup>SAH, 9 May 1865.

<sup>73</sup>ibid.

ease some of the economic burden her parents suffered. Although Algy did receive (probably largely due to the influence of Philip and Belle) a minor posting in Belize, by mid-1868 an expected salary increase to 200 pounds per annum had not come through,<sup>74</sup> which meant that his anticipated sending for Susan would continue to be delayed indefinitely. One year later, she was still waiting and began to despair of this event ever happening. Even if she was to marry Algernon now she feared that "on the small pittance [sic] he is likely to get . . . I could do but little towards helping anyone else."<sup>75</sup>

By this time, Susan had already begun to have some doubts about her engagement. A few days earlier she had written:

sometimes I almost regret having entered into this engagement not only on my own account, but on his, I dare say it is a great drag on him, feeling bound to and yet without any prospect of marrying, and after all perhaps the best thing I can do is to tell him so,

adding cryptically, "there is perhaps another reason which influences me a little, but I will not write it even here, time will tell."<sup>76</sup> No clues as to what this "reason" might have been are evident in subsequent entries. In July of the same year she began teaching at Yale, still wishing that "something could be settled." When she heard that Jessie's engagement was likely to be broken off, she commented that "she has been very unfortunate in her love

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<sup>74</sup>SAH, 26 May 1868.

<sup>75</sup>SAH, 7 April 1869. Algy's fate seemed to be tied to Philip Hankin's at this time. Philip was in Victoria, but it looked as though he might soon leave. If he had stayed, Algy might also have ended up at a post there.

<sup>76</sup>SAH, 2 April 1869.

affairs; I am beginning rather to despair about mine I am afraid its [sic] rather hopeless."<sup>77</sup>

Finally, in July 1870 Susan wrote to tell Algy she thought their engagement should be broken "as there seems no prospect of our meeting."<sup>78</sup> A response did not come until October, and it was equivocal. She sought her mother's opinion, and was advised to break off the engagement. This she determined to do, claiming that:

it seems very evident that he has lost a great part of his interest in the matter so I won't keep him to it. He fancied I wished to break it off with the intention of marrying someone else, this certainly is not the case & had he been working and showing that he was doing the best he could I would have waited any number of years for him, but as it is it is better at an end.<sup>79</sup>

Although this was her final decision, she continued to feel some anxiety about her action, as for a while she seems to have been plagued with dreams about Algy, in which he complained of her treatment of him or had died of disappointment.<sup>80</sup>

Not long afterwards, Susan noted that "Mr. Holmes" had asked her to "re-consider" her decision, thus obviously alluding to a previous proposal, which she had refused. She justified her refusal on the basis that "altho I feel he is a good man and no doubt wd. do his best to make me happy, still I cant [sic] bring myself to say I will marry him." She was still anxious about Algernon's well-being.<sup>81</sup> David Holmes, no doubt impressed by Susan's pious nature,

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<sup>77</sup>SAH, 14 December 1869; 13 May 1870.

<sup>78</sup>SAH, 12 July 1870.

<sup>79</sup>SAH, 17 October 1870.

<sup>80</sup>SAH, 5 October and 31 October 1870.

<sup>81</sup>SAH, 15 December 1870.

made one more attempt early in 1871. This time, Susan "promised to try for the next two months to like him, so at the end of that time if I can forget the past and do so, I am to marry him." She admitted that she thought him "a truly good man perhaps a little hasty" who would make "a kind affect. husband to one who could return his affection." Her further thoughts on the subject at this time are unknown, as the next page of the diary was torn out.<sup>82</sup>

In February, David (to whom she still referred as Mr. Holmes) again "tried hard" to make her accept, but she was still unable to do so, although she did confide that "I think I am beginning to 'like' him, and perhaps it may end in my loving him, tho' I have felt & said I w[oul]d never love any one again."<sup>83</sup> Two days afterwards, she exclaimed:

Well, I've been gone & done it--Whether for good or bad, I am engaged to Mr. Holmes. I cant [sic] quite realize that I really have said the word, have I done right? I hope so--I have not deceived him as to my feelings He know[s] the old wound is not quite healed, but is satisfied that I will do my best to forget it--and perhaps may end in my caring for him more than for the other.<sup>84</sup>

She felt sure her parents would be glad, for she believed they thought only of her happiness, and would rejoice in anything that led to it.<sup>85</sup>

This engagement was not to be a long one. Susan still expressed some doubts (mainly in the form of presentiments that

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<sup>82</sup>SAH, 5 January 1871.

<sup>83</sup>SAH, 17 February 1871.

<sup>84</sup>SAH, 19 February 1871.

<sup>85</sup>SAH, 20 February 1871.

she would never be married), but over the next two months she reported going on a number of pleasant walks with David, and by the time she went to Victoria in April she had started to refer to him as "my dear David."<sup>86</sup> David followed her to Victoria in June, and they were married quietly by Dean Cridge on the 19th, leaving again that same evening for a few days in New Westminster before returning to Yale.<sup>87</sup>

Jessie Nagle seems to have been more inclined to "sensibility" (at least she expressed such feelings more freely in her diary) and, perhaps for that reason, her parents were more directly involved in the course of her romantic life. When her diary opened in early 1867, she was twenty-two years old and engaged to James Moorhead. This was apparently not her first engagement, for when James left for San Francisco later in the year she admitted that, although she would miss him,

he is passionately fond of me, too fond, I tell him  
for I cannot return it with such ardor, how I wish  
I was as much attached to him as he is to me, shall  
I ever be, he knows he is not my first love, as it is  
called & that I've been engaged before, but it makes  
no difference in his feelings towards me, dear James  
you do deserve more love than I can give you yet.<sup>88</sup>

But by the end of the year their engagement was broken off, though not directly by Jessie, for Jeremiah had written to James "that he [Jeremiah] wished it to be so" because "there was no prospect of his [James'] being able to marry." For her part, Jessie insisted that she did not regret this event, reasoning that "I ought not to have

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<sup>86</sup>SAH, 20 April 1871.

<sup>87</sup>SAH, 7-25 June 1871.

<sup>88</sup>Jessie Nagle, 10 May 1867.

accepted him, I thought I respected & esteemed him sufficiently to marry, but absence has shown me that I do not, and I'm sure he has either changed or he has never cared for me in spite of all his protestations."<sup>89</sup>

Jessie appears to have been much sought-after, and within a year she had another proposal, this time from Mr. Burnaby, a man considerably older than herself. Unfortunately, she felt that she did not understand him and was unlikely ever to be able to "care sufficiently for him to marry him," although she felt that she could trust him, more than she could say for many men she did like.<sup>90</sup> Thus, Mr. Burnaby was disappointed, leaving the door open for Mr. Berkeley (Willie), a friend from her days in New Westminster. She accepted his proposal in December 1869, but their relationship ran into a crisis a few months later when Willie, an accountant, told her that the marriage would have to be postponed because "he had lost \$400 from the Treasury." Her parents were both extremely angry and she herself was "wretched."<sup>91</sup> For the next few months she was in a turmoil of emotion, feeling herself pulled in all directions. Willie begged her not to end the engagement, while her parents argued with equal passion for her to do so, both of them also expressing their displeasure to Willie in no uncertain terms. Jessie was torn between wanting both to defend Willie to her parents and to justify their words and actions to him as their "duty." Her sister and brother-in-law (Belle and Philip) also became involved on Willie's side, causing Jessie a good deal of anguish as they manipulated her

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<sup>89</sup>Jessie Nagle, 22 December 1867.

<sup>90</sup>Jessie Nagle, 30 November 1868; 4 April 1869.

<sup>91</sup>Jessie Nagle, 22 April 1870.

into seeing Willie at their house after her parents had forbidden him to come to their home. Belle and Philip's lack of consideration for her feelings troubled her, especially after she finally decided to break off the engagement, and she complained that they "seem to think that I ought to see him or rather . . . they can't understand why I do not want to see him and yet they might."<sup>92</sup> She must have been particularly glad for Susan's arrival from Yale; although both Susan and Catherine sympathized with her, they told her she had done the right thing. She herself wrote, "I do not know whether I've done right or wrong . . . there is only one satisfaction in it and that is that both Papa and Mama wished me to do it."<sup>93</sup>

This was the situation when Jessie's diary entries ended in August. Since she and Willie did eventually marry, in December of the following year, it would appear that he had managed somehow to clear up his problems. Perhaps Philip Hankin had paid the amount, as he had offered to do. In any case, they were apparently married with the family's blessing. Their marriage was not to last long, however, as Jessie did not survive the birth of their only child (a daughter who also died shortly after the birth) in 1873.

Although Susan Suckley's father had not been a physical presence in her life and had probably never given her any direct instructions or advice, his influence on at least some of her choices was nevertheless quite definitive. In 1875, Susan received a letter from George Suckley's lawyer in which the provisions made for her in her father's will were laid out. She was left \$1000.00 (not a huge

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<sup>92</sup>Jessie Nagle, 12 July 1870.

<sup>93</sup>Jessie Nagle, 18 July 1870.



sum, but at the time what she might have expected to earn over a couple of years as a teacher) in trust, under certain conditions. She was to receive payment of this sum upon "marriage to a white man approved by the trustees." If she did not marry by age nineteen (which she had already passed), or married someone not approved by the trustees, the money was to be invested by the trustees and the interest paid to her throughout her life or until she received the principal under the previously stipulated conditions. If she married without approval, and died leaving children, the principal would be divided equally among the children. The lawyer, Mr. Tillotson, was to be the sole trustee; he concluded by saying, "I regret that I cannot pay over the money to you, but the directions in the will are so explicit, that I am compelled to retain it until the contingency contemplated by the will shall take place."<sup>94</sup>

In this way, George Suckley was able to exert significant control over his daughter's life, even though she hardly knew him. The use of trust arrangements to provide for female kin was quite common in the nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup> Besides being, like other such arrangements, a manifestation of notions of female dependence, this particular provision carried other implications. Not only was Susan's potential option not to marry at all decreased, but also her autonomy in choosing a marriage partner was limited. This was so not just because of the financial aspect (though for someone as practical as Susan appears to have been, this alone would have been

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<sup>94</sup>Letter from G. Tillotson to Susan Suckley, 20 August 1875, Flood family papers. Tillotson did not explain why he was only then (six years after George's death) informing her of these terms, but it was probably connected to the death of Rutsen.

<sup>95</sup>See Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, pp. 209-215.

quite compelling); there would undoubtedly also have been a psychological dimension to the pressure to conform to her father's wishes as expressed in his will. They were, after all, indications of concern from a figure for whose acknowledgement she longed.

For his part, George Suckley probably viewed the stipulation of marriage to a white man in the same light as a good education by the nuns--both originated from his concern for his daughter's "respectability" and from a desire for her to become as "white" and "middle-class" as was possible. The conditions of his will ensured that, when it came down to a choice, Susan would opt to "become white," and that her children's lives were therefore even more likely to be passed within a white context. He was deliberately attempting to force the construction of his descendants' identities in a certain direction.

Of course, such limitations on the choice of marriage partners were in place for women like the Nagle sisters as well, but they were much more implicit for them. The societal injunctions against interracial marriage or marriage outside of one's class would have been considered sufficient for them not even to imagine violating them. A halfbreed girl, on the other hand, might be thought to need more overt guidance in this matter. Yet, although in some ways Susan Suckley's choices were more restricted than those of the Nagles, in other ways they were less so. Not having had the benefit of growing up in a stable household headed by a prominent white father, Susan would certainly never have been able to marry into the colonial elite, as James Douglas' daughters did. At the other extreme, her potential husband had to be approved by the trustee,

and as such could not have been too "low" or rough a person. (In this way, her father's will likely also protected her against the fate of many mixed-blood women of the time, that is, to be treated as "concubines" by white men without the securities of marriage.) However, the trustee would probably not be too circumspect in approving a husband, as long as he was reasonably respectable and white.

It is unknown whether Susan had any attachments before she met William Flood. Living in the convent most of the time, the opportunities to do so must have been few. In any case, her relationship with William must have started not long after she arrived at Fort Hope in the spring of 1881. Some of the entries in her autograph book from the summer of that year (presumably written when she was back in Victoria to take the teachers' examination) made veiled references to her romantic connection. How much of the connection was romantic and how much pragmatic is difficult to ascertain. The practical elements (for both sides) are readily apparent, but it seems there must have been something of romance there too. Among her pages of copied riddles, Susan wrote (in a different colour of ink): "When are there only 25 letters in the Alphabet? Ans. When W & I are one."<sup>96</sup> That she shared in many of the romantic preoccupations of her peers is evident in the notes, autographs, and other bits and pieces she kept, as well as in the sentimental poetry she copied and wrote. The community at Fort Hope appears to have viewed Susan and William's courtship in this

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<sup>96</sup>Susan Suckley's "Pacific Diary," Flood family papers.

way as well. An anonymous poem about the town during this period includes the following lines:

Of all the schoolmarms that held sway,  
Among the rest we'll ne'er forget  
Misses Miller, Suckley, Smith and King,  
Two being caught in Cupid's net.<sup>97</sup>

At least she did not have to suffer through a long engagement, being married within a year of meeting William.

To what extent were these women's marriages difficult adjustments for them? Carroll Smith-Rosenberg suggests that:

If men and women grew up as they did in relatively homogeneous and segregated sexual groups, then marriage represented a major problem in adjustment. From this perspective we could interpret much of the emotional stiffness and distance that we associate with Victorian marriage as a structural consequence of contemporary sex-role differentiation and gender-role socialization. With marriage both women and men had to adjust to life with a person who was, in essence, a member of an alien group.<sup>98</sup>

However, in a society where white women in particular had relatively few opportunities for female companionship, where the barriers (societal and self-imposed) to association between women of different races were so strong,<sup>99</sup> and where few families had the economic means for their female members to withdraw into the home, the ideology of "separate spheres" probably did not manifest itself to quite the same extent as it may have elsewhere. Both Susan and Jessie Nagle had a number of male friends, indeed some

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<sup>97</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 284.

<sup>98</sup>Smith-Rosenberg, "Love and Ritual," p. 28.

<sup>99</sup>See Perry, "Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men," pp. 40-42.

quite close friends, with whom they went walking, horseback riding, and on picnics. Their multiple relationships should also have helped to acquaint them with the ways of the opposite sex. Even Susan Suckley, living at a convent for ten years, apparently had male acquaintances, evident from the numerous entries by men in her autograph book. (She may have met these men only after she had left St. Ann's; however, the time between that event and her arrival at Fort Hope was relatively short.)

There is no information available on how Susan Suckley fared in adapting to married life. She had not known her husband long before they married and was not married long before she became a mother. She did not have the benefit of her own mother's help in her new situation. In addition, she was relatively new to the community, so it seems likely she may have had some difficulties. On the other hand, she had adapted to entirely different situations in the past and so may have been fairly adept at the task.

Susan Nagle apparently did experience some adjustment problems. Following her marriage her health was not good and she admitted to being "low spirited at times." She feared she also made David unhappy, explaining that "he does not quite understand how I feel (which is quite natural) and attributes my giving way and crying to being cross, which is far from being the case."<sup>100</sup> Despite her varied acquaintance with men, Susan very likely was still affected by the prevailing assessment of male and female "natures." Nancy Theriot asserts that, through mid-century, "part of the message young women were given was that the sexes were so different from

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<sup>100</sup>SAH, 23 November 1871.

each other that communication and mutual understanding were rare between women and men . . . Young women learned, from the culture at large and from their own family situations, to expect little emotional support or understanding from men."<sup>101</sup> An acceptance of this divergence was part of the woman's acculturation into her married life. It may have been the case that Susan was having difficulty with this adaptation; nevertheless, little more than a month after this entry, she wrote, "my marrying David was ordained by Providence and it is possible there may be reasons for it which we cannot see now. I think we are very well suited to each other . . . may the end of the next [year] find us as happy as this leaves us."<sup>102</sup> By the time her next surviving diary opened, in August 1874, she appeared to have settled into her life with David.

Relationships with a "family of origin" were extremely important in the lives of both Susan Nagle and Susan Suckley, although their families and the relationships encompassed within them differed vastly. Susan Nagle's family comprised a group of closely-knit immediate blood kin, while Susan Suckley's was a changing, and often "surrogate" entity. At various times she was most closely connected to her mother's family, then to non-relatives appointed by her father (or his agents), and finally to the Sisters of St. Ann. Despite his physical absence from her life, her father's influence on her was profound.

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<sup>101</sup>Nancy M. Theriot, Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity (Lexington: the University Press of Kentucky, 1996), p. 67.

<sup>102</sup>SAH, 31 December 1871.

The influences of both Susans' families can be seen in the form and content of their education. While little is known of the specifics of Susan Nagle's education, it clearly conformed to the typical education for a girl of her background. Susan Suckley also received a middle-class kind of education, partly as a means to aid her hoped-for absorption into white society.

Both women ostensibly had some self-control over their destiny in terms of their eventual marriages; however, their options were also constrained by their family circumstances. Susan Nagle did not face the direct interference that her sister Jessie did, but she seems to have internalized her family's interests in the matter more fully. As in other areas, Susan Suckley's father's influence was indirect but potent.

This discussion has for the most part left aside the question of economic life, though there is an obvious interconnection between it and family relations. The next chapter will take up the issue of how these two women functioned as economic agents, both before and after their marriages.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ECONOMIC IDENTITIES

Despite the Victorian middle-class ideal of a "separate sphere" for women which encompassed the domestic aspects of life to the exclusion of any economic involvement, it is doubtful that many nineteenth-century women remained pure of the taint of economic life.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, both Susan Holmes and Susan Flood were active participants in their families' economic lives, in both financial and non-financial capacities. While recognizing that it is virtually impossible to completely disentangle the economic from other aspects of a life (as Victorian ideology desired to do), in this chapter I would like to examine some of the ways in which this participation took place.

Once again, there were both similarities and differences in the ways the two women functioned as economic agents. Before their marriages, both earned salaries as teachers; later, both were actively involved in buying and selling land, an interest each may have inherited from her father. Nor was the economic side of their lives strictly financial--while searching for various sources of family income was an ever-present preoccupation, the evolving nature of their household work and the family division of labour was no less a factor in the family economy. Their choices of work and ability to perform some economic activities were undoubtedly constrained by legal, social, and cultural limitations. These are also

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, the wife's function within marriage, the base of middle-class society, was inherently economic, both in terms of symbolic value and of connections between families as economic entities. See Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes.



a part of their experience in this area, and must be considered along with their actual activities.

### **Teaching in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia**

Historical studies of schoolteaching in nineteenth-century North America have often focused on aspects of the changing sexual division of labour in the occupation, and on the connections among the "feminization" of teaching, the development of public school systems, and the increasing bureaucratization and hierarchalization of these systems.<sup>2</sup> The reasons given to explain why women became the majority of primary school teachers during the latter part of the last century usually include the tendency of financially-constrained school boards to view hiring women teachers as a cost-cutting method.<sup>3</sup> Such concerns could help overcome any lingering biases against the employment of women. Indeed, the ideology of separate spheres was eventually mobilized in favour of hiring women to teach the younger grades, since such a task could be constructed as a "mothering" function, and thus merely an extension of women's natural role.

Later studies called more attention to the need to acknowledge the complexity of the phenomenon of feminization. These took into consideration social, economic, and cultural factors such as marital

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<sup>2</sup>Discussions of the "feminization of teaching" in the Canadian (or British North American) context can be found in: Alison Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching in British North America and Canada 1845-1875," Social History 8, no. 15 (1975); Marta Danylewicz, Beth Light, and Alison Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: A Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study," Social History 16, no. 31 (May 1983); and Marta Danylewicz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth Century Montreal and Toronto," History of Education Quarterly 24, no. 1 (Spring 1984).

<sup>3</sup>Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching," p. 7. As Prentice notes (p. 12), "low pay and status were probably a condition of female employment in the first place."

and household status, ethnicity, and age structure, as well as regional variations.<sup>4</sup> In the British Columbia context, Jean Barman suggests that "feminization may have been overemphasized as an explanatory device." In B. C., the process occurred more slowly and to a lesser degree than in England or the rest of North America; there were also significant differences between rural and urban areas and among teachers depending on when they were hired. Furthermore, "feminization of itself did not necessarily alter the character of teaching as an occupation," as retention rates were more reflective of the urban/rural split than of gender divisions.<sup>5</sup>

The particular situation in British Columbia differed from that of most of the rest of Canada in that, while the Public School Act of 1872 established a publicly-funded non-sectarian school system with a Board and Superintendent of Education which regulated curricula, teachers' certification and appointments, and school rules, the occupation of teacher was still relatively free from overt centralized control until the establishment of the first Normal School in 1901. Thus, between those two dates, teaching as a vocation in B. C. was "peculiarly voluntary"; that is, teachers could "select" themselves for the occupation simply by deciding to write and passing (even minimally) the teachers' examination set every year.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, while the backgrounds of teachers may have

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<sup>4</sup>See Danylewicz, Light, and Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching," and Marta Danylewicz and Alison Prentice, "Revising the History of Teachers: A Canadian Perspective," Interchange 17, no. 2 (Summer 1986).

<sup>5</sup>Jean Barman, "Birds of Passage or Early Professionals? Teachers in Late Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," Historical Studies in Education 2, no. 1 (1990): 17-18.

<sup>6</sup>ibid.

broadened somewhat during these years, an analysis of who actually did become teachers indicates that many barriers still existed and teachers in public schools in B. C. remained a remarkably homogeneous group.<sup>7</sup>

### **Teaching Before 1872**

For reasonably educated young women who had little choice but to try to earn a living, teaching in some capacity was probably the most obvious route to take. Both Susan Nagle and her sister Jessie took more than one job within the less-organized educational milieu predating the Public School Act. Neither seemed overly enthusiastic about her work as a teacher, thus indicating that their occupational choices were mainly a matter of financial exigency, rather than the result of any sense of vocation. In this sense, they were more exemplary of the earlier nineteenth-century type of "schoolmistresses" who, although they lacked financial means, were able to parlay their middle-class breeding and educational background in both basics and "accomplishments" into a means of livelihood (and maintaining status), than of the more professionally-minded teachers who would later predominate in the field.<sup>8</sup>

In her diaries, Susan said relatively little about the conditions under which she performed her teaching work or, indeed about the

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<sup>7</sup>In her research on pioneer teachers in B. C., Jean Barman has found few instances of teachers who did not fit the white "middle-class" or even Protestant (outside of the Catholic institutions) norms. Profiles of pioneer teachers and a discussion of their motivations are provided in Jean Barman, "British Columbia's Pioneer Teachers," in Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia, eds. Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland, and J. Donald Wilson (Calgary: Detselig, 1995).

<sup>8</sup>See Joyce Senders Pedersen, "Schoolmistresses and Headmistresses: Elites and Education in Nineteenth-Century England," in Women Who Taught, eds. Prentice and Theobald.

nature of the work itself. In the first of these, she remarked that she had begun going to "Mrs. Reece's" at the beginning of February 1865, but did not elaborate on what duties she performed there. It appears that she was able to continue living at her parents' home while working at the Reece's school, although bad weather in March forced her to remain at the Reece's for a period of at least a week. At this point, she stated: "I enjoy being at Mrs. Reece's. The only boarder in the house is little Georgie Foster and I have nothing to do with him after school time. From two o'clock I am quite at liberty to do whatever I like . . . We have so very few day scholars as well as boarders. I sit with Mr. and Mrs. Reece in the study in the evenings, which is much more agreeable than as it used to be, in the school room with all the girls."<sup>9</sup> Susan, who particularly enjoyed conversation with educated people, would seem to have been quite fortunate in the degree of rapport between the Reeces and herself. Nevertheless, as the end of term approached, she confessed, "No school girl ever looked forward to leaving school with more pleasure than I do this vacation."<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of her feelings about teaching, Susan Nagle was pragmatic about the lack of alternative opportunities for her to contribute to the family income in any significant way. Recognizing that trying to start yet another school in Victoria was not likely to come to anything, she applied for and received an appointment to teach the school at Yale, commencing July 15, 1869. According to her sister Jessie, the salary was the "very nice sum" of \$80.00 per

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<sup>9</sup>SAH, 10 March 1865.

<sup>10</sup>SAH, 5 June 1865.

month, and Susan could board with "a nice respectable woman" for \$25.00 per month.<sup>11</sup>

At first Susan did board with a Mrs. Barlow, commenting that "my room is very little but I expect I shall manage."<sup>12</sup> Within a month, however, she had left Mrs. Barlow's to stay, "for the present at least," with her cousin Nellie McKay and her family.<sup>13</sup> Nellie was married to Joseph McKay, a Hudson's Bay Company official (and apparently also a School Trustee in Yale), and it was probably partly due to their influence both that Susan was persuaded to apply for the position in Yale and that she was hired for it. Susan found herself "far more comfortable" staying with her relations, and indeed seemed to fit nicely into their daily lives.

The salary may not have been exactly what Jessie reported it to be--at least not consistently. On August 19th, Susan noted that she had received \$41.62 1/2 from the Trustees for July 1st to August 1st, on September 4th, \$41.60 for the month of August, and on November 1st, \$83.62 1/2 for September and October. Her later cash accounts (whether for 1870 or 1871 is unclear) indicate that she received from the School Board \$46.68 on March 2nd, \$11.75 on March 20th, and \$112.25 on April 1st.<sup>14</sup> These varying figures may reflect the unstable financial situation of B. C. schools and of the government itself--a few years earlier, Susan had mentioned a theatre performance in Victoria put on "for the benefit of the Public

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<sup>11</sup>Jessie Nagle, 18 May 1869.

<sup>12</sup>SAH, 9 July 1869.

<sup>13</sup>SAH, 31 July 1869.

<sup>14</sup>SAH: 19 August 1869; 4 September 1869; 1 November 1869; Journal for 1871.

School teachers who have not received a cent this year for their services, as in many other cases the excuse is no money in the treasury which unfortunately is too true."<sup>15</sup>

Throughout her diary at this time, Susan provided a good deal of detail on her financial transactions, not only on the payment of her salary but also on small loans given to her (mostly by Mr. McKay) and the money, sometimes borrowed, she sent home to her mother. In addition to her schoolteaching, she was giving music and French lessons to a number of children, and this extracurricular work also augmented her salary. (She was paid \$10.00 for two months' music lessons.) Overall, however, she seemed to be barely scraping by, continually borrowing on her salary and repaying when the money came in. Nevertheless, she apparently never (or at least seldom) failed to find something to send to her mother.

Susan was less forthcoming with any description of her work itself; in fact, until the very end of her tenure, the school almost never found its way into her recounting of her daily life. On the day she began teaching, she mentioned that she had twenty-six pupils; her next reference to teaching came in December, when she complained, "I am getting very tired of this work and wish something could be settled."<sup>16</sup> This theme was continued in the next entry concerned with the school, eight months later: "Began school

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<sup>15</sup>SAH, 17 December 1867. See Jean Barman, The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) regarding the province's precarious finances, "never on very firm ground" during this period (p. 104).

<sup>16</sup>SAH, 14 December 1869. Susan's engagement to Algy was still on at this time, but her dissatisfaction with that situation was growing. This was probably what she meant by the "something" she wished would be "settled."

today with 20 scholars I am afraid I don't take to it very kindly I shall soon get broken in tho'.<sup>17</sup> Before the end of the year, she began to make allusions to her "troubles" with the school.

The nature of these problems is never explained. They could easily have been the result of a combination of political and personal factors. Susan's relationship to the McKays may have placed her, in the eyes of some townspeople, too firmly on the side of one faction in town, and there may have been some resentment of her connections with the more "elite" segments of local society, with their visits from personages such as Governor Musgrave. In her recollections of life in Yale, Florence Goodfellow (formerly Agassiz) suggested the existence of such divisions between the townsfolk and the "gentlemen" and "ladies" who lived "on the hill above the town."<sup>18</sup> Susan could also have run afoul of one or more of the families of children she taught, if they perceived that she was too strict or favoured other children. Especially in rural areas, parents and trustees had a fair amount of power to make teachers' lives miserable, if they chose to do so.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the reasons, Susan returned to the school in early November of 1870 after an illness to discover that "for some reason or other more than half the children have left," and she had only ten pupils.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>SAH, 8 August 1870.

<sup>18</sup>Florence Goodfellow, Memories of Pioneer Life in British Columbia: A Short History of the Agassiz Family (Hope: Canyon Press, reprinted 1982), pp. 18-19.

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, J. Donald Wilson, "I am Ready to be of Assistance When I Can: Lottie Bowron and Rural Women Teachers in British Columbia," in Women Who Taught, eds. Prentice and Theobald, for a discussion of this in early twentieth-century B.C.

<sup>20</sup>SAH, 7 November 1870.

Although she never discussed the possible issues behind her problems at the school, Susan did at several points reveal her own feelings about the events, and it is clear that she felt herself to be an aggrieved party. In December, she declared that "it is very annoying when one is doing the best they can to meet with so much discouragement when least expected,"<sup>21</sup> but the hopes she had of the children coming back after the holidays were disappointed when only eight showed up in January. She considered this to be "their loss--how very foolish these people have shown themselves."<sup>22</sup> They were not only foolish, but also "narrow-minded," and their attitude worked against their self-interest, as "they might have got another teacher without having any of this bother, for it is more than likely I will give it up in the [s]pring."<sup>23</sup> Aside from whatever conflicts were fueling this situation, the school may have been in danger of closing because the government tax had been "done away with," according to Susan.<sup>24</sup>

Paradoxically, although Susan claimed at the beginning of January that "after all the bother there has been about the school I really dont [sic] feel the same interest in it that I did," it was only during these last few months of teaching that she referred regularly to going to school as part of her daily activities. Frequently, these references had to do with the difficulty of getting to school in

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<sup>21</sup>SAH, 15 December 1870.

<sup>22</sup>SAH, 4 January 1871.

<sup>23</sup>SAH, 9 January 1871 or 10 January 1871. (There are two separate diaries covering this period.)

<sup>24</sup>SAH, 12 December 1870. This is mentioned in connection with a school meeting at which "Messrs. Holmes, Church, and McQuarrie" were elected to the local Board for 1871.



inclement weather. She also noted that her duties were "not very arduous" at that time due to the small number of students. As the term wore on, this became more of a blessing, for she suffered from frequent bouts of illness, no doubt brought on (or at least exacerbated) by the stressfulness of her situation. Eventually, her poor health convinced her to withdraw from teaching the school before the end of March. Having decided to marry David Holmes, she would only have been finishing out the term in any case.

Shortly after her first mention of her difficulties at the school, Susan received news that her sister Jessie had been appointed teacher at the Esquimalt school and commented, "I hope she will get along with the people better than I do here."<sup>25</sup> The surviving portion of Jessie's own journal was cut off before she went to Esquimalt, but when it opened in January 1867 she was employed as a teacher in New Westminster.<sup>26</sup> Like Susan, Jessie apparently did not perceive teaching as a vocation but rather as a practical part of a solution to her family's financial difficulties. She also did not write much about the details of the job itself, but her journal does provide some illumination of the effects that living arrangements could have on the lives of young women teachers, in a way that Susan's does not.

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<sup>25</sup>SAH, 10 November 1870. Jessie remained in this position less than five months, apparently because of a lack of accommodation for her. As the end of her employment at Esquimalt occurred around the time when Susan was giving up the Yale school, she wondered if Jessie might be able to take it over. This evidently did not occur, but whether because of Susan's problems there or because of Jessie's renewed engagement to Willie is unknown (SAH, 7 March 1871).

<sup>26</sup>Jessie had also worked as a governess for the Moodys in 1860, though apparently not for a long term, as she left when she became engaged, probably to Mr. Moorhead's unknown predecessor. See Jacqueline Gresko, "'Roughing It in the Bush' in British Columbia: Mary Moody's Pioneer Life in New Westminster, 1859-1863," in British Columbia Reconsidered, eds. Creese and Strong-Boag, p. 44.

Jessie returned to New Westminster early in January 1867 "once more to begin the dull routine of teaching, teaching from morning till night, I feel rather disinterested now, but I dare say in a few days I shall get accustomed to my duties again."<sup>27</sup> (Her lack of enthusiasm was probably increased due to the fact that she had become engaged to James Moorhead just the day before she left Victoria for New Westminster.) In New Westminster, she was staying with the family of Henry Crease, the attorney general of British Columbia. Although she did little specific complaining, the circumstances described make it clear that Jessie was taken advantage of, treated at times with a lack of consideration, and perhaps even harassed, in this situation. Three weeks after her return, Mrs. Crease suddenly informed her "that her arrangements would be altered and that in a month's time, if convenient she would wish to have my room."<sup>28</sup> The Creases were expecting guests, and "I have to give up my room & sleep in the schoolroom, which will not be half so pleasant, I must make the best of it."<sup>29</sup>

In addition to being shunted around on short notice, she had to accommodate herself to Sarah Crease's desired schedule with regards to the lessons Jessie gave her daughters Mary, Susan, and Barbara. Jessie, who was presumably being paid for these lessons in one way or another, would have preferred to give them after she came home from school. However, Mrs. Crease, desiring her daughters' assistance in sewing and other tasks later in the day,

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<sup>27</sup>Jessie Nagle, 4 January 1867.

<sup>28</sup>Jessie Nagle, 21 January 1867.

<sup>29</sup>Jessie Nagle, 5 February 1867.

wished the larger part of these lessons to take place in the mornings, before school. In her diary, Jessie expressed her displeasure fairly mildly: "I much prefer having no lessons before breakfast, I have more time to myself, I shall not mind it so much when the days are longer and the weather warmer, but the mornings are so cold and dark now, that it is a great hardship to have to get up early particularly if you go to bed late."<sup>30</sup> The result of Mrs. Crease's demands was particularly long days for Jessie, who gave lessons before breakfast, taught at the school during the day, and then (both because she often had trouble getting up early in the mornings and so could not finish before breakfast and because the girls were sometimes to be given lessons at different times) came home to give yet more lessons. While it was not the case that Mrs. Crease expressed no concern at all for Jessie, sometimes even her concern seemed somewhat self-interested. For example, on a heavily rainy day in February, Mrs. Crease would not hear of Jessie's going to school for fear that she might take "fresh cold." Instead, Jessie sewed until noon, gave lessons to Barbara until lunchtime, and then to the others until five o'clock.<sup>31</sup>

On top of this workload, Mr. Crease's actions on various occasions must certainly have increased the strains on Jessie's daily life. In several entries, she complained vaguely of his "teasing," which kept her from accomplishing tasks such as sewing alterations and writing in her journal, as it meant that she could

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<sup>30</sup>Jessie Nagle, 9 January 1867. In her defence, Sarah Crease was apparently in the late stages of pregnancy, a fact which also may have mitigated Jessie's annoyance with her.

<sup>31</sup>Jessie Nagle, 8 February 1867.

"scarcely think let alone write."<sup>32</sup> This culminated one evening in his snatching her journal away from her: "he at last carried it off & would not give it me & after sitting up till nearly 2 o'clock expecting he would bring it to me, I at last went to bed feeling very cross with him."<sup>33</sup> She got the book back the next day, but not without a little more "teasing." At the very least an invasion of privacy, such behaviour could not have made Jessie feel very secure or free in her situation.<sup>34</sup> In combination with the other conditions of her life with the Crease's, it must have made it difficult to see much advantage in continuing on at the school.

For a brief time in January, Jessie had hoped that she and her brothers Harry and Fred might be able to "keep house to-gether," but that plan came to nothing when Fred lost his job and had to move elsewhere to search for work. Her parents urged her to give up the school and go back to Victoria, ostensibly because of her poor health, although they probably had some awareness of the other aspects of her situation and thought she would be better off out of it. Jessie, who was also sending home half of her quarterly salary of \$60.00, worried that it was more important than ever for her to keep her job since Fred was out of employment, thus diminishing the family finances. Eventually, however, she did decide to give up the school, citing her ill health as the main reason.

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<sup>32</sup>Jessie Nagle, 16 February 1867.

<sup>33</sup>Jessie Nagle, 28 February 1867.

<sup>34</sup>It would also mean that Jessie probably consciously veiled what she wrote in her journal even more than might have been the case otherwise. (Later in her journal, Jessie was much more open than Susan generally was.) It might also help to explain why most of the Crease women revealed very little of their inner thoughts in their own journals. See Powell, "The Diaries of the Crease Family Women."

### Teaching in the 1880s

The context in which Susan Suckley experienced her teaching career was both similar and different to that in which the Nagle sisters did their teaching. After 1872, there was certainly more regulation and central control than previously had been the case, but in the rural areas the local officials still carried the major clout, such that "the predilections of trustees helped determine who was hired and how long he or she remained."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the comfort of a teacher's life still depended to a large degree on the goodwill of the local people.

There was probably not a lot of difference between Yale in 1870 and Fort Hope in 1880. The two towns were only a few miles apart on the Fraser River and were probably fairly equal in roughness of character. Founded to service the fur trade, Fort Hope had, like Yale, gained new life through the Gold Rush. However, it had lost out to Yale as the head of navigation on the Fraser, and its population dwindled to near ghost town numbers on more than one occasion. Those people who remained had largely come with the various mining excitements that arose in the area.

While Fort Hope was her only official engagement as a teacher, Susan Suckley probably had some prior experience as a teacher's assistant. She had certainly helped out with the younger girls during her stay at the convent in Victoria, and in 1877 she had gone as a "helper" along with Sisters Mary de la Croix Perreault and Mary Eleanor Digner when they were sent to open the Sisters of St. Ann's

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<sup>35</sup>Barman, "Birds of Passage," p. 19.

convent school in Nanaimo.<sup>36</sup> Undoubtedly, much of her work there would have been in the area of housekeeping, but the Sisters also would not likely have wasted the potential for classroom aid offered by someone who had already received a St. Ann's education. When Susan decided to write the teachers' examination in the summer of 1880, the Sisters willingly supplied a testimonial, if not to brilliant academic achievement, then at least to her "irreproachable conduct . . . assiduity and good behaviour" which had "won the esteem of her teachers."<sup>37</sup> The latter qualities were probably more relevant to most rural school boards at the time, in any case.

Due to the relative lack of teachers in British Columbia, Susan did not have to wait long for a position, even with a third class certificate. Like many other women teachers, however, she "provided the filler," being hired partway through the year when the original teacher had left.<sup>38</sup> Originally, she had hoped to acquire a post at a school in the Victoria area, an unlikely occurrence given her background and limited qualifications. In the fall of 1880, she wrote to C. C. McKenzie, then Superintendent of Education, expressing her concern that her present habitation in Seattle might mean that she would not hear of any vacancies in time to apply for them. McKenzie assured her that she would be duly informed of any such possibility.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Down, *A Century of Service*, p. 86; S38 Nominations, St. Ann's Convent, Nanaimo B. C., 1877-1899, Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann, Victoria (here Susan is described as an "orphan cook"); doc. 24-3, Victoria Convent Historical Eye-View and Nominations, 1940, p. 74 ("orphan help").

<sup>37</sup>Testimonial of the Sisters of St. Ann, Flood family papers.

<sup>38</sup>Barman, "Birds of Passage," pp. 19-20.

<sup>39</sup>C. C. McKenzie to Susan Suckley, 4 November 1880, Superintendent of Education, outgoing correspondence.

Whether from McKenzie or some other source, she did learn of a vacancy at Fort Hope in March of 1881, and again "took the liberty" of writing to him "to know if the situation, as teacher, at Fort Hope is taken yet? At present, I am doing nothing for myself but have offers of situations, none of which I have as yet accepted as I prefer the situation you were speaking about at Fort Hope, and I am still in hope of being the lucky applicant."<sup>40</sup> McKenzie replied that as soon as the incumbent had "settled up with school affairs at Hope," she would be given first refusal of the position.<sup>41</sup> Although she may have exaggerated her other "offers," her tone in this letter is revealing of her general attitude in dealing with the authorities--she was suitably deferential, but in no way diminished herself.

The evolution of the situation in Fort Hope was in itself an interesting story, with both racial and gender subtexts. Correspondence between the trustees at Fort Hope and the Superintendent indicates that the school had a history of difficulty in keeping attendance up. In the spring of 1880, Miss J. E. Trenaman, who had taught there since 1876, resigned in the wake of some disciplinary problems. In June, the school was closed, but at the end of August, the school board secretary wrote that there was now "the full complement of children" whose parents were "waiting with some anxiety" to learn whether the school would be reopened.<sup>42</sup> Voicing the typical concerns of "rural authorities [who] worried about the ability of women teachers, particularly if they were

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<sup>40</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 12 March 1881, Superintendent of Education, incoming correspondence.

<sup>41</sup>C. C. McKenzie to Susan Suckley, 14 March 1881.

<sup>42</sup>James Wardle to C. C. McKenzie, 22 August 1880.

young, to manage schools attended by young men and about the ability of women to 'govern' children in general,"<sup>43</sup> the trustees requested a male teacher if possible, "as some of the children are getting to[o] large for a female teacher."<sup>44</sup>

At first, Mr. E. J. Wood, the male teacher who was hired, seemed fairly well-disposed to his posting, although the young Englishman obviously considered the place far removed from civilization. Initially, he described his students as

not by any means an intellectual crowd but I suppose I shall manage to drive something into them before long, the young rascals speak but very imperfect English and as the Chinook language was not taught at my College I find it rather difficult to understand them; however I am getting on very well considering all things.<sup>45</sup>

By the next month, however, he was starting to complain of problems with students (he had lost a family of five), which he at this point blamed on the Roman Catholic clergy, whom he considered "the fierce opponents of the Government System of education."<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of 1881, Mr. Wood had already expressed his intention to leave Fort Hope. He claimed that his reasons for doing so were twofold: first, he found it impossible to subsist on his salary, given how expensive it was to live at Fort Hope; and, second, with regards to the school, he had not "had a bed of roses." He went on to explain that "some of the halfbreeds attending this school are to say the

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<sup>43</sup>Danylewicz, Light, and Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching," p. 85.

<sup>44</sup>William Yates to C. C. McKenzie, 8 April 1880.

<sup>45</sup>E. J. Wood to C. C. McKenzie, 6 October 1880.

<sup>46</sup>E. J. Wood to C. C. McKenzie, [?] November 1880.



least downright 'gaol-birds.'"<sup>47</sup> It is clear from the correspondence of both Mr. Wood and the trustees that a serious conflict of personality and lifestyle existed between the teacher and the community, with both sides believing themselves to be the wronged party. (Although Wood claimed that the "most respectable portion of the inhabitants" condemned the trustees' actions, this seems unlikely, as the trustees were themselves representative of that "portion."<sup>48</sup>) Wood obviously considered most of his pupils to be unredeemed savages, an estimation not likely to endear him to trustees whose children were among that number.

The fallout from Wood's tenure carried over for a while after Susan Suckley began teaching in Fort Hope, and she was probably required to employ a good deal of diplomacy in dealing with the leftover issues. Mr. Wood had left without sending a report to Victoria for the month of February; the trustees informed Susan that he had never furnished them with any reports at all. They may only have been trying to make him look bad, but the result was that she had to piece together as best she could a report for a month when she had not been present at the school.<sup>49</sup> More seriously, she had to deal with the diminished number of students that was his legacy. The school was once again threatened with closure, if she could not "induce" the people to send their children to school, so that an

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<sup>47</sup>E. J. Wood to C. C. McKenzie, 25 January 1881.

<sup>48</sup>E. J. Wood to C. C. McKenzie, 25 February 1881.

<sup>49</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 2 April 1881; C. C. McKenzie to Susan Suckley, 9 April 1881.

average of ten children could be kept up.<sup>50</sup> This she endeavoured to do immediately, replying to McKenzie:

The people here seem quite anxious to keep up the School. When I intimated that you were anxious to see the Report of May have a better bearing, they almost brought up by force a family containing a number of children from a Ranch some miles below Hope so that the school should have the average number again.<sup>51</sup>

Evidently she was successful, for the school reopened in the fall with fifteen names on the register.<sup>52</sup>

In the meantime, Susan had to rewrite the teachers' examination. In the short period of time she had taught at the school, she had apparently won over the trustees, who wrote to the Superintendent:

We have great pleasure in stating that during the time Miss Suckley has been in charge of the Public School at this place, there has been a marked improvement in the progress of the scholars, and sincerely trust that you will allow her to return to fulfill her duties as Teacher, as she has entirely gained the respect, confidence, and affection of her pupils by her kindness, firmness, and ability.<sup>53</sup>

Susan did manage to do well enough on the examination, although at five per cent lower than the previous year, to be allowed to continue.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>C. C. McKenzie to Susan Suckley, 10 May 1881.

<sup>51</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 22 May 1881.

<sup>52</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 1 September 1881.

<sup>53</sup>Hope school trustees, James Wardle, William Yates, and [signature illegible] to C. C. McKenzie, 28 June 1881.

<sup>54</sup>Register of Teachers' Certificates 1881. Superintendent McKenzie felt the need to exhort her to begin preparing for the next year's examination right away--and especially to strive to improve her spelling. C. C. McKenzie to Susan Suckley, 22 September 1881.

Despite any deficiencies she may have had in academic excellence, there is evidence that Susan took her teaching quite seriously. Indeed, the content of her letters to the Superintendent was somewhat surprising to me, as I had originally believed that she viewed her work almost entirely as a means to an end. While this practical element was undoubtedly present, her letters also indicate a dedication to her pupils and their learning, and a determination to do the best job she could. In contrast to Mr. Wood, she almost immediately stated that she was "quite pleased" with her students' behaviour, and then moved on to "candidly" assess the books and supplies necessary for the school until vacation. She also asked to have sent to her, with the cost deducted from her salary, a number of other books, including "Mosell's Essentials of English Grammar with exercises, an advanced Arithmetic, and a Modern Geography." She did not resign from the school when she married (her letter of March 15, 1882 was signed Susan Flood), and may even have entertained hopes of continuing on the next year had she not become pregnant. In any case, she remained concerned for her pupils, praising their regularity and desire to learn, and reporting proudly on their progress--such as when five students had been allowed to begin studying Geography and hoped to commence History as well. She offered her opinion that the Collier's English Histories possessed by the school were "not so easily retained by beginners" as a small "catechism" would be; hence, she had determined to "get a few of the Catechisms of English History for the purpose of learning

the rudiments of History, and at the same time read out of Collier's English History till further advanced."<sup>55</sup>

Susan's work as a teacher thus included assessing needs and ordering books and other supplies, tending to the increasing amounts of paperwork that went along with a more centralized system (for example, monthly reports and registers),<sup>56</sup> physical care of the school, recruiting students and keeping up attendance, preparing for her next examination, and maintaining good working relations with the trustees. The teacher at Hope apparently lived behind the schoolroom, in a building overlooking the river.<sup>57</sup> Mr. Wood had complained of the money and effort he had had to put into "convert[ing] the house . . . from a pig sty into something habitable,"<sup>58</sup> and, unless he had done a very good job of this, Susan probably also had some work to do there. In spite of all this, her evident interest in her "scholars" and in her position indicates that she very likely regretted having to give up the school at the end of the 1881-1882 term. The trustees were also sorry to see her go--in fact, when they wrote to McKenzie in July requesting another teacher, they added that they would "prefer a Lady teacher."<sup>59</sup>

Why was Susan Suckley's experience at Fort Hope seemingly so much more positive than Susan Nagle's at Yale? Susan Nagle was

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<sup>55</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 2 April 1881 and 15 March 1882.

<sup>56</sup>See Marta Danylewicz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers' Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Central Canada," in Women Who Taught, eds. Prentice and Theobald.

<sup>57</sup>Susan is listed as the only member of the household on the 1881 census.

<sup>58</sup>E. J. Wood to C. C. McKenzie, 10 March 1881.

<sup>59</sup>James Wardle to C. C. McKenzie, 17 July 1882.

much closer to the norm for British Columbian teachers in the late nineteenth century--white, Protestant, middle-class. There is no doubt that Susan Nagle would have been an extremely competent teacher, and she had a genuine fondness for children. (Although she at one point claimed not to like other people's children, that assertion was belied by her interactions with them throughout her life.<sup>60</sup>) The quality of her own education, though perhaps not entirely formal, was good for a woman of the time. If she was not enthusiastic about the work of teaching itself, she was certainly dutiful and hard-working, and would have put more than enough effort into doing her job. Yet she managed to run afoul of some of the people in Yale, and in the end that was enough to make her life there miserable.

Ironically, Susan Suckley's background may have helped her situation in Fort Hope. When she arrived, the trustees (and probably others, as well) were still outraged by the previous teacher's attitude towards them and towards the pupils. It could be that the Superintendent, wondering what to do with a "halfbreed" applicant, thought that here might be a place that would accept her. Two of the men who were trustees during Susan's term as teacher--William Yates<sup>61</sup> and H. D. Shuttleworth--had native wives and thus halfbreed children, and they among others might well have found her to be more understanding and flexible where their children were concerned. In any case, she would not have been perceived as either

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<sup>60</sup>She made this remark the autumn following her marriage (SAH, 30 October 1871).

<sup>61</sup>William Yates, originally a Hudson's Bay Company man, had been at Fort Hope since 1854. Susan Allison described him as "one of the most amusing characters I ever met." Ormsby, ed., A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia, p. 7.

condescending or antagonistic towards them. To the extent that they viewed things ideologically, they adapted their ideology to fit the circumstances, and any prejudices they might have had could have been mitigated by their recent experience.

Whether or not Susan Nagle felt any social division between herself and the bulk of the population of Yale, her visible connections made the perception by others of such a division more likely. On the other hand, she could merely have inadvertently stepped on some toes--throughout her life, she was not shy in expressing her opinions, and these could often be perceived as judgemental. In general, rural teachers did not stay long at one school,<sup>62</sup> and such conflicts were probably the fate of many.

### **The Importance of Land**

Largely because "the prevailing myth of British Columbia has been founded not on agricultural settlement, but rather on the gold rush,"<sup>63</sup> there has been a relative lack of historical interest in the relationship of settlers to the land in this province. While it is true that there were probably few who made their livings entirely as farmers, the ownership of land, and its working, carried greater weight in settlers' self-identification than has generally been allowed.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, real property carried some significance in the lives of both Susans.

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<sup>62</sup>See Susan Laskin, Beth Light, and Alison Prentice, "Studying the History of Occupation: Quantitative Sources on Canadian Teachers in the Nineteenth Century," Archivaria 14 (Summer 1982): 83.

<sup>63</sup>Gwen Szychter, "Women's Role in Early Farming in British Columbia," B. C. Historical News (Winter 1990-91): 22.

<sup>64</sup>Ruth Sandwell makes this point and elaborates on the actual importance of the relationship in her study of Salt Spring Island, "Peasants on the Coast? A Problematique of Rural British Columbia," Canadian Papers in Rural History X (1996). Robin

During the Nagle family's early years in Victoria, Jeremiah Nagle was actively engaged in buying up a considerable amount of prime land (for example, their James Bay home) in the area.<sup>65</sup> However, his business misfortunes appear to have eventually cost him all his land.<sup>66</sup> Family descendants believe it unlikely that Susan inherited any land from her father, although there is at least one reference in her journals to property in Esquimalt.<sup>67</sup> But the Holmes' were also frequently involved in buying and selling property, and the location of this property at such a distance from their home in the Cowichan Valley may have meant little. Indeed, late in 1905, Susan described their unsuccessful attempt to "buy in" a lot in Victoria West at a tax sale, thus indicating that they kept their eyes on land opportunities relatively distant from where they lived.<sup>68</sup>

George Suckley also seems to have had some interest in amassing real estate. The notice for the Administrator's Sale of his Washington Territory property lists eighteen full and two fractional lots in the Fort Steilacoom/Olympia area.<sup>69</sup> His purpose in buying all these lots may have been purely speculative--in a letter to his

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Fisher's Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890 (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1977) evokes the importance of land to both Indians and white settlers through the discussion of the conflicts engendered by the increasing encroachment of the settlers on Indian territories.

<sup>65</sup>Indeed, along with major local personages such as John Helmcken and Modeste Demers, he was one of "30 holders of 10 or more downtown lots in 1858," and was still a large landholder in 1862. Harry Gregson, A History of Victoria 1842-1970 (Victoria: the Victoria Observer Publishing Co. Ltd., 1970), pp. 22-23.

<sup>66</sup>There is also a family "myth" of land lost in New Zealand, an occurrence supposed partly to have prompted the family's move to North America.

<sup>67</sup>SAH, 3 December 1890. The Holmes' had offered to sell this property to a Mr. Harrison for \$800.00. Susan made no further mention of it.

<sup>68</sup>SAH, 2 January 1906.

<sup>69</sup>Washington Standard, 9 December 1871, p. 3, col.3.

aunt, he noted their rapid increase in value, adding that "if I had them all paid for I could sell out now for \$1500 advance." On the other hand, he declared, "I do not know now but think that I ultimately *will* settle on Puget Sound," so the land may have been worth more than simply its property value to him.<sup>70</sup> Whatever his hopes or intentions were, he did not live long enough to "settle," and his daughter certainly received none of this property, although its sale probably allowed for the payment of her legacy as well as the doctor's debts.

Since they were married women, the ability of both Susans to participate as individuals in the land market (and in other financial matters) would have been contingent on reforms in married women's property laws in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Prior to these reforms, Canadian law, like the English law it was based upon, adhered to the "doctrine of marital unity," by which most of a woman's property rights, including the "authority to manage the property or receive the rents and profits from it" were transferred to her husband upon marriage. In England, over the years, rules of equity had developed which undermined some of the worst injustices of this doctrine, but these had had less impact in Canada. The need for some reform was clear by the 1860s, although the implementation of more equitable legislation was fitful and slow, coming, as Constance Backhouse relates, in three overlapping waves.<sup>71</sup> In B. C., married women acquired the right to unsupervised land ownership and business transactions in 1873, but their ability

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<sup>70</sup>"Notes and Documents: Sidelights on the Stevens Railway Survey," p. 246.

<sup>71</sup>Constance B. Backhouse, "Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada," Law and History Review 6, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 211-217.



to act in these capacities was still effectively limited by aspects of legislation such as that "protecting" their property from creditors.<sup>72</sup>

It is not known whether either of these women had title to any of the family land (outside of Susan Flood's allotment land, and there the question of title was quite murky in any case) before their husbands' deaths. Like the Holmes', the Floods acquired a number of properties in addition to the 160 acres of their homestead at Flood. They owned eighty acres at Kawkawa Lake (also acquired at a tax sale), a thirty acre island in the Fraser River (Croft Island), and two lots in the town of Hope. They do not appear to have been involved in selling their land to the extent that the Holmes' were, although they did sell some of it, for example, the sixty acres at Flood sold to the Gillander family in 1919.<sup>73</sup> Described by her grandson-in-law as "having great business acumen and imbued with common sense,"<sup>74</sup> Susan Flood certainly must have played a role in decision-making when it came to the land and other economic matters, even though there are no records of her involvement.

Susan Holmes' journals *do* provide ample testimony to her activities with regards to the family property. Whether or not she actually had title to any of the land, she obviously had the legal capacity to make some decisions as to its disposition. For example, in 1898, while David was in Texas, she arranged and signed an

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<sup>72</sup>Peter Baskerville, "She Has Already Hinted at *Board* ": Enterprising Urban Women in British Columbia, 1863-1896," Social History XXVI (November 1993).

<sup>73</sup>Morley Gillander, "The Skagit Saga," unpublished manuscript, Flood family papers.

<sup>74</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 237. The family understanding is that Susan was actually a moving force behind the Flood land transactions.

agreement for the sale of one hundred acres, and a few months later had to go to Victoria to meet another potential buyer.<sup>75</sup> The latter instance proved more complicated, with the two agents at "daggers drawn" over the "railway release" and "release of the coal bond," but was finally settled after about a week. At this time, she was also responsible for dealing with tenants renting some of their property in Cowichan.

The Holmes' are believed to have originally owned about five hundred acres of land in the area of what is now Duncan.<sup>76</sup> Some of this land was sold over the years and some given to their children as they grew older. (The children also probably paid for some of their land, if they were able.) Some was either sold or given to the school (their grandson believes it was most likely sold, with perhaps an extra bit thrown in at no cost), and more was given for a trail in return for free water as long as a Holmes lived on the land. The tax assessment rolls for 1904 do not give the number of acres David Holmes owned at that time, but the assessed tax payable was \$500.00, as compared to \$800.00 for William Flood's 155 acres in 1905.<sup>77</sup> By this time, the Holmes' had managed to whittle down their land (and the attendant work) considerably from its original size. Yet the land continued to be a focus of their attention.

### **The Family Economy**

In some respects, Susan Holmes and Susan Flood differed little from the majority of rural women earlier in the nineteenth-century

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<sup>75</sup>SAH, 5 September 1898; 8 September 1898; 25 April 1899.

<sup>76</sup>Information from Don Roberts, 1 May 1996.

<sup>77</sup>British Columbia Tax Assessment Rolls, Reels B00433 and B00478, BCARS.

who lived "lives that were dominated by the necessities, satisfactions, and sorrows of domestic production."<sup>78</sup> Some of their productive activities were geared towards bringing more cash into their family's hands, but many more were non-financial, at least in the sense that they did not directly add money to the household coffers--they certainly increased the household's economic viability. As with the rural families Ruth Sandwell studied on Saltspring Island, these homes appear to have had "an economy based on the labour of all household members, characterized by a wildly fluctuating combination of subsistence activities, waged labour (often 'off-farm' work) and commercial agricultural production."<sup>79</sup> Family strategies for economic survival often had to be both complex and flexible.

Unlike many other rural women across North America, neither Susan Holmes nor Susan Flood had been brought up in agricultural milieux. Indeed, neither married a farmer, as both David Holmes and William Flood had entirely different occupations at the time of their marriages. The Holmes' became a "farm family" after they moved into Holmesdale in 1884, and the Floods when they finally took up residence at their homestead just after the turn of the century. But their concern with survival as economic units did not come about with their transformation into farming families; rather, farming simply became for both families a centre point of their economic strategies.

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<sup>78</sup>Light and Prentice, Pioneer and Gentlewomen, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup>Sandwell, "Peasants on the Coast?," p. 284.

It was certainly not the only, or even the main, financial component of these strategies. David Holmes' and William Flood's work lives were both marked by "occupational plurality."<sup>80</sup> In David Holmes' case, farming would definitely seem not to have been his favoured choice as a means of making a living. Susan occasionally commented on his lack of mental enthusiasm for the work, even as she worried about how hard he laboured at it physically. As the nineteenth century was ending, she engaged in her habit of sitting up alone on New Year's Eve to write her musings on the past year and hopes for the next. The particular year that had just passed had contained the good news that "the mortgage which has been such a bane to us for so many years has been all but cleared off" and that David was home again, evidently permanently. However, she added, "I don't know tho' whether he will be satisfied to remain without Ch. work. He does not seem to take kindly to farm work after being out of it for so long."<sup>81</sup>

David's own thoughts on this subject are unknown: although his preference for church work seems more than likely, he had over the years also shown considerable interest in agriculture. There had been his work in the late 1860s at the mission farm at Hope, and later his attempts to establish an agricultural college in the Cowichan Valley. He had also built a sawmill at Holmesdale--where he wanted to teach milling, apparently envisioning the future importance of lumbering in the area--probably to help pay for the development of the college. An accident which almost completely

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<sup>80</sup>The term Sandwell uses.

<sup>81</sup>SAH, 31 December 1899.

destroyed the mill added to the other factors which led to his leaving his church position in the parish.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps his interest in agriculture was in his mind intimately tied to his clerical duties, and in particular to his missionary activities with the Indians. Farming as a vocation in and of itself may have been a different matter.

William Flood seems to have taken more enjoyment in farming, although the bulk of the family's income must have come from his other occupations. It seems he had given up the insecure business of searching for gold by the time he met his future wife,<sup>83</sup> focusing instead on developing a sawmill and construction business. Aside from building homes and churches, he also supplied the Hope area with caskets. He (along with the men he employed) acquired the wood for his sawmill by logging his own land, using teams of oxen.<sup>84</sup> Produce from the farm (after the family had moved out to Flood) certainly provided a necessary augmentation of the construction business income: farm produce and horses were sold to both highways and railroad construction outfits (for both of which Bill also served as an employee), and fruit from the orchards at the homestead were shipped to Vancouver and sold from there. While the family was never wealthy by any means, it seems they were always fairly comfortable, enduring minimal financial hardship.

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<sup>82</sup>Information from Don Roberts, 1 May 1996.

<sup>83</sup>Two years before, in 1879, he and James Corrigan had floated a raft they called the *Steamboat* down the Skagit River, looking for gold. A campsite they named "Steamboat Landing" was the site of the notorious Steamboat Mountain mining scam in 1911. Bruce Ramsay, Ghost Towns of British Columbia (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1963), p. 197.

<sup>84</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 86.

The two Susans shared one other aspect of their experience-- both of their husbands were absent from the household for extended periods of time. Such absences of necessity had a profound effect on the household ecology. Writing of later time periods in Newfoundland, Marilyn Porter remarks that:

Women with largely absent husbands must take almost total responsibility for running the home and rearing the children, and carry out those tasks with very little assistance. This means, of course, that they must take care of tasks normally allocated to men in the traditional sexual division of labour, as well as having to handle decisions and financial arrangements.<sup>85</sup>

Absent husbands thus entailed the development of various "family strategies" to keep the household running as a viable economic unit.

Susan Holmes' activities in the land market have already been mentioned. When David was away preaching in Texas in the late 1890s (and receiving a stipend of \$800.00),<sup>86</sup> her children were older (the eldest three in their twenties), but all still usually living at and contributing to the running of Holmesdale. A few years earlier, Susan had accompanied Harry to Victoria, where she had made inquiries about getting the young man a surveying job. By 1898, both Harry and Fred were away surveying for periods of time, but working on the farm when they were home, thus both adding to the family's finances in two ways. The Holmes daughters, too, worked outside the home for pay, a part of which went into the

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<sup>85</sup>Marilyn Porter, "Mothers and Daughters: Linking Women's Life Histories in Grand Bank, Newfoundland, Canada," in Rethinking Canada, eds. Strong-Boag and Fellman, p. 401.

<sup>86</sup>SAH, 23 February 1898.

family's income. Beatrice obtained a teaching certificate in 1898 and received a posting at Gabriola Island the next January. Susan reported that "Beatrice herself scarcely knows whether to be pleased or not--of course she is glad of the prospect of earning some money, but does not like leaving home."<sup>87</sup> The following month she was happy to have "Rec'd letter & 15.00 from Beatrice. Her first earnings! It will come in very useful."<sup>88</sup> At around the same time, sixteen-year-old Zephie went to Nanaimo to help look after a family of young children. However, when the mother became ill Zephie could not manage all the child care on her own, and Susan, who had found it difficult to part with her youngest daughter in the first place, decided she should not go back to Nanaimo: "she is too young to go from home."<sup>89</sup> In 1906, Zephie too sought to contribute to the family income by way of teaching school.<sup>90</sup>

In general, the division of farm and household labour followed definite gendered lines, but this was not necessarily rigidly imposed and was often contingent on circumstances. Thus, while Susan's diary entries usually recounted days in which the girls divided the housework, while Harry and Fred performed chores such as clearing land, loading lumber and planting crops, they also occasionally described unusual situations, especially with regards to the outdoor farm labour, where these divisions had to be abandoned. One such occasion occurred in the summer of 1898, when a potential weather

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<sup>87</sup>SAH, 14 January 1899.

<sup>88</sup>SAH, 13 February 1899.

<sup>89</sup>SAH, 6 February 1899; 1 April 1899.

<sup>90</sup>SAH, 24 December 1906.

change threatened the farm's oat crop. Harry, apparently in charge of the crops,

announced that it was his intention of getting in the field of oats next the Barn. Ernest<sup>91</sup> went too, & Zephie & I volunteered to help; we all worked away until 11 o'clock. & then had supper no 2. Getting to bed some time about mid-night.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, while labour was generally performed in gender-specific ways, survival sometimes dictated a deviation.

Nevertheless, it was the gender balance in the family's workload that Susan was most concerned with on the several occasions that she mentioned the shifting burdens brought about by any of the children's absences. For instance, when Beatrice was away studying for the teachers' examination, it left "more for the rest of us to do," a comment provoked by Susan's having arisen one morning to discover that Isabel had finished the washing begun the day before.<sup>93</sup> It was usually the case that the remaining children (of the appropriate gender) would take up whatever slack was left by an absent sibling, and that sibling would also often do beforehand whatever was possible to lessen the burden on those left at home. When Zephie attended a King's Daughters convention in Vancouver, Susan was moved to remark that "she is a dear sweet girl, and did all she could to lessen my work while she is away."<sup>94</sup> She sometimes found her desire for her children's benefit to be in conflict with these necessities, as when she wished Beatrice had

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<sup>91</sup>Probably Ernest Skinner, a friend from a neighbouring family.

<sup>92</sup>SAH, 25 July 1898.

<sup>93</sup>SAH, 26, April 1898.

<sup>94</sup>SAH, 23 June 1910.



been invited along with Zephie to stay with Philip Hankin in Vancouver at the same time as she felt relieved that she would not have to do "all the work" alone.<sup>95</sup> After David had returned from Texas, she also worried about his increased workload when the boys were on their surveying trips: for example, in 1904, with Phil away, Harry now married, and Fred also living on his own land (a parcel of Holmesdale), she exclaimed, "So we are reduced to two girls & no boys! I am afraid Father will find it hard work doing everything himself."<sup>96</sup>

In some ways, however, the Holmes' were more fortunate than many in terms of the help they received in getting work done. To begin with, they had six healthy children all able to contribute (when they were old enough) in various ways. Furthermore, while their finances were sometimes shaky, they also at times were able to afford to hire outside help. A recurring theme in Susan's diaries during her first few years at Cowichan involved the difficulties she had in getting and retaining reliable domestic help.<sup>97</sup> She employed a string of local girls (at what was in truth probably not a very high salary) who inevitably seemed to keep an erratic schedule and to quit shortly after they had been hired. Even those who started off so well that Susan tentatively thought she may have found "a treasure" seemed to disappear after brief periods of employment--and amidst

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<sup>95</sup>SAH, 10 February, 1906.

<sup>96</sup>SAH, 2 May 1904.

<sup>97</sup>Gillian Marie calls this "the perennial problem" of "upper-class women" in Victoria and Vancouver during this time period. "Writing Women into British Columbia's History," in *In Her Own Right*, eds. Latham and Kess. p. 5.

arguments regarding the terms of their departure.<sup>98</sup> Despite determining to "do the work ourselves" after one incident with a boy from Victoria who disappeared after a week, taking Harry's savings bank with him, she continued the search for household help, with varying degrees of success.

During this particular period, Susan had one toddler, had been suffering from ill health (exacerbated by a miscarriage in early 1876), and had hopes of teaching the girls at David's Indian school. These, along with her duties as a parson's wife (ranging from teaching Sunday School to visiting the sick), were the factors that made domestic help of some kind seem such a necessity. In later years, the children's work made outside help less crucial. In addition, David's sister Betsey arrived from England in 1890 and stayed with the family for a number of years, and Susan frequently mentioned her gratitude for her sister-in-law's work in the household. Betsey's presence probably also made it easier for Susan to leave Holmesdale for extended periods of time, as when she was in Watsonville, California, in 1896.<sup>99</sup> According to her grandson, Susan likely did little housework in her later years. With fewer people in the household (and those grown and able to work), there would have been less to do, and she was able to hire various Chinese men to cook and do the major housekeeping. This allowed her more

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<sup>98</sup>For example, "Christine" was hired for a month for \$10.00, and seemed to be working out well, but then wanted to leave after less than two weeks. "I told her if she liked to remain until I could get some one else I would then pay her for the time she had been, if not she must remain the month as [s]he engaged to do or I should not pay her. She was not satisfied to do this, & so took herself off." SAH, 10-20 August 1874.

<sup>99</sup>Letter from SAH to her children, from Watsonville, California, 6 June 1896, Holmes family papers.

time for her writing, from which she did earn some money, though how much is unknown.

Throughout her journals, particularly those from around the turn of the century, Susan frequently made mention of numerous sources of income, real or potential. These were often those typical of a small farm--the creamery cheque, cash for eggs, chickens and a cow--and were balanced by an accounting of the cheques she sent out: "The money slips away very fast!"<sup>100</sup> There were also small initiatives invested in with the hopes of bringing in more cash, such as potting geraniums on her verandah, with the intention of selling the plants in the spring.<sup>101</sup> Some of these apparent money-making schemes were referred to only enigmatically. This was the case when she spoke of a letter she had received from the Household Journal: "The late arrangement 'the mailing idea' has fallen through & they have adopted another plan. I will try it but do not think it will be as remunerative as the other."<sup>102</sup> A few years later, she received a mysterious shipment of books, which she had evidently ordered for people in the area and now had to (with help from Isabel and Zephie) deliver and collect payment for.<sup>103</sup> Along with these various schemes, she also undertook some of the means of augmenting income common to women of the time: for instance, taking in Annie Carmichael (the local schoolteacher who later married Harry) as a boarder in 1899.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>SAH, 15 June 1903.

<sup>101</sup>SAH, 1 February 1904.

<sup>102</sup>SAH, 22 June 1903.

<sup>103</sup>SAH, 28 January-1 February 1907.

<sup>104</sup>See Baskerville, "She Has Already Hinted at *Board*."

Much of the work done at any given time was not really even perceived as "work," though without it the family would certainly not have been able to function well. On many occasions, Susan refers to sewing and mending as something she could do when she was feeling too tired or "poorly" to do any "work," as she could sit still and perform these tasks.<sup>105</sup> Helping other members of the family with their chores was also a matter of course: this could take the form of a day at Fred's spent "in getting dinner ready, making bread, & cakes & cleaning up the house generally,"<sup>106</sup> or an evening of helping one of her daughters with dress alterations ("they don't seem to be able to do without their Mother's help even now!"<sup>107</sup>). And even apart from her occasional forays into the fields, Susan considered herself to be totally involved in her husband's work, especially his church work. This encompassed the Sunday School teaching, visiting and potential teaching at the Indian school mentioned earlier, as well as a more vaguely described desire to be well enough to aid him in whatever way possible when he was once again engaged in constructing a church in Chemainus in 1890. On New Year's Eve of that year, she wrote, "I pray that our Heavenly Father will enable him to do much good in his new field of work & grant to me also to be a worthy helpmate to him,"<sup>108</sup> a sentiment similar to many she expressed over the years.

Although his work did not take him to places as distant as that of David Holmes, or for such long periods of time, from the very

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<sup>105</sup>For example, SAH, 18 March 1891.

<sup>106</sup>SAH, 26 May 1904.

<sup>107</sup>SAH, 28 December 1906.

<sup>108</sup>SAH, 31 December 1890.

early days of his marriage to Susan Suckley, William Flood's construction business still entailed numerous extended absences. The contracts to build All Saints Anglican Church in Ladner in 1881, and Christ Church in Surrey in 1882, would in fact have meant that he was probably away much of the time leading up to and following their wedding, and possibly when their son Charles was born in November, 1882. Even his work on the addition to All Hallows School in Yale, only about twenty miles from Hope, would have necessitated his staying on site in those years when travel between the two towns was by river. Like Susan Holmes, then, Susan Flood frequently would have been alone and responsible for running all aspects of her household.

Of course, this was not as large as the Holmes household. Although the Floods often had people staying with them, their basic unit only included two children, Charles and Leila, and community expectations of the family would have been lower than they were for the Holmes', especially during the latter's parsonage years. Nevertheless, even a small family required a good deal of work to keep it functioning economically, particularly in an area that was still essentially part of the western frontier, though its settlement was beginning to grow rapidly.

The Floods' son, Charles, certainly contributed to the running of the household. In the 1901 census, his occupation is listed as "farmer's son," a catchall phrase to describe the son who performed the work of a hired man on the farm. His tasks would have been many and varied: his future wife described him as being "capable in

all the practical trades that the pioneer days required."<sup>109</sup> He would have helped clear land and build the house in Flood and also worked for and with his father on construction jobs for the Canadian Northern Railway, as well as at a wide variety of jobs on his own. Since he lived with his parents until his marriage at a relatively late age, his contributions in income and labour would have continued to aid them as they moved into their later years.

Of Leila's contributions to the family enterprise less is known. She died fairly young, and the artifacts left of her life do not relate to the kind of work she might have done. She was still a child in school at the time of the 1901 census, and even if she had been grown, there was no female equivalent of the "farmer's son" designation. No occupation was listed for any of the Holmes daughters either. However, it is hard to imagine that Leila's mother, with her own expertise in handiwork, would not have passed some of that and her other skills on to her, or that Leila (who from her photographs, several taken when she was on horseback, appears to have enjoyed the outdoors) would not also have inherited at least some of Susan's proclivity for outdoor work as well.

According to her granddaughter, Susan likely much preferred outdoor to indoor work. In particular, she liked to work with plants, and apparently had a fairly extensive knowledge of grafting.<sup>110</sup> While it is unclear where she would have gained her expertise in this area, it would certainly have been valuable on the Floods' small farm, where the orchards likely provided the biggest cash crop. The

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<sup>109</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 232.

<sup>110</sup>Eileen Bonson, personal communication, 28 January 1996.

Floods planted three hundred fruit trees (apples, pears, plums, quinces, cherries--and a grape arbour--purchased by catalogue from a nursery in Michigan) soon after they moved to their property in Flood.<sup>111</sup> The fruit was the one crop that was not either entirely consumed by the family or sold locally. Aside from her technical expertise, Susan is believed to have helped with clearing the land and planting. She would almost certainly have also been involved in picking the fruit and packing it in the barrels and boxes for shipping.

Aside from the work she performed on the farm and in the home, there is ample evidence that Susan also felt involved in her husband's non-farm work. There is a story that she loaned Bill the money to erect the bell tower for Christ Church in Surrey,<sup>112</sup> and she and the baby Charles accompanied him to the dedication ceremony of that church in 1884.<sup>113</sup> Bill Flood also told a tale of meeting the train robber Bill Miner along the Hope-Princeton Trail. Claims of such meetings with Miner were common<sup>114</sup> and are possibly quite true, given that gentleman's stay in the Princeton area. What is interesting in this particular account is that Susan was also present: the two had supposedly set up camp along the trail and provided food for Miner and his companion.<sup>115</sup> The implication is that Susan may at times have accompanied Bill on his business away from home, especially if he was in the bush and needing someone to

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<sup>111</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 229.

<sup>112</sup>The "loan" of money between husband and wife indicates that, although they usually thought and acted in terms of a family economy, Susan obviously had money which she thought of as belonging to her individually, as well.

<sup>113</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 229.

<sup>114</sup>Mary Bulger also reported such an incident in Forging a New Hope, p. 221.

<sup>115</sup>*ibid.*, p. 229.

cook and help set up and maintain camp. Furthermore, in the only photograph surviving of Bill at his sawmill, Susan is also in the picture. Finally, it seems likely that, being an educated woman (even if mathematical skills were not her forte), she may at least have had a hand in whatever paperwork was required for the construction business. Her papers do include remnants of accounts paid out and brought in, much like the notations Susan Holmes made at the back of some of her diaries.

As far as anyone knows, Susan Flood had no outside domestic help. She sometimes had girls staying with her for periods of time and they, along with Leila, must surely have contributed some labour. The household was a relatively small one (and the house probably smaller than Holmesdale), and community expectations would have been considerably fewer than was the case for Susan Holmes, and perhaps these factors made the domestic burden fairly manageable for one woman. Still, it seems plain that neither woman had to worry about having idle hands.

To what extent did these women represent the nineteenth-century "domestic ideal," and to what extent did they act in ways which might be seen to threaten it? Such questions are difficult to answer when faced with individual women's circumstances, especially in the non-ideal situation of the frontier. Certainly, both women fulfilled the "traditional" requirements of womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood, but they were both just as certainly economic agents in many different ways. A strong separation of public and private was not possible in the context of their lives--



their families pieced together a livelihood which ultimately took the form of an organic whole, not rigidly defined, but shifting over time and with varying circumstances. The evidence suggests that each of them played an active role in determining and implementing their families' agendas, even as they were, undeniably, limited by law and custom in the extent and form of this role. They had had to take care of themselves economically before their marriages, and continued to perceive themselves as economically contributing members of a family unit afterwards.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES

The boundaries between social identity and individual identity are like those between the "public" and "private" spheres themselves: in some ways seemingly self-evident, but at the same time frustratingly shifting, blurred, and hard to determine. Making such distinctions in a narrative about women's lives seems arbitrary and confining, but also necessary. However, it is possible to do so while still keeping in mind "a central insight of feminist theory, that public and private are not separate but intersecting."<sup>1</sup> The differential relevance of this dichotomy to the experiences of various groups of women may also be noted: greater for middle- and upper-class white women than for working-class<sup>2</sup> and women of colour, for whom "the politics of 'personal life' may be differently defined."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, while this chapter will attempt to isolate aspects of Susan Holmes' and Susan Flood's experiences that could be said to define their social identities, it must be remembered that their "self-images," or how they viewed themselves as individuals, were

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<sup>1</sup>Newton, "History as Usual?," p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover describe how working-class women's employment choices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were both influenced by their families and "structured around [their] expectations of domestic responsibilities." Required to do outside work as part of their family responsibilities, their experience of that work was still "steeped in a set of ideas which maintained that their final and proper place was in the home." "From Queen Victoria to the Jazz Age: Women's World in England, 1880-1939," in Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover, eds., Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1986), pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>Chandra Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," in Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, eds. Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, p. 9.

also inextricably bound up in their relationships to others. Writing "with regard to nineteenth-century writers such as [Susannah] Moodie," Helen Buss claims that "such a woman wished not to 'extricate' her own voice, but to inscribe it within, to hold it in dynamic balance with the other voices of her community, voices that her sense of the othered nature of her identity makes her own."<sup>4</sup> I would suggest that, regardless of whether or not they consciously had such a sense, both Susans would have perceived the same kind of interconnection.

### **Home and Family Relations<sup>5</sup>**

Tamara Hareven has claimed that "in Western society today, the major burdens of family relationships are emotional, while, in the nineteenth-century, they were heavily weighted toward economic needs and tasks."<sup>6</sup> Like most such generalizations, while this statement may appear to fit the available evidence, it also seems to draw its lines perhaps a bit too strongly. On the other hand, Peter Ward argues that, while nineteenth-century "ideals about the essential elements and principal ends of matrimony . . . paid due regard to practical matters, they upheld mutual love as the vital ingredient in marriage and considered shared happiness to be its most precious fruit," at least in the abstract.<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that the two families under consideration here were economic units

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<sup>4</sup>Buss, Mapping Our Selves, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup>In general, the family relations under consideration in this chapter will be those of each woman's family of marriage (and the communities those in which they lived their married lives), although it may not be possible to adhere rigidly to this dividing line.

<sup>6</sup>Hareven, "Family Time and Historical Time," p. 64.

<sup>7</sup>Ward, Courtship, Love, and Marriage, p. 148.

and this indeed was one of their primary functions, but it is less clear that it was *the* major one. At the least, it coexisted with other, more "emotional" functions; in fact, it is difficult, as we have seen, to disconnect the "economic" from the "emotional." Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the economic aspects of emotional (familial) ties were generally more in evidence in the nineteenth century than they tend to be today.

First of all, neither of these marriages could in any way be construed as strictly "marriages of convenience," despite the obvious practical elements involved in the parties' decisions to marry. If such had been the case, both women would likely have been married considerably younger, like most of the rest of the women in British Columbia. The constraints placed upon them by class, status, and race may have complicated their choices, but if economics had reigned supreme, these constraints would have been overcome at an earlier time. Neither may have been madly in love with their future husbands, but the evidence suggests they felt the need to have at least a level of affection for and a sense of "suitedness" to them.<sup>8</sup> Although the latter may have been most essential, it seems plain that they would not have believed it to be present without the former--Susan Nagle's insistence on deciding whether or not she could "like" David Holmes before agreeing to marry him is an indication of this attitude.

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<sup>8</sup>The longevity of both these marriages also should not be taken for granted. In Making and Breaking Families in the American West, Glenda Riley makes the point that many marriages on the western American frontier did break up as a result of the pressures of frontier life.

The period of these women's courtship and adjustment to their marriages in the earlier stages has already been discussed in a previous chapter. Susan Holmes' early misgivings about an apparent lack of "understanding" between her and her husband seem to have disappeared by the time she wrote her first New Year's thoughts as a married woman, when she expressed gratitude that she and David were so well "suited" to each other. She may have simply determined not to dwell on any negative aspects of their relationship, but in any case she did not in her later diaries voice any feelings of this kind. This is not to say that she offered no criticisms of her husband--she certainly did, but these criticisms did not specifically relate to his relationship with her.

For instance, a few years after David had returned from Texas, Susan, in making her usual Sunday recounting of which family members had attended which services, noted that David had been the only one not to go to church at all. Obviously exasperated by what she considered incomprehensible behaviour, she declared: "I don't know what has gotten into him, but he never goes to Church, it seems very strange to me how he can reconcile such laxity with his ordination vows."<sup>9</sup> If she had any understanding of the possible bitterness that may have partially prompted some of his seemingly unusual actions, she did not express it. Of course, her own identity was bound up with her connections to the church (and in particular to her original position as a clergyman's wife) to such a degree that it may have been difficult for her to have much sympathy for his feelings and actions, which may indeed have been a sign of

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<sup>9</sup>SAH, 29 May 1904.

depression. She may even have thought that he had been responsible for at least some of his misfortunes with regards to the church. A few weeks after this last entry, she wrote of their wedding anniversary, "I can't say it has been a very satisfactory one." David had become embroiled in a "fuss" with his hired boy and sent the boy away, and Susan declared that she wished "he were less hasty in his speech."<sup>10</sup> While in this case referring specifically to the hired boy, there is evidence that such "hastiness" and occasional obstinacy may have contributed to his problems with the local church in the 1880s. Given the other factors at play, these problems may well have occurred anyway, but these character traits probably did not help soothe matters.

Still, many of Susan's critical comments reveal more of her own developing character than they do of her husband's. When she complained of his insistence on attending a meeting even when he didn't feel well and there was an epidemic of "la grippe" in the area, or that "he would go to Victoria this morning" although he had a cold ("men are so obstinate!"), her tone was indicative of an increasing sense of confidence that her own judgements were generally right.<sup>11</sup> Mother knew best! Nevertheless, the overall impression given by Susan's mentions of David's "obstinacy" is that of a marriage that (having lasted over thirty years by this time) had settled into a fair degree of comfort, even if that comfort was marked by occasional disapproval. After all, by far the most common kind of remark Susan made of David after their marriage expressed her worries over how

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<sup>10</sup>SAH, 19 June 1904.

<sup>11</sup>SAH, 25 January 1907; 22 November 1910.

hard he worked. Such remarks included her perception of the gap between David's industriousness in church (and other) work and that of most of their neighbours during their early years at Cowichan,<sup>12</sup> and her fears that the work around their home was "too much for one man to attend to, with the Sunday Service as well."<sup>13</sup> Her later diary entries pertaining to David also tended to reflect this theme: in 1903, she still expressed a conviction that David continued to do too much heavy work, "forgetting that at his age he cannot do things with impunity."<sup>14</sup>

While Susan did not often mention David during his absences (after all, her journals were mainly concerned with what was happening in her household and, to a lesser extent, her community), it is still clear that she missed him and wished that these absences were not necessary. Early in 1898, on the day that David left for Texas, she wrote:

I have hoped all along that something would turn up here so that he might be nearer home, but it is not to be & he must again turn out. No doubt it is all for the best & we shall see it someday tho' now it does seem rather hard.<sup>15</sup>

Having articulated this sentiment, she did not dwell on her feelings, and seldom even referred to her husband while he was away.

However, on both wedding anniversaries that passed during the next two years, she did wonder if David "remembered the fact,"<sup>16</sup> and on at least one occasion voiced disappointment at not having received a

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<sup>12</sup>SAH, 2 November 1874.

<sup>13</sup>SAH, 20 May 1876.

<sup>14</sup>SAH, 23 February 1903.

<sup>15</sup>SAH, 19 January 1898.

<sup>16</sup>SAH, 19 June 1898; 19 June 1899.

letter from him.<sup>17</sup> So, although she got on with her life and work running her household with little emotional expression, it would be wrong to suppose that the emotional attachment was not present. Susan Holmes merely acted under the conviction that one did what needed to be done and wasted little time or energy agonizing over it.

In later years, Susan spoke little of her own feelings, and in general also did not say much about David even though he had come home permanently. Perhaps this was because, after so many years of marriage, she took his comings and goings as a given. In any case, the activities with which she increasingly concerned herself most were those of her children, particularly her daughters.

Before she married and had her own children, Susan claimed not to have a fondness for children in general, and they certainly did not play a very large role in her written records, despite her occupation as teacher. Indeed, when the newlywed Holmes' had two Indian children staying with them while in town for their baptism, she remarked: "Its [sic] all very well if one has children of their own to have the trouble of them, but there is no fun in being bothered with those of other people."<sup>18</sup> Nor had she ever expressed in her diaries the desire to have children. However, once she had actually become a mother (relatively late according to the norms of her time and place), she obviously delighted in her children. In her own emphasis on the importance of this relationship, she certainly reflected the nineteenth-century idealization of motherhood. When

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<sup>17</sup>SAH, 21 November 1898.

<sup>18</sup>SAH, 30 October 1871. Her insistence on her indifference to children unconnected to her by blood is somewhat undermined by many of her actions throughout her life: her care of the girl Gladys Speck, telling stories to children waiting in the hospital in Victoria, and, indeed, her specialty of writing children's stories in itself.



she looked back on her life at the age of seventy, among her many "mistakes" and "blessings" she identified her role as mother as her major accomplishment: "I trust my life has not all been lived in vain, I have brought up six children & put them on the right road."<sup>19</sup> She enjoyed her children, appreciated their abilities and character traits, defended them in the face of suspected calumnies, and had high expectations of them.

As was the case with the Nagle family, Susan and David Holmes were strongly influential in their children's lives until well after the latter had grown up. Still, there were some major differences between the two generations in this regard. For one thing, David Holmes does not seem to have been quite as involved in their decisions as Jeremiah Nagle had been in those of his children. However, this perception may be the result of having the family chronicle related only from Susan's perspective; as previously noted, she did not usually recount David's activities in much detail. She also did not write as much about her sons' daily lives as she did about her daughters', and it is quite conceivable that David was more involved in the boys' lives. (They did work together on the farm.) It is also possible that his long absences from home distanced him from the day-to-day conducting of his children's lives, even when he was present.

In particular, the family experience of Susan's children appears to have differed from her own in the area of parental influence over marriage choices. Although she was extremely interested in her children's romantic lives and supportive of their

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<sup>19</sup>SAH, 19 September 1910.

decisions, Susan did not describe anything that could be considered interference on either her or David's part. Again, she wrote a good deal more about the girls' experiences. Both Harry's and Fred's engagements were simply announced without any prior discussion of their romances<sup>20</sup> (although an "attachment" on Harry's part was at one point alluded to by his sceptical mother as one reason he was so faithful in his church attendance at that time<sup>21</sup>). Evidently, she was happy with Fred's choice of Bella Duncan, a local girl the family had known since childhood, and her only concern in Harry's case seemed to be the fact that Annie Carmichael (the schoolteacher who had at one time boarded at the Holmes') was about ten years older than he was. Nevertheless, she felt that "if they truly care for each other that may be no drawback--and I trust they may both be very happy."<sup>22</sup>

A much more active interest comes through in Susan's descriptions of both Isabel's and Zephie's decisions in this area. Still, it would seem she refrained from any attempts to directly intervene in these decisions. If her surprise at the turns some of these took is any indication, she did not even try to have an indirect influence through discussing their situations with her daughters. Her reactions to the events surrounding Isabel's choice between two suitors provide a clear example of this, for she was quite certain that Isabel would choose the one she eventually rejected. All of this took place late in April 1904, when Isabel returned from a visit

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<sup>20</sup>SAH, 31 December 1899; 1 January 1906.

<sup>21</sup>SAH, 4 December 1898.

<sup>22</sup>SAH, 31 December 1899.

with the Roberts family<sup>23</sup> on Kuper Island and informed her mother that Percy Roberts had asked her to marry him and return with him to Whitehorse within the next month. In her diary that evening, Susan remarked: "She cannot make up her mind what to do! Lawrence [surname illegible] came again this evening. I'm afraid he is the stumbling block!"<sup>24</sup> Her belief that Isabel favoured the latter gentleman was plain in her entry for the next evening when she expressed the expectation that Isabel's walk with this other man signified that "it will be all up with Percy!"<sup>25</sup>

However, the next day she reported that:

Isabel surprised me this morning by saying that she had made up her mind to have Percy & nothing would do but she must send him a telegram to that effect, but no sooner had it gone than she regretted it & would have done anything to get it back! I don't know what to make of her--she is terribly changeable & does not know her own mind for an hour together.<sup>26</sup>

After "sleeping on it," Isabel confirmed her decision, but her mother maintained a tinge of scepticism until after the other man had been informed. Susan's own opinion of the two men's relative virtues seems to have been in Percy's favour, for, while she claimed to feel sorry for the one rejected, it was only because she thought he cared for Isabel as much as he could for anyone but himself. Yet he had "only himself to blame, had he acted in a proper manner she would have cared for him too." As for Percy, Susan felt he was "a very nice man," who she was sure would make Isabel "a good husband,"

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<sup>23</sup>The Roberts were another Church of England missionary family.

<sup>24</sup>SAH, 23 April 1904.

<sup>25</sup>SAH, 24 April 1904.

<sup>26</sup>SAH, 25 April 1904.

although he was "rather too old for her."<sup>27</sup> Thus, "the first wedding day from the House" went forward on May 14, 1904.

Of her three daughters, Zephie was probably the one most like Susan.<sup>28</sup> Yet Susan did not attempt to interfere with Zephie's romantic decisions either. Her comments on Zephie's involvements quite plainly show the amount of trust and autonomy she granted her children over their lives, as well as the support she was willing to give them when they had made up their minds one way or the other. (Had Isabel chosen Percy's rival, Susan's careful comments indicate that she would have supported that evidently less-satisfactory situation as well.) Early in 1903, Zephie had told a young man that she only liked him as a friend and wished no other relationship. Susan had not mentioned this possibility before, but now declared, "I can't say that I am sorry, for I do not think him a young man calculated to make a girl happy."<sup>29</sup> Three years later, when Zephie did become engaged to Jack Hawkshead, a protégé of Susan's brother-in-law Philip Hankin, Susan and David were asked for their consent, the only time Susan recorded such a request. The engagement was settled, and Susan seemed satisfied with Jack, noting that "the more we see of him the better we like him."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>SAH, 27 April 1904; 30 April 1904. Percy was born 8 June 1864, making him sixteen years Isabel's senior. Memories of the Chemainus Valley: A History of People (Victoria: Chemainus Valley Historical Society, 1978), p. 59.

<sup>28</sup>Throughout Susan's later diaries, Zephie's interests appeared to be the most in harmony with those of her mother--she more frequently than her sisters accompanied Susan to events such as sewing circles, and she was also involved with the junior division of Susan's organization, the King's Daughters. Susan's grandson, Don Roberts, also has the impression that Zephie was the most like her mother, as he thinks they approached life with a similar sense of humour (Don Roberts, 1 May 1996).

<sup>29</sup>SAH, 8 February 1903.

<sup>30</sup>SAH, 16 April 1906.

However, little more than a month later Zephie was having second thoughts, and Susan was inclined to be sympathetic. They had received a letter from Phil Hankin (whose autocratic ways were well-known to Susan) outlining his and Jack's new plans--plans that ultimately were to include Zephie without her having been consulted. Philip had taken a house in Vancouver and announced:

that his German friends were going to live with him & Jack for a year! & then Zephie & Jack could get married! Zephie does not like the arrangement at all & I expect it will end in her bringing matters to a climax. She doesn't fancy being made a convenience of & not considered at all in their arrangements.<sup>31</sup>

Unaware of Zephie's negative reaction, both Philip and Jack wrote a few days later to recount "in a jubilant manner" their various arrangements. By this point, Susan recorded, Zephie had "almost come to the conclusion that as they seem to be so well able to manage by themselves, to let them continue to do so."<sup>32</sup> She did, in fact, break off the engagement. Susan, while again pitying the "poor lad" and wishing Zephie had known earlier what her feelings were, believed that it was better to end it sooner than later.

Jack apparently still held out some hope until Susan and Zephie went to Vancouver for a King's Daughters convention later that summer. It was at this time that Susan appears to have come closest to interfering, although it is probable that Zephie would have wished her to do as she did. Susan wrote that, having taken the opportunity for a "long chat" with Jack,

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<sup>31</sup>SAH, 26 May 1906.

<sup>32</sup>SAH, 28 May 1906.

I told him that she was so miserable at the prospect of their being married that I thought there was nothing for it but to end the engagement. He wanted her to promise to write to him once a month but I vetoed even that. There must be an end altogether unless in the future she should think differently then she should write but not unless.<sup>33</sup>

In this instance, Susan felt that her advice was for the best for all parties concerned, although she still left the ultimate decision to her daughter.

In the degree of her expressed interest in her children's engagements and marriage plans, Susan Holmes showed a clearly differential gender treatment, even though she did not insist on (or even, evidently, overtly advise) any particular courses of actions for either sons or daughters. There were other ways, too, in which this difference was apparent, both in terms of a greater interest in the details of the girls' lives and of more curtailment of their activities. The greater interest probably stemmed partly from a closer connection to the types of activities in which they engaged and partly from their sharing of work--that is, from gender identification.

On more than one occasion, Susan equated her daughters' absence from the house with her being alone, even if male members of the household might have been present. Thus, in June 1899 she exclaimed, "So I shall be alone in my glory! That is as far as the girls are concerned!" And again in January 1900 she amended an earlier statement: "When I said no one went out I meant any of the

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<sup>33</sup>SAH, 6 July 1906.

female part of the family."<sup>34</sup> This larger degree of identification was accompanied by more restrictions. For instance, the night after the entire family had been to a dance (until around 4 a.m.), the boys attended another party. The girls had also been invited, but Susan would not let them go, having noted, "I think they might all have been satisfied with having been out all the night before." On another occasion, she reluctantly allowed Isabel to attend a party because her brothers had "begged so hard" that she be able to go with them--though it was "with the understanding that it is to be the last this winter."<sup>35</sup> Even as late as 1910, when Beatrice was over thirty and Zephie twenty-eight, their mother commented that Harry and Annie had chaperoned them to a concert and dance, though she may not have insisted on the necessity for this at that stage.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, although relatively independent, the Holmes daughters were definitely not exemplary of the "new woman" of the turn of the century. Nor were they particularly cloistered Victorian young women. Their mother apparently did not share the qualms of many older people regarding the real and symbolic "challenge to physical and social restrictions on the movement of women" presented by the "bicycle craze" of the 1890s;<sup>37</sup> indeed, she seemed to endorse the potential freedom and mobility the "byke" offered her children.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>SAH, 3 June 1899; 5 January 1900.

<sup>35</sup>SAH, 29 December 1898; 3 February 1899.

<sup>36</sup>SAH, 27 August, 1910.

<sup>37</sup>Wayne Roberts, "Rocking the Cradle for the World: The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto 1877-1914," in Linda Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 16.

<sup>38</sup>Though here, too, there was differential gender treatment. Inquiring about "the byke" in a letter home from California, she commented: "I hope none of the girls have had very bad tumbles." No mention was made of Phil, who was, after all, the

(Her own frequent difficulties in getting around probably influenced her judgement in this matter.) However, it is unlikely that "brashness" and "irreverence" would have been qualities either encouraged or tolerated in her daughters.

Susan had high expectations for her daughters' conduct and attitudes and was generally satisfied with these. Nevertheless, she did record some disappointments after the "girls" were grown, which indicates that they did have minds of their own. One day when they were all late getting home, she admitted, "I am afraid I am very cross with them, I suppose it is thoughtlessness on their part they do not realize how tired out I get now after a little work."<sup>39</sup> She was more seriously aggrieved a few years later, when Beatrice, along with Phil, Harry, Annie and Fred, all went skating on a Sunday afternoon. A staunch believer in the Ten Commandments, Susan sadly noted, "They all seem to think my ideas are very old fashioned, for I do not approve of this amusement on the Sabath [sic] day." But that Beatrice's part in this was especially difficult for her to accept is implied in her closing words for this entry: "This is the first time I have known one of my girls to do what is so contrary to my wishes and I am very sorry for it."<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Susan's daughters, while not always acquiescent to their mother's will, could not be perceived as engaging in a "revolt" of any kind, and most certainly not a "revolt against uselessness" such as

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youngest child, and likely to be interested in bicycle-riding as much as his sisters were. (Letter from Susan Holmes to her children, 6 June 1896, Holmes family papers)

<sup>39</sup>SAH, 1 August 1903.

<sup>40</sup>SAH, 3 February 1907. That this did not happen until the "girl" in question was almost thirty years old might have been cause for many a mother to feel extremely fortunate!



supposedly characterized the "new woman."<sup>41</sup> Of course, the perception of female "uselessness" would not likely have become attached to those not among the upper-middle-classes; even among the middle-class, rural Canadian women could rarely have been accused of frivolity. Beatrice, Isabel, and Zephie Holmes probably worked as hard as their mother had when she was younger, and did not act in ways which would seriously challenge their feminine roles. At the same time, they were in some ways the products of changing times, even when the changes they represented were not welcomed by their parents. While Susan and David exerted a good deal of influence over their daughters' lives, they apparently did not seek to have the same amount of control the Nagles had had in Susan's life.<sup>42</sup> According to Nancy Theriot, this was a pattern typical of the differences between the experiences of women who came of age during the mid-nineteenth century and those of their daughters. She claims that:

the sexual ideology a woman grows up with becomes the core of her feminine identity; it defines the expectations and limitations of her womanhood. But the woman's life experience may provide a challenge to her inherited script; the material conditions of one generation usually do not fit exactly with the ideology produced by the previous generation. Women create a new, altered version of the feminine script out of the contradictions between their worlds and their mothers'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Kealey, A Not Unreasonable Claim, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup>Ward claims that parents' power over women's marriage plans had largely disappeared by 1900. Ward, Courtship, Love, and Marriage, p. 136.

<sup>43</sup>Theriot, Mothers and Daughters, p. 2.

There is no direct evidence as to whether or not Susan Flood felt that she and her husband were "suited" to one another. However, judging from the content of some of the letters she received after her marriage, she must have given quite a favourable impression of him as "a worthy industrious young man" with whom she had "every prospect of being a very happy young lady."<sup>44</sup> There are indications that she and William spent a good deal of time together when he was at home (and sometimes even when he was away, judging from the story of camping on the Hope-Princeton Trail), especially given that she had such a propensity for outdoor work. In the early days, at least, a good working relationship would have been imperative. Bill's eventual description of himself as a Catholic could also be interpreted as a symbolic gesture to her sensibilities, for it was definitely not a necessary act.

It was only during the last ten years of Bill's life that Susan allowed any worries she had regarding him to become apparent. The death of their daughter Leila in 1917 had had a profound effect upon Bill, and he appears to have never recovered from his grief. According to his daughter-in-law, "his whole attitude towards life seemed to change. He became more or less a loner."<sup>45</sup> Susan, suffering from her own grief, was decidedly frustrated by his withdrawal, and felt that his response to Leila's death was the main cause of his declining health in the years that followed. Even when their grandchildren came along, Bill remained detached. While their grandmother was a daily part of their lives, the children seldom saw

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<sup>44</sup>Letters from W. F. Tolmie and Jennie Y. Dickson to Susan Flood (undated), Flood family papers.

<sup>45</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 230.

their grandfather, as he rarely left his own house until his death in 1928.<sup>46</sup>

To a large degree, Susan's relationship with her children must be inferred from the nature of her interactions with others with whom she also had an essentially mother-child relationship--in particular, her daughter-in-law May and her grandchildren. Because of her relatively early death, Leila passed on no memories directly. The mementos that have survived (many photographs, an autograph book, a catechism book and religious keepsakes, a "motoring scarf," china dolls) evoke a fairly independent young woman, who seems to have had some similarities to her mother in terms of her enthusiasm for both friends and spending time outdoors. (Though the absence of any examples of her needlework may imply one area in which they differed!) Members of her family later believed that her love of horses was indirectly a contributing factor in her death. In May Flood's recounting of this event:

She was racing the local work train along the tracks when she was thrown. The train crew saw the accident and stopped to help her. In her fear that she would be forbidden to ride again, Leila begged the trainmen not to tell her parents. It was believed that this injury eventually caused her death.<sup>47</sup>

It is impossible to tell whether or not this incident did have anything to do with the "bone disease" that claimed her life (evidently after a long period of incapacitation), but the tale as told does point to some similarities between Leila and the Holmes

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<sup>46</sup>Eileen Bonson, 28 January 1996.

<sup>47</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 232.

daughters. Like them, she placed a value on having some degree of freedom and autonomy. Furthermore, she knew that some of that freedom and autonomy could easily be curtailed, as shown by her fear that, even in her early twenties, she could be "forbidden" one of her favourite activities because of parental concerns. It is unlikely that her brother Charles would have felt such constraints.

In contrast with his sister, Charles seems to have been fairly introverted and was described as shy by one of his contemporaries. Although he worked with his father much of the time, their relationship could probably not be considered close, as this same source thought he was somewhat in awe of Bill and felt unable to please him.<sup>48</sup> After his marriage in 1919 (until which time he had lived with his parents when working in the area), he likely saw little of his father, who had by then withdrawn into himself. Charlie's relationship with his mother was probably, if not closer, then at least more harmonious. Susan was a constant presence in his own household, and his family was "always happy to see her coming." The impression of Charlie's daughter was that Susan most likely had some influence on his decisions--he obviously wanted to please her and on at least some occasions may have done what she thought he should (for example, in christening his children as Catholics)--but she did not overtly try to intervene.<sup>49</sup>

Charlie's respect for and sense of connection to his mother were evident to those around him, and were also implied by the interest he took in her background. He put a good deal of energy into

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<sup>48</sup>ibid. This was Annie Bulger's opinion.

<sup>49</sup>Eileen Bonson, 28 January 1996.

relocating and maintaining contact with her mother's second family in Washington, taking her to Bainbridge Island to visit her half-brothers in 1927 and 1929. Apparently, he did not expend any such effort on his father's family in Ontario, with whom Bill had also largely lost contact.<sup>50</sup> Charlie's greater sense of identification with his mother's history seems plain in the notation he made on the back of a 1905 photograph, in which he identified himself as the son of Susan, the grandson of Cecilia and George Suckley, and the great-grandson of Big John and Martha Skagit--but did not mention his Flood forebears.<sup>51</sup>

According to her granddaughter, Susan approved of Charlie's marriage to May Lawrence, although, like Susan Holmes, she may have been somewhat unhappy, or at least concerned, about the difference in their ages. (May was twenty years younger and still in her teens at the time.) Still, Susan did what she could to help May out, without insisting that the younger woman do things her way. Perhaps she felt some kinship with the daughter-in-law who had spent the first ten years of her life in an orphanage; perhaps May was in some ways a replacement for Leila. In any case, May always claimed that she felt Susan treated her like a daughter, and always spoke of her with affection and respect. For the rest of her life, May treasured the things she eventually inherited from Susan, and took pride in her relationship to her mother-in-law. Her children were encouraged to appreciate their grandmother's talents, and to

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<sup>50</sup>Susan and Bill's granddaughter, Eileen Bonson, has speculated that Bill's family might have disapproved of his marriage to a "halfbreed" woman. In any case, there is no record of any contact between him and his family in the east, and Eileen had never heard any such contact discussed.

<sup>51</sup>Flood family papers.

perceive her as someone special. Susan's presence was a given, and although she apparently did not necessarily try to teach them anything specifically, or even to tell them much about her earlier life, they later recalled that they "just liked being together." She was an integral part of their household, even though she never lived with them.<sup>52</sup>

There was one way in which both Susan Holmes and Susan Flood could be considered, as mothers, more fortunate than many of their contemporaries. While Susan Holmes did have at least one miscarriage and circumstances suggest that Susan Flood may also have had similar experiences (given the smaller than average number of children she had and the relatively large gap between them), neither woman had a child die in infancy or childhood. The worry that could accompany even the most simple illnesses cropped up quite frequently in Susan Holmes' diaries, as when, early in 1880 for instance, she described her own children's mending colds in conjunction with the death of a friend's child after an illness which had "commenced not unlike Fred's did, but with what a different ending."<sup>53</sup> The regular occurrence of entries in which Susan would make a comment about one of her young, strong children and then tack on the phrase "if he lives" did not suggest merely an automatic iteration arising from a fatalistic religious stance; it was also an acknowledgement of a reality in which people, and especially children, could be taken with little warning. That this had not happened to these women during their children's early lives was not

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<sup>52</sup>Eileen Bonson, 28 January 1996.

<sup>53</sup>SAH, 11 February 1880.

something they could have taken for granted. Still, both would eventually lose a grown child at a young age, as Leila Flood died of her mysterious "bone disease" in her twenty-fifth year in 1917, and Phil Holmes of pneumonia in his twenty-third, in 1907.

Although both their strong religious beliefs and the prevailing attitudes of the time most likely kept them from too open a show of their grief, the two Susans were hit hard by their losses. As with other deaths in her circle of relatives and friends, Susan Holmes took comfort in her faith that Phil's death had at least taken him to a better existence. Three years after his death, she wrote, "One dear one has reached home before me, saved probably, from many troubles, which even those who lead the easiest lives have to bear, in one shape or another."<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, aside from the accepted outward signs of grieving (such as the frequent visits to "the grave" described in her last surviving diary, and edging her letters in black after Phil's--and later, David's--death<sup>55</sup>), there were other hints of a more interior turmoil. Foremost among these was the abrupt ending of her journal entries in the year of Phil's death (but while he was still healthy), and their resumption more than three years later. Although there are a number of gaps in Susan's journals, attributable to a variety of causes, it is still interesting that these gaps cover some of the more difficult periods of her life, such as the years surrounding both the "troubles" with the parish at Cowichan and Phil's illness and death. Since there was at least one surviving journal out of which pages had been torn, it is certainly possible

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<sup>54</sup>SAH, 19 September 1910.

<sup>55</sup>Don Roberts, 1 May 1996.

that Susan censored herself after the fact--that she chose not to leave a record of these deep feelings on paper. Or she may have felt incapable of keeping a journal at all during such periods: indeed, her first entries after other hiatuses usually recounted a number of events the impact of which had kept her from writing.

As for Susan Flood, family members attested to both the heavy grief she felt upon Leila's death and the need she saw to keep this grief from taking over her life, in light of her husband's failing health, which she perceived as stemming from his own reaction to their daughter's death. After all, she had only one child remaining, and he was often away, so the support from immediate family that she could have called upon must have been minimal. Faith in God and her own inner resources would have to be the mainstays of her ability to carry on.

### **Other Household Members**

As was the case with many families during this time period, the Holmes and Flood households were often composed of more than just immediate nuclear family members. Some of these extra people were short-term visitors, and some were boarders or servants (for example, Annie Carmichael and Mary Eastman<sup>56</sup> at Holmesdale). Others stayed for longer periods of time and became *de facto* family members.

In the Holmes household, two people stand out in this latter category. The first was David's older sister Betsey Holmes, who came from England in 1890 to make her home with her brother's family. Although she presumably had never met Susan or the

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<sup>56</sup>Listed as "house servant" in the 1881 census.



children, she seemed to settle in quickly and feel "at home with us all." For her part, Susan almost immediately (and frequently thereafter) expressed gratitude for the household help provided by her sister-in-law.<sup>57</sup> As previously mentioned, Betsey's presence would also have made prolonged absences more feasible for Susan, who would have felt more at ease leaving the affairs of her home in the capable hands of an older woman. She did not record any instances of friction between Betsey and herself; however, on more than one occasion she commented on Betsey's stubbornness with regards to dealing with the illnesses to which she later became subject. Betsey apparently was prone to exerting herself too much and too soon after starting to feel a little better and to refusing any medical advice from the local doctors, in whom she had no confidence.<sup>58</sup> If she was obstinate in this area, she probably had her own set ideas about running a home as well, and Susan more than likely felt her patience tried at times, even if she did not admit it in her journals.

The other person who became a relatively permanent part of the household was a little girl, Gladys Speck. Gladys' mother had died in 1899, and over the next several years the girl stayed with the Holmes' for extended periods of time while her father had to work out of the area (and sometimes outside the province). During these times, Gladys was evidently treated like one of Susan's daughters: her activities were also a major focus of the diary entries, and Susan worried about the effects of local conditions on

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<sup>57</sup>SAH, 20 May 1890; 4 June 1890.

<sup>58</sup>SAH, 21 January 1900; 4 February 1900.

her upbringing.<sup>59</sup> Even when Gladys was again living with her father, Susan would put much care and energy into packing a Christmas box for the child with a dress she had sent away for, a skirt she had made, and "one or two other little things. It is not such a Christmas-Box as the one we sent last year, but I couldn't manage more this time."<sup>60</sup>

Susan Flood also had two young sisters unrelated to the family who lived with her off and on for periods of several months or longer from the time they were around the ages of eleven or twelve until they were in their later teens. These girls were named Maxine and Madeline. Their mother and other siblings lived nearby, but their father was either dead or simply "gone," and it would appear that Susan took them in because their home life was somewhat unstable --perhaps because the father of the other children did not particularly want them around. At some point, their mother moved to Vancouver, but the girls still stayed at Flood for some time. Much or even all of the time they spent at the Floods would have been after Bill died, so Susan was in her seventies at the time. Maxine and Madeline, while probably helping her around the house and providing her with the companionship she missed from her own daughter, were closer in age to her grandchildren. Indeed, they apparently called her "Grandma."<sup>61</sup> Her relationship with the two sisters was likely quite similar to that of Susan Holmes and Gladys Speck, as the latter woman was in her sixties when the girl came to

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<sup>59</sup>For instance, at one point she considered withdrawing Gladys from Sunday School, as she disagreed with the way it was being taught (SAH, 9 December 1906).

<sup>60</sup>SAH, 16 December 1910.

<sup>61</sup>Eileen Bonson, 28 January 1996.

stay and probably also enjoyed having Gladys as a companion at a time when her own daughters were increasingly leading their own lives. Despite the benefits both women would have received from their charges, they were still taking on a large load in their later years, an action which in both cases was doubtless also motivated by their sense of personal responsibility within their larger communities.

### **The Larger Community**

Despite the persistence of the public/private dichotomy, it is not always easy to make a clear distinction between family and community relations. This is true on a number of different levels. In a general sense, in frontier rural communities such as those in which the two Susans lived, a sort of symbiosis among members of the society was perceived as necessary to its survival; hence, everyone had a more or less intimate interest in everyone else's life. People interacted with the community at large both as individuals and as family members. Community problems might be dealt with through the efforts of families that saw them as their problems too. This is essentially what happened in the cases of Gladys and Maxine and Madeline, situations in which children in troubled circumstances became members of the Holmes and Flood families. While they would not likely have thought of their actions in taking in these girls as "community service," in effect that was what the two Susans were doing, in probably the most basic sense of the term--service that involved community and family in both the most simple and the most complex interactions. Thus, the family home was often

not so much the middle-class private "castle" as it was one of the settings in which community relations took place.

The original house at Holmesdale, a two-storey structure, was finished by 1884. Around 1900, the Holmes' built an addition, initially intended as space for Phil and Belle Hankin, who were then planning to move there. The room built ran the width of the building; it was as big as a ballroom, and was actually later used for dances, as well as for other events such as meetings of the directors for the King's Daughters' convalescent home.<sup>62</sup> According to Bishop Hills, writing during a stay in 1892, the grounds at Holmesdale were "extensive & varied." Situated on Lake Somenos, just north of the village of Duncan, they provided ample opportunity for relaxation "by Myandering streams under shady trees."<sup>63</sup> Gatherings, sometimes quite large, were also held on these grounds fairly often. For instance, within little more than a month in 1910, the Holmes' hosted both a summer "fête" (featuring "little tables . . . dotted about for tea & ice cream," golf and croquet) which evidently had a fundraising purpose, and a croquet party for twenty young women invited to meet a friend of Zephie's.<sup>64</sup> Although the weather and distances (Holmesdale was one mile from Duncan, two from Quamichan, and three from Somenos), along with sometimes doubtful means of transportation, at times made both church attendance and social engagements uncertain undertakings, the family home was

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<sup>62</sup>SAH, 5 January 1911.

<sup>63</sup>Bishop Hills Diary, 22-23 June 1892.

<sup>64</sup>SAH, 10 June 1910; 24 July 1910.

usually a hub of activity. Susan's occasional comments about having no visitors "for a wonder" serve to confirm this impression.<sup>65</sup>

The Flood family home seems to have been considerably smaller than Holmesdale (and indeed it would have needed fewer bedrooms, since it housed a much smaller family); however, it too was often a centre of activity. Situated about five miles downstream from Hope on the Fraser River, the homestead was the first in the area which would become known as Flood. Other settlers soon began moving into this area in the years following the Flood family's relocation there, some of them having purchased their land from the Floods. Upon first arriving in the area, more than one of these new neighbours stayed with the family. The son of one such family, the Thorstensions, recalled being told that his father had purchased property from Bill in 1910 and brought his wife and infant son to Flood the following year. Since the land had not yet been cleared, let alone a house built, the family lived at the Flood home until these tasks had been accomplished.<sup>66</sup> Eight years later the Floods extended the same hospitality to the Gillanders, newly arrived from Medicine Hat, Alberta; this time, there must have been some structure already on the property, as the stay lasted only two weeks.<sup>67</sup> Before the Floods had left Hope, they had also opened their home there to those who needed a place to stay on various occasions. For example, one young girl coming to school in town from Hunterville, several miles down river, would, "during the worst

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<sup>65</sup>Details about the house and its situation were provided by Don Roberts.

<sup>66</sup>Forging a New Hope, pp. 288 & 313.

<sup>67</sup>Morley Gillander, "The Skagit Saga," Flood family papers.

weather," stay in Hope with either Susan or one of two other local women.<sup>68</sup> The older women presumably took on a mothering role for their charge.

The large orchard at the homestead in Flood provided the backdrop for what became a regular community event, the annual fall festival. The Floods owned a cider press, and after fruit had been shipped off for sale, surplus and culled apples were turned into cider and the neighbours invited for a day-long picnic. They apparently "came from miles around with their gallon jugs for delicious apple juice."<sup>69</sup>

The nature of these women's interactions with their communities was, of course, strongly influenced by the character of those communities. There were similarities between living in the Cowichan Valley around what became Duncan and living in the Upper Fraser Valley around Hope, but there were also enough differences to create quite divergent kinds of experiences for the two Susans. The ways in which each was inserted into the community also had an effect on how they were placed within it throughout the years. In this respect, Susan Flood had had more of a place in the community (however briefly) that was separate from that of her husband; many local people continued to remember her as a schoolteacher long after she had married. Susan Holmes had been in a similar situation in Yale, but she and David had not remained there long. Being the minister's wife gave Susan a particular relationship to the people in both communities she lived in as a married woman, but given her

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<sup>68</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 205. This was Annie Bulger.

<sup>69</sup>*ibid.*, p. 231.

previous experiences with the people of Yale, she must have been relieved in many ways when she and David moved back to Vancouver Island.

Aside from those concerns, the Cowichan Valley would probably have been a much more comfortable setting for Susan, and not only because of its relative proximity to Victoria and her family. The white settlers who first started moving into the Valley in the early 1860s were concerned with farming rather than with the gold mining fever that fuelled most of the early arrivals at both Fort Hope and Yale--although some Cowichan pioneers did maintain hopes for a big strike of some kind in their area, the only one of any importance (copper) did not come until the end of the century.<sup>70</sup> For this reason, the growth of settlement in the Cowichan area was relatively steady, as opposed to the boom and bust cycles of Hope, which, after the excitement of the Fraser River Gold Rush, and the smaller flurry of activity during the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, was on more than one occasion close to being reduced to a ghost town.

At the time Susan Suckley arrived at Fort Hope, the population was in one of its down turns, as attested to by the problems in recruiting enough children to keep the school, built just a few years before in 1876, operating. Susan was probably not totally unprepared for what awaited her in Fort Hope. While she was at St. Ann's, she had received a letter from a friend who had taken the steamer to Yale and reported tongue-in-cheek that "it would not

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<sup>70</sup>Elizabeth Blanche Norcross, The Warm Land: A History of Cowichan (Duncan: Island Books, 1975), pp 52-58.

take so long only we had to stop at twenty-five different places, such large cities that you could count the houses sometimes there would be two in one city." Susan must have known that Fort Hope was one such metropolis. If she accepted, as her friend claimed, that "Victoria is like London to what Yale is," she would have been under no illusions as to the type of facilities available in the even smaller town.<sup>71</sup>

Overall, the population in the settlements of Cowichan appears to have been more homogeneous than was the case around Hope. As the earlier white settlers had generally come from Victoria and the building of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway had brought a large number of "remittance men" from England, the tone set was predominantly English. There were Chinese inhabitants in most settlements, but little social mixing between them and the whites-- Susan Holmes sometimes had Chinese men (whom she, like many of her contemporaries, occasionally called "Celestials") as household help, but she seldom wrote about them except in regards to this domestic work role.<sup>72</sup> According to one local history, early white settlers in the Cowichan Valley recognized their dependence on the Cowichan Indians in many ways, so that "there was a good deal of mutual affection and respect between Indian and white in the early years, existing at the same time as ill-feeling over such matters as

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<sup>71</sup>Letter from Cecilia Forman to Susan Suckley, 13 June 1875, Flood family papers.

<sup>72</sup>One exception to this occurred in 1891, when she reported: "Being Chinese New Year's, we call to see 'Mrs. Saw Sing' who rec'd us very graciously altho' she cannot speak a word of English, her fat husband acted as interpreter" (SAH, 10 February 1891).



land rights and animal trespassers."<sup>73</sup> The building of separate schools and churches for Indians tended to "foster segregation," with the result that, on the eve of the First World War, after sixty years of co-inhabiting the Valley, and despite the fact that "the natives' lives touched those of the whites at many points," there was still little integration of Indians into "the general community life."<sup>74</sup> Although there must have been some incidence of intermarriage, this does not seem to have been as high as it was in some areas of the province--or at least it was not commented upon.<sup>75</sup> Susan Holmes' relationship with Native women in the area would have been restricted to that of a churchwoman--she would have been concerned and kindly towards them, but they would not have been numbered among her peers.

The situation in the Hope area contrasted with this, at least to some degree. Similarly to other parts of the province there was little besides business interactions between Indians or whites and the Chinese who at times, particularly during the Gold Rush and the building of the C.P.R., made up a significant portion of the local population. Even after these influxes had subsided, there were usually some of the Chinese who remained to work or to open businesses, such as the usual laundries and restaurants. Although the recollections of some locals who grew up in the early years of this century include a few memories of these men, it is clear that

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<sup>73</sup>Norcross, The Warm Land, p. 34.

<sup>74</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>75</sup>The degree to which such a lack of acknowledgement evolved in the Okanagan is discussed in Jean Barman, "Lost Okanagan: In Search of the First Settler Families," Okanagan History, The Sixtieth Reprt of the Okanagan Historical Society (1996).

their relationships did not go beyond friendly acquaintance,<sup>76</sup> and the Chinese men from this era left no legacy in the form of descendants.

It was a different story with regards to Indian-white relations. As previously mentioned, many (if not most) of the men who settled in this part of the Fraser Valley during the latter part of the nineteenth century married Indian women, and their families became the mainstay of the local communities. These families usually maintained some connection with their mothers' families of origin; in fact, that was often almost their only familial contact, as their fathers had generally come from outside the area. And, while some of these men were British, many others were Canadian and American, as well as Italian, Mexican, and Norwegian, among other nationalities. The Queen's Birthday was the major holiday here, as it was in Cowichan (and featured Indian canoe races in both places), but beyond such outward manifestations, there was much less impetus to recreate social and other relations as they were in the "old country"; in other words, Hope society seemed to make less of an effort to be "genteel." There was no longer the social elite that had existed in Hope in the early 1860s, when Susan Allison and her newly-arrived family found "a surprisingly large number of residents with an upper class background similar to their own."<sup>77</sup> The men who arrived in this later period were more often than not interested in mining prospects, although most of them ended up

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<sup>76</sup>For example, see Forging a New Hope, p. 47.

<sup>77</sup>Ormsby, ed., A Pioneer Gentlewoman, p. xiv.

turning their hands to farming of some sort, in addition to whatever other activities were needed to help make ends meet.

Thus, both Susan Holmes and Susan Flood could be said to have spent their married (and later) lives in communities in which each must have been more comfortable than they might have been elsewhere. If anything, the "English" nature of Cowichan society increased as years went by, along with ease of communication with the outside world. In Hope, the mixed-race children of the settlers were themselves an integral part of society before worsening attitudes towards Indians began to take hold, and were therefore less affected by these than they might otherwise have been. The complexity of racial attitudes reflected this changing situation: for instance, May Lawrence's adoptive parents took their son's first child away from her mother, presumably because the mother was an Indian.<sup>78</sup> However, they apparently approved of May's marriage to Charles Flood who, after all, was part of an established "pioneer" family.

The physical settings of their respective communities also had an impact on these women's lives, most notably with respect to the effects they had on transportation and communication. Given the frontier conditions of and the geographical difficulties posed by almost all parts of the province, early settlers in both areas had to contend with considerable isolation. However, this condition lasted longer for Hope than it did for the Cowichan Valley. In Cowichan, almost all transportation from Victoria until the mid-1880s was by steamer which, by the time the Holmes' arrived, at least made

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<sup>78</sup>Information from Eileen Bonson.

regular runs. There was a trail to Victoria, but no wagon road until 1884; two years later, the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway began operations.<sup>79</sup> Even with just the steamer connection, Susan was able to visit her family in Victoria without much difficulty; the advent of morning and evening trains (as well as the telegraph between Victoria and Nanaimo in 1879) permitted fairly regular communications and travel.

At Hope, improvements were much slower in coming. Although sternwheelers did ply the Fraser River as far as Yale, they usually could not run the whole year through, and the canoe was still the "major mode of travel" in the late 1880s.<sup>80</sup> Even the construction of the C.P.R. did not provide an easy connection with the outside world, for it ran on the north side of the river. Since there was no bridge, people and goods still had to be ferried across to the station at Haig, north of the Fraser and to the west of Hope. Nor was there any telephone or telegraph service to the outside before 1910.<sup>81</sup> A real change in the area's isolation did not come until the completion of the Canadian Northern Railway (on the south side of the river) in 1914, an event credited with "opening up a new way of life" in the Upper Fraser Valley, as farming could now be geared to an outside market. For the first time, too, automobiles were a feasibility-- Bill Flood's Model T, purchased in 1916, was one of the first in the area. (In Cowichan, by 1906 private cars were "sufficiently numerous for a petition to be circulated which asked that

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<sup>79</sup>Norcross, The Warm Land, p. 41.

<sup>80</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 245.

<sup>81</sup>*ibid.*, p. 47.

automobiles be prohibited from travelling more than four miles per hour."<sup>82</sup>) Due to the difficulties of transportation, it is doubtful that Susan Flood was ever able to respond positively to the Sisters who wrote asking when she might visit Victoria again--her last trip there was probably the one she took to write the teachers' examination in 1881. In the same way, she was unable to make the overland journey to her relatives in Washington until the 1920s, when roads were more accessible. She simply could not be as mobile as Susan Holmes was.

Isolation and frontier conditions also meant that health care was undertaken by family members, and by extension sometimes became a community service as well. In such circumstances, "the wife and mother of the family" was "the most widespread provider of medical care."<sup>83</sup> Hope apparently did not have a resident physician until 1947. In the years prior to that, there had sometimes been doctors in the vicinity, but, lured by the gold, "even medical men had come here to engage in the mining business rather than to practise their calling, and they soon left."<sup>84</sup> Mary Bears, a contemporary of Susan Flood's and also the daughter of a white father and Indian mother, acted as the main local "mid-wife and practical nurse" during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She had apparently learned "the natural skills" and "remedies of roots and herbs" from her mother.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Norcross, The Warm Land, p. 61.

<sup>83</sup>Wendy Mitchinson, The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 20.

<sup>84</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 136.

<sup>85</sup>*ibid.*

There is no evidence that Susan Flood herself took on any particular community role in health care, but she must have done a considerable amount of nursing during both the long period in which Leila was bedridden and Bill's final years of ill health. Like most mothers in such communities, she probably also sometimes offered what skills she had in these matters to others outside her family circle, if only on a small scale. Her future grandson-in-law, for instance, discovered early in his acquaintance with her that:

Mrs. Flood had a strong belief that honey would cure most of the common ills. He soon learned, while in her presence, to try to withhold even a small cough, lest he be told, perhaps ordered would be a better word, to come to her house for some honey-based concoction.<sup>86</sup>

The Cowichan Valley was more blessed with professional medical expertise: Susan mentioned the two local "medical men" in whom Betsey had no faith in 1900, and there were apparently four doctors in the Valley by 1912.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, there was still a need for nursing care, and Susan Holmes, perhaps largely due to her perception of her duties as a minister's wife, seems to have taken on a fair amount of this care for people in the vicinity. Such activities probably seemed quite natural to her, as there are numerous references both in her own early diaries and in her sister Jessie's to home remedies such as onion poultices and mustard plasters applied by and to members of the Nagle family, even in a city with relatively comprehensive medical care. Susan frequently spoke of the nursing duties she undertook, without calling any

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<sup>86</sup>ibid., p. 237.

<sup>87</sup>Norcross, The Warm Land, p. 64.

special attention to them. Within her family, she regularly dispensed pills, applied plasters, and sent her "patients" to bed. She spent six weeks away from her own home in order to nurse her mother in 1876.<sup>88</sup> But family members were definitely not the only recipients of her care. For instance, just a few days after she had brought Betsey through an attack of pleurisy with the aid of poultices and hot flannels, she went to visit the Cresswells, a tenant family "in a pitiable plight," and made and applied a poultice for one of their children as well.<sup>89</sup> On another occasion, a little girl received a lump on her forehead and Susan, visiting at the time, bound a piece of raw meat over it to reduce the swelling.<sup>90</sup>

What was by far Susan's most challenging nursing episode took place in 1899. Mrs. Speck (Gladys' mother) had been suffering from an unspecified illness and was rapidly deteriorating--within a few days she had lost her sight and most of her hearing, and was "scarcely able to speak & wandering in her mind." At that point, her family and the local doctor decided to call in another doctor from Victoria. Susan had been keeping Gladys at Holmesdale while continuing to check in on the sick woman, and was present when the two outside doctors arrived. They decided that an immediate operation offered the only chance of saving Mrs. Speck's life. To perform this operation, they required one more assistant, and since Susan was there she felt obliged to take part. This was one of the

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<sup>88</sup>SAH, 1 January 1877.

<sup>89</sup>SAH, 4-8 April 1898.

<sup>90</sup>SAH, 14 June 1906.

few occasions on which she allowed her emotional state to filter through her description of events:

I had to take part tho' I had much rather not.  
However it would have taken up a lot of time to  
get some one else if I had refused so I said I would  
assist--but oh! it was terrible & I never want to  
take part in anything of the kind again. And the  
worst of it is, I am afraid she will not pull through  
after all.

She was right, for Mrs. Speck never regained consciousness and, within a day, Susan was assisting in "laying her out."<sup>91</sup>

Many contributions to sustaining the community were the result of just such circumstances--being on-the-spot at a particular time. However, being there in the first place also indicated a commitment and connection which was manifested in a wide variety of activities within the community. In Susan Holmes' case, these activities were often grounded in her religious beliefs and could be considered "church work." Her later diaries are full of references to attending missionary and church committee meetings and to fundraising through "sales of work" and social events. She taught Sunday School for years and played the harmonium (once in Yale when her "fingers were almost frozen"<sup>92</sup>) and organ for church services when she was younger. Even those acts of charity she performed as an individual could be seen as arising from her beliefs in good Christian behaviour. Exemplary of this kind of action was her visit (with her daughter-in-law Annie) to a local poor family to

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<sup>91</sup>SAH, 29 October-3 November 1899.

<sup>92</sup>SAH, 25 December 1871. All three Holmes daughters also did organ duty, sometimes all in one day at three different churches.



ascertain what she could best do for them for Christmas. She was moved by the "pitiful sight" of "so many little pale faced children, living in two rooms, insufficiently clothed, & evidently not half fed." On the ensuing shopping expedition, the women bought a box of Japanese oranges for the children, as well as warm stockings (to go with the clothing they had already brought) and "eatables" of a more basic nature.<sup>93</sup> This was the same kind of concern she showed for other families in misfortune, such as her tenants the Cresswells.<sup>94</sup>

While she did not share Susan Holmes' sense of religious vocation (and I would argue that this is exactly what it was for her) as an impetus for community service, Susan Flood nevertheless did perform such service, though perhaps on a smaller scale. Through her family's contributions to building the community--such as the donation of lumber and materials to construct Concord School in Flood in 1915<sup>95</sup>--and through other actions like opening her home to newcomers and less fortunate members of the community, she also showed that she had a deep sense of responsibility to that community.

### **Organizations**

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a profusion of women's organizations made their appearance throughout the western world, and the west coast of Canada was no exception. The impetus behind this proliferation is generally

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<sup>93</sup>SAH, 14 & 19 December, 1910.

<sup>94</sup>Aside from helping to nurse the Cresswell boys, Susan made shirts for them, and she and David did not apply pressure for back rent. Nevertheless, the family eventually did vacate "the cottage" without notice (SAH, 23-28 January 1898; 19 March 1899).

<sup>95</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 58.

thought to include a combination of factors: "a primarily middle-class women's revolt against the uselessness of a dependent existence . . . just as public attention was focussing on a series of social problems which seemed to threaten the smooth path of 'progress,'"<sup>96</sup> and the technological changes which allowed many of these women (mostly urban) "increasing amounts of leisure time [that] could now be devoted to fulfilling those social responsibilities that the Christian consciences of many Canadian women urged them to take up"<sup>97</sup> being the most commonly noted.<sup>98</sup> The clubs were organized for a variety of purposes. Some sought to accomplish specific objectives, such as improved sanitation or temperance, and some were engaged in a more general struggle for legal, social, and/or political reforms. Some were secular in origin and nature, while others were church-based, but most, if not all, seemed to share a rather moralistic orientation in their goals and work.

This period coincided with the easing of Susan Holmes' domestic workload. As she was now able to afford some household help, and the household itself was smaller, she was able to spend more time both on her writing and on community activities. She had always been deeply involved in both *ad hoc* and church-related charity, and it is not surprising that she would have chosen to become an active member of a new Anglican women's group, the

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<sup>96</sup>Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup>Cook and Mitchinson, eds., The Proper Sphere, p. 198.

<sup>98</sup>Theriot attributes this new preoccupation to late nineteenth-century women's "new definition of true womanhood," which, due to an increased sense of physical control, could "imagine a motherhood that claimed the world as its domain." Mothers and Daughters, p. 133.

King's Daughters. The International Order of King's Daughters and Sons was founded in 1886, and came to the Cowichan Valley in the late 1890s with the establishment of a branch known as the Scattered Circle.<sup>99</sup> Susan's diaries first mentioned her attendance at a meeting of the King's Daughters (to which she almost always referred as the "K.D.s") in November 1897, at which point the group was planning one of its frequent "sales of work" for fundraising.<sup>100</sup>

Susan was evidently a faithful and enthusiastic member. She took part in all aspects of the day-to-day business of the organization, and was also active in determining its local policies. On more than one occasion she was an instigator of group activities towards a specific end. One of these situations involved her idea for the K.D.s to "help the distress" of the people of New Westminster after that city was left "a heap of ruins" by its "great fire" in 1898. The idea was to get together a carload of vegetables to send to them. (She did not record whether this actually materialized, although she did say that Mrs. Maitland, the founder of the Cowichan circle, thought it a good idea and intended acting on it.<sup>101</sup>) Similarly, after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 Susan (who was particularly concerned because her brother Fred and his family were living in Santa Rosa) proposed that the local group collect garments to send to the "stricken city." Susan was put in charge of getting the box together and having it sent.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Norcross, The Warm Land, p. 53.

<sup>100</sup>SAH, 22 November 1897.

<sup>101</sup>SAH, 11 & 13 September 1898.

<sup>102</sup>SAH, 17 April-2 May 1906. In this case, she did describe all parts of the plan, including the follow-through.

The circle's main project throughout this time was the construction of a convalescent hospital "for young bachelors who fell ill, a building which would also be 'a place of refuge and a sanctuary for tired women.'"<sup>103</sup> This home was a long time in the planning, as funds needed to be raised and a suitable site selected. Susan was on the committee for the latter, and generally in the thick of things for the former. Construction was finally begun in 1910 and the building opened in April 1911, at a total cost of \$5000.00. Half of the site that was finally chosen was bought at a low price from Harry Holmes.<sup>104</sup>

During this period, Susan was also busy with the internal affairs of the group, and she had definite ideas about how these affairs should be undertaken. She spoke at meetings, attended conventions as a delegate, and was eventually elected district secretary and appointed to the board of directors for the convalescent home.<sup>105</sup> She viewed the occasions on which she was asked to speak, especially to a broader audience, as opportunities for propounding her beliefs with regards to the organization's purpose and proper conducting of business. Asked to give the address of welcome to the delegates of a convention held in Duncan, she admitted, "now I am rather glad as it gives me an opportunity of speaking on several subjects wh. otherwise I should not have had. One on spending the Sabbath."<sup>106</sup> She declined another such opportunity in Vancouver because a mix-up had meant she was asked

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<sup>103</sup>Norcross, The Warm Land, p. 53. (Origin of quoted material unknown.)

<sup>104</sup>ibid., p. 64.

<sup>105</sup>SAH, 2 September 1910; 20 October 1910.

<sup>106</sup>SAH, 13 June 1904.

to speak only the day before the event and she felt she was "not good at extemporaneous speeches"--however, she regretted this lost chance.<sup>107</sup>

Susan was especially eager to offer her opinions when she thought the order's members were forgetting their origins and purpose, and at these times she expressed a determination to fight for what she believed was right. This determination surfaced with regards to two fundraising issues in 1910 and 1911. The first incident involved a benefit concert that the K.D.s had not organized, but at which they were to

have the privilege of selling refreshments & cigarettes! . . . I forgot to say the concert was to end with a dance! I pointed out that we could not as K.D.s have any such affair take place under our auspices, and after some discussion, asking for the room, & selling cigarettes was given up, but they voted for the rest. I objected, but my objections were put aside as 'old-fashioned'.<sup>108</sup>

That her horror at these decisions was based in her perception of the order's principles and goals is plainly conveyed by her reaction to hearing that the Junior Circle in Vancouver was going to raise funds by having a bridge circle: "It shows how little they realize what it means to be a 'Daughter of The King.' I shall do all I can to stop it."<sup>109</sup>

Women's organizations did not make their way to the Hope area until considerably later. Founded in Canada in 1897, the Women's Institute came to British Columbia in 1909, but the Hope and St.

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<sup>107</sup>SAH, 28 June 1906.

<sup>108</sup>SAH, 11 November 1910.

<sup>109</sup>SAH, 16 January 1911.

Elmo/Laidlaw chapters were not formed until 1930 and 1931, respectively.<sup>110</sup> While their original objective was to "promote household science," Alexandra Zacharias argues that an examination of the Institute's activities in B. C. shows "an organization as much concerned with social service as with the domestic arts," and which initiated projects responding to the specific needs of each community.<sup>111</sup> For the Hope area chapters, such projects included fundraising to build a community hall, setting up a small library, and providing dental work for local schoolchildren.<sup>112</sup> As she was nearing eighty years of age by the time the Women's Institute opened a local chapter, Susan Flood's involvement with the group would have been limited. However, she was apparently a "strong supporter," attending meetings despite the difficulties of getting around (she had to travel to either Hope or Laidlaw, both a few miles from her home)<sup>113</sup> and "shar[ing] her many talents with this worthy group of women."<sup>114</sup> Her motivations for doing so were seemingly less grounded in her religious ideals than were Susan Holmes', but for both women, the desire to serve the community in whatever ways were open to them was obviously strong.

This chapter has examined the ways in which these two women constructed their social identities through their relationships with others, both in the traditional "private sphere" of the family and in

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<sup>110</sup>Forging a New Hope, pp. 118-19.

<sup>111</sup>Alexandra Zacharias, "British Columbia Women's Institute in the Early Years: Time to Remember," in In Her Own Right, eds. Latham and Kess, pp. 55 & 62.

<sup>112</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 119.

<sup>113</sup>Eileen Bonson, 28 January 1996.

<sup>114</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 232.

the "public sphere" of the outside community. The elusiveness of the boundaries between these two spheres is readily apparent here--in many instances, aspects of "community service" regularly extended into "the home." These relationships, and the "identities" that emerged from them, were also an integral part of how the women viewed themselves as individuals, or their self-images.

## CHAPTER SIX: SELF-IMAGES AND SELF-REPRESENTATIONS

We believe that beneath, and intimately connected to, the outward signs of identity--national, racial, class, gender, familial, religious, economic, community--lies the "inner self," the sense of personal identity (or subjectivity) which can never be fully translated or transmitted to the outside world, or perhaps indeed to the individual consciousness itself. Nevertheless, individuals engage continually in a process of self-definition, both for themselves and for others. This chapter will attempt to illuminate the ways in which Susan Holmes and Susan Flood constructed their self-images, or personal identities. In one sense, this could be construed as an examination of the "private" self or life, but this cannot, of course, be understood as severed from the "public" persona. Indeed, almost more than anything else, the process involves considering how they wished to be perceived (which may or may not have coincided with how they perceived themselves), how they presented and/or represented themselves both to themselves and to others.<sup>1</sup> The private and public selves thus have a mutually contingent relationship--at least to some extent, others see you as you see (or present) yourself, and you see yourself as others see (or represent) you.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The necessity for this process may, of course, only be attributable to the fact that we have no access to that part of their experience which has not been represented in some way to the outside world.

<sup>2</sup>Certainly, it is much more complex than this simplification, as for example when individuals present a characteristic (bravery, compassion) they do not feel, and



There is therefore also some connection between their self-representations and how these women have been represented by others, and these external views and perceptions are components of their identities as well. Large portions of their individual, personal identities are both linked to and comprised of all the previously discussed aspects of their lives and experiences. Their own definitions of self might not have gone beyond the social/demographic markers commonly used to define individuals, but this would probably have been because they, like most other people, were not accustomed to overt self-definition in the first place. Yet it is evident that they did believe, at least implicitly, that who they were was tied to their place in their families of origin and of creation (in both emotional and economic functions), and to their place in the community. These are the aspects of self-image that are most easily apprehended; this chapter deals with facets of self-expression which may be more opaque (though certainly none are transparent). Therefore it presents a "reading" of their lives perhaps more speculative than has been the case in the discussion to this point. In particular for Susan Suckley Flood, who left few of her own words, a good deal more must be inferred in order to get at even a minimal approximation of the "interior" factors that helped to shape her self-definition. Still, although the "silences" needing "decoding" may seem more of a problem in her case, Susan Holmes' much vaster written autobiographical material

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know themselves to be "living a lie." However, such (self) deception too becomes in some sense part of "who they are."

also contains many silences in important areas, and these too must be considered.

This chapter will discuss some of these more interior aspects and what they may reveal about how these women viewed themselves, and how they presented this view to the outside world. Specifically, it will look at expressions of their religious or spiritual selves, "artistic" expressions of identity, their views of themselves as revealed in instances of self-assertion, such as critiques of others and reflections on their lives, and the influences they had on others. The perceptions of these others will also be considered as indicators of the women's own self-assessment and self-development.

### **Religious/Spiritual Identity**

Religion was a strong defining influence for both women, although they differed in their relationship to their churches, and thus in their roles within the religious framework. The importance of religious identity to each is hardly surprising, given the ideological connection between "serious" Christianity and the middle-classes in nineteenth-century English-speaking nations. In particular, women were supposed to be "more susceptible to religion" and were therefore held more stringently to its moral code.<sup>3</sup> Of the "four cardinal virtues" in the "cult of true womanhood," "religion or piety was the core of woman's virtue, the source of her strength."<sup>4</sup> The ethic represented by this moral code was patently Protestant; however, the expression of religious

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<sup>3</sup>Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup>Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," p. 152.

feelings of Catholic women such as Susan Flood were probably more akin to those of their Protestant sisters than either would care to admit.

Susan Holmes' role as a minister's wife and *de facto* "missionary" has already been touched upon. Certainly, the religious character of her personality was reinforced by her marriage to David Holmes, but it was not solely attributable to this connection. Her strong religious convictions obviously predated her marriage (it is hard to imagine her marrying a man outside the Church of England, as Susan Flood did a non-Catholic), and, as we have seen, her own ever-increasing piety led to her puzzlement in later life regarding what she perceived as David's diminishing interest in the church. Throughout her life she engaged in the characteristically Victorian exercise of the "struggle for the better self," often articulated through musings on New Year's Eves and birthdays.<sup>5</sup> A fairly early example of the former illustrates her perception of this struggle:

There is tonight a brilliant gathering at the finest house in the place for the purpose of dancing the old year out & the new one in. In the Church there will be prayers while the last hours of the Year are ebbing, prayers for Mercies past for sins forgiven for strength to bear the trials & troubles that may be coming, at which of these places will there be found the greater number. Ah! easily said, the Ball room, poor erring moths that we are prefer[r]ing the dazzling light which will destroy us to resisting the temptation, and being saved. And will it be always so? Shall we never be able to choose that which is the best for our souls?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup>SAH, 31 December 1868.

While "occasional amusement," she continued, was "necessary," she felt that "constant pleasure indulged in" served to make one unfit for performance of religious duties. Alluding to some unspecified personal temptations, she finished her New Year's thoughts by commenting that "to be always rushing from one thing to another as is often the case is very very hurtful and none have found it more so than she who writes this."<sup>7</sup>

Susan was apparently equally prone to discussions on points of doctrine and Christian teachings with her friends and family. While she was teaching in Yale, a "homily" on fasting (given by David Holmes) provoked a heated argument between Susan and her cousin Nellie McKay. According to Susan, Nellie thought that fasting was a "folly," and not part of Christ's teachings, while Susan herself argued that this was "certainly a mistake" and quoted the gospel of Matthew to support her point. Her words on this matter indicate that the strictness she applied to the observance of the Sabbath and other religious periods was not an attitude developed later in life. Abstinence and not "taking part in idle amusements during Lent" were, she felt, small sacrifices to make in preparation for "another life." Furthermore, such actions carried the benefit of setting a good example, and "the example of even one consistent Christian is not without good, if we could always remember this, and feel what an amount of influence either for good or ill, we are constantly exerting on those around us, and try and to [sic] use this influence

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<sup>7</sup>ibid.

for their good, we should be much happier ourselves, and help to make others so. May this be my desire and effort for the future."<sup>8</sup>

However, Susan's strictness in these areas was not accompanied by any rigidity of intellect. At the same time as she evinced a "vital religious motivation" behind her own desire for learning,<sup>9</sup> at all times clearly tying the pursuit of knowledge and creativity back to her belief in God, she also did not feel that there was any need to restrict the kinds of knowledge to be sought. Both of these inclinations are illustrated in a long passage she wrote in January 1871. (In this particular case, she was speaking about her interest in the meaning of dreams, an interest I will come back to later.) Responding to an imagined challenge as to what "good" could come of certain types of knowledge, she asked: "What is the use of any knowledge? . . . If there are things to be learned and God gives us minds to find it out--why should we not try to do so--of course always with our reverence to the Creator." To those who denounced students of such subjects as superstitious, she replied:

These--I can't think half so superstitious as those who in face of all the researches and enlightenments of this age, will believe in nothing but what they were taught as children. As I said before Had all our best thinkers and most scientific Men if Bacon, John Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, with hundred[s] of others [had] been satisfied to stifle the thoughts that came unbidden into there [sic] minds, thinking it wrong to pry into things that have not been revealed, where now wd. be the knowledge we possess on the

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<sup>8</sup>SAH, 2 March 1870.

<sup>9</sup>Selles-Roney, in "A Canadian Girl at Cheltenham," p. 94, claims that such a motivation was central to the "quest for advanced learning" of many nineteenth-century women.

Subjects the[y] taught?<sup>10</sup>

She even suggested that such censurers were often hypocrites, "living lives as irreligious as is possible to be conceived, carrying [sic] for nothing but the daily pleasures and cares of the present day, and ridiculing into the bargain those who are giving their time & labour to the improvement of those around them."<sup>11</sup> Thus, in insisting that people need not "shrink from studies which might endanger their religious principles & faith," she showed that, however principled she might be with regards to religious observation, she was hardly doctrinaire. Her strong religious beliefs existed alongside a scientific curiosity also typical for her time.

Although her musings generally became shorter as the years went by, Susan Holmes continued her practice of expressing both New Year's thoughts and opinions on church matters throughout her life. Often, the two went hand in hand. She particularly enjoyed attending the New Year's Eve service, which she considered "a better way to spend the last hours of the old year than in dancing it out as used to be the custom, & no doubt still is in many places."<sup>12</sup> She was critical of Mr. Leakey, the local clergyman, when the midnight service was discontinued, feeling that this was a direct result of his having instituted the celebration of Holy Communion at this service. Those who were not confirmed would leave the service, "some going out & talking & laughing outside which disturbed the

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<sup>10</sup>SAH, 10 January 1871.

<sup>11</sup>ibid.

<sup>12</sup>SAH, 31 December 1890.

devotions of those inside--so by degrees every year more & more have dropped. . . & this year there is no service to go to."<sup>13</sup> This had only reinforced what she saw as a sorry trend, wherein parties were "of more attraction to the young people" than the watchnight service, a situation she attributed to the lack of influence the clergymen had on their congregations. She lamented, "It is hard for mothers, when they have so little help from the clergy."<sup>14</sup> For her part, she continued her frequent practice of holding her "own little service," staying up after the other members of her family were in bed to pray, consider her blessings, and resolve to spend the coming year "as tho it is my last on earth."<sup>15</sup>

Aside from the difference in their religions themselves, there were numerous ways in which Susan Flood's relationship to her church differed from that of Susan Holmes. First of all, she was a convert, not a member of a longstanding church family, and a "halfbreed" convert at that. The attitude of representatives of the Catholic Church towards her would therefore most likely be considerably more paternalistic than what Susan Holmes would ever have experienced. While Susan Flood spent ten years amongst the nuns of St. Ann's and obviously learned enough to be confirmed and considered a good Catholic, that would have been the extent of her Catholic education. There was no resident priest in Hope throughout the first half of her life there (the Catholic church in Hope was consecrated in 1913), the "spiritual needs" of the area's Catholic

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<sup>13</sup>SAH, 31 December 1906.

<sup>14</sup>SAH, 31 December 1903.

<sup>15</sup>SAH, 1 January 1898.

residents being looked after by the Oblate Fathers who occasionally came up from Mission.<sup>16</sup> Even after the church was built, Susan was not always able to attend masses regularly, for it was several miles away from her home, and finding transportation was sometimes tricky, especially as she got older and became lame. In addition, not only was her husband not the equivalent of a clergyman, but he was also not even a Catholic at all. There was no reinforcing of her religious persuasions with her marriage. Her religious knowledge cannot possibly have even approached that of Susan Holmes.

Nevertheless, during her years in the convent, those few journal entries Susan Suckley made were perhaps understandably focused on her attendance at masses, vespers, and various ceremonies. Like Susan Holmes, she too frequently mentioned the speakers and subjects of the sermons and addresses she heard. Her entry on Palm Sunday in 1878 expressed sentiments similar to those voiced by the latter in her New Year's Eve thoughts:

My thoughts are wandering far, if I could only live in spirit like the Saints. Certain it is that happiness in this world come[s] only from God. Still I often wish for its false charms how weak is human nature. Next Palm Sunday where will I be I hope in a manner promoting the love of God.<sup>17</sup>

In citing her own imperfections and desire for a more spiritual life, Susan may have just been responding to the environment in which she lived and the expectations of those in charge of her, but it also seems more than likely that such expressions of religious passion were deeply felt. There is ample evidence of the importance to her

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<sup>16</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup>Susan Suckley's "Pacific Diary," 15 March 1878, Flood family papers.



of her Catholic faith, despite the fact that she apparently spoke little of it to her family.<sup>18</sup>

Such evidence can be found first in the fact that the bulk of the mementos that Susan Flood kept throughout her life arise from the period in which her connection to the church was strongest, the years at St. Ann's. This was probably partly due to her sense of familial attachment to the convent, but the collection of religious cards and pictures, catechisms, and newspaper clippings about various groups of Sisters and Fathers suggests something more than a purely sentimental interest.

Of even greater import were Susan's actions upon her marriage and the birth of her children. While it might be conceivable that she converted to Catholicism because such an act would make her even more at home in the environment in which she found herself in her mid-teenage years, such a simple interpretation would probably entail her similar actions when she knew she was going to live in yet another different environment for the rest of her life. To marry a man outside one's faith, and to maintain that faith, would have been daunting enough for one of strong convictions, let alone for one who was merely pragmatic in her beliefs. A woman at this time had no legal rights regarding the faith in which her children would be brought up.<sup>19</sup> Susan's insistence that her children be raised as

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<sup>18</sup>Eileen Bonson, 28 January 1996. At least, she offered little instruction to her grandchildren, whose non-Catholic mother could not have been expected to provide it, and who also seldom had the benefit of Catholic services. She probably spent more time on the religious education of her two children, and her daughter Leila seems to have had a strong Catholic identity.

<sup>19</sup>Clara Brett Martin, "Legal Status of Women in the Provinces of the Dominion of Canada. (Except the Province of Quebec)," in Women of Canada: Their Life and Work, compiled by the National Council of Women of Canada (Ottawa, 1900), cited in The

Catholics, despite the impediments to such an upbringing inherent in the circumstances in which she found herself, indicated how much importance she placed on her own faith. Four days after her son Charles was born, she had him baptized by a visiting Oblate Father; although Charles himself was not particularly religious, he kept the written certification of this event as an important document indicating that he should be buried as a Roman Catholic, according to his mother's wishes.<sup>20</sup> The Catholic baptism of his own children was also undertaken because it was important to their grandmother.

The fact that Susan Flood apparently did not discuss her religious feelings much with her family or others could be explained partly by a likely sense of inadequacy with regards to the depth of her knowledge and partly by a desire to minimize any friction that might be caused in her marriage due to her being of a different faith than her husband. In his congratulatory note to Susan on her marriage, W. F. Tolmie (himself an Anglican) had admonished her: "On religious matters above all we are each and all of us, (here but for a short time, at the longest) entitled to freedom of opinion. To do right should be our great aim--'Bout forms of faith, let bigots disagree. But all mankind's concern is Charity."<sup>21</sup> Such advice from a figure she associated with her father would not be ignored, and her own experience of having lived among people of differing ways and

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Proper Sphere, eds. Cook and Mitchinson, p. 94: "Nor will any contract before marriage that the children shall be brought up in a faith other than that of the father's be binding upon the intended husband."

<sup>20</sup>Certification of E. C. Chirouse, O.M.I., 30 November 1882, Flood family papers. Ironically, through an odd combination of circumstances, Charles failed to fulfil this wish.

<sup>21</sup>Letter from W. F. Tolmie to Susan Suckley Flood, no date, Flood family papers.

beliefs would surely have impressed upon her the importance of maintaining harmony in daily life--without sacrificing her beliefs.

Another consideration is the question of whether or not Susan Flood maintained any aspects of traditional Indian spirituality. The researchers of a life history project engaged in interviewing four contemporary mixed-blood women from the Fraser Valley (one from Hope and belonging to a family Susan would have known well) concluded that all had "syncretistic attitudes consistent with the Indian belief that it is possible to maintain membership in religions of differing ritual and iconographic persuasions," despite having no specific recollections of witnessing "Indian ceremonies" when they were young.<sup>22</sup> There have been claims that aspects of Catholicism, in particular, were fairly easily and commonly integrated with existing frameworks of belief.<sup>23</sup> For instance, the personal spirits that were the most important elements of Coast Salish spiritual life<sup>24</sup> could be perceived as roughly equivalent to saints and angels. The Interior Salish woman Mourning Dove claimed: "My people have always believed that all religions and rituals lead to a common spiritual result, and they saw no conflict among these different approaches."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Marilyn Ravicz, Diane Battung, and Laura Buker, "Rainbow Women of the Fraser Valley: Lifesongs Through the Generations," in Not Just Pin Money, eds. Latham and Pazdro, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup>See Laura Peers, "'The Guardian of All': Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary," in Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History, eds. Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996), p. 291.

<sup>24</sup>Hermann Haeberlin and Erna Gunther, The Indians of Puget Sound (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1930), p. 67.

<sup>25</sup>Mourning Dove, A Salishan Autobiography, p. 142. Mourning Dove went to a Catholic mission school. She also noted that her mother was both more devoutly Catholic and more persistent in traditional ways than her father (p. 24).

Given the facts of her conversion and then subsequent marriage to someone outside her new faith, it is certainly possible that Susan Flood did not perceive strong, uncrossable divisions among religions. The conversion to Catholicism may indeed have marked the taking on of a religion that appeared to have more common points with other spiritual ideas she may have had contact with as a child. Although we know that she was removed from her mother's family for at least some of her developmental years, she also definitely lived among--or had some contact with--them for some of that time. While her mother's spiritual leanings are unknown, her grandfather was certainly entirely traditional. After being confined to the Port Madison reserve, Cuo-dis-kid's nearest neighbour was apparently a Suquamish shaman named Kilshebetsut. The author of a 1950 magazine article concerned with these two speculated that they were located in this proximity due to their perceived combined ability to "ward off the giants and the dwarfs," the dangerous "spooks" of stories told by the elders.<sup>26</sup> If Susan spent any time at all at Port Madison, she would have heard at least some of these stories and had some contact with Kilshebetsut. Even if these influences had been pushed far back in her consciousness during her time with the Sisters, when she settled in Fort Hope she again became part of an environment in which many traditional native practices (such as medicine) were still a part of life for many.

It is hard to ascertain to what extent Susan passed on any of her own knowledge or beliefs in this area. Apparently she did not

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<sup>26</sup>Bertelson, "The Land of Spooks."

speak of it to any great extent to her grandchildren, at least not so that they remembered any of it.<sup>27</sup> However, Morley Gillander recalled her telling stories of her early life when he (as a child of eight) stayed with the Floods upon his family's arrival in the area in 1919. He believed that it was "by her living example [that] I learned respect for and knowledge of Indian culture" and that she had "implanted my great interest in early British Columbia history and my introduction to the great wisdom contained in Indian philosophy."<sup>28</sup> With her own children, when she was still a young woman, she must have offered similar insights into her early life. Her son Charles' connection to this side of his past might be seen in his interest in the history of his Indian relatives, in his affinity for "the bush," and, specifically, in his abiding curiosity regarding certain phenomena such as the Sasquatch.

Although his approach to this subject was definitely that of a white man and he professed himself to have been a non-believer,<sup>29</sup> Charles' own claimed encounter in 1915 with a large, hairy creature may have been interpreted the way it was partly because of his exposure to the knowledge presented to him by his mother. To the end of his life, he maintained a fascination with the subject. Normally rather shy and reticent, he allowed himself to be interviewed about his experience in 1957. He even provided a statutory declaration swearing to what he had seen: "a large, light-

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<sup>27</sup>Her granddaughter Eileen Bonson speaks of her regrets in this regard.

<sup>28</sup>Morley Gillander, written statement submitted to the Ross Committee, for the U. S. Federal Power Commission, Bellingham, Washington, 23 April 1974; "The Skagit Saga", Flood family papers.

<sup>29</sup>Gillander, "The Skagit Saga," Flood family papers.

brown creature about eight feet high, standing on its hind legs pulling berry bushes with one hand or paw towards him and putting berries in his mouth with the other hand, or paw," a "strange creature" which "looked more like a human being" than a bear.<sup>30</sup> His description is fairly typical of white reports in that it assumes a basic incredulity, but his susceptibility to the experience may have been partly influenced by residual beliefs imparted by his mother.

Interestingly, Susan Holmes was also not unconcerned with what might be termed "the supernatural." Indeed, her recurrent preoccupation with the meaning of dreams, and particularly dreams as presentiments, carried an overtone that could almost be related to spiritualism, although she would probably have been horrified at such a suggestion. Her most sustained discussion of this phenomenon followed her 1871 meditation on the nature of knowledge and learning. She began by admitting:

It may be, as many of my friends have told me, great foolishness on my part, thinking any thing about dreams, tho' having had many which bear reference to the future, and more than this to things taking place at the present time but at a distance--and of which I had at the time no knowledge

--these instances led her to wonder "what put these dreams into our head."<sup>31</sup>

Her own theory on the subject was that:

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<sup>30</sup>In John Greene, On the Track of the Sasquatch, Book Two (Harrison Hot Springs: Cheam Publishing Ltd., 1980), p. 19.

<sup>31</sup>SAH, 10 January 1871. There are two versions of Susan's 1871 journal, only one of which contained these discussions and descriptions of dreams. Her family referred to this as her "Dream Book."

during this time [sleep] the mind is to some extent a free agent, and at liberty to as it were spread it self out, radiate so to speak--expand and contract in a moment at the awakening of the person. To use a very low & weak simile, something in the way a sea anemone expands itself while left along [alone] and suddenly closes again with the least touch.<sup>32</sup>

The rest of her explanation was lost, as the next page of the journal was cut out. The last pages of the volume in which this passage is found contain descriptions of several dreams Susan had during the years 1869-1871. She said very little about the subject of dreams during the rest of her life, but it was evidently something she still thought about from time to time. In 1904, she mentioned writing and sending to a magazine an article on "mind pictures," a term she did not explain, but which could easily have referred to dreams or some similar phenomenon.<sup>33</sup> Six years later, she was reminded of a dream she had had fifty years earlier:

There was a very peculiar appearance round the sun this evening about 9 o'clock. There were long rays of light glittering [?] from it to the horizon & radiating upwards also. It reminded me of a dream I once had at Yale, but have never actually seen until yesterday.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>ibid.

<sup>33</sup>SAH, 2 March 1904.

<sup>34</sup>SAH, 21 July 1910. The original dream may have been one occurring September 25, 1869 and described thus in the Dream Book:

Dreamed that I and several others were out side some some [sic] house when I noticed a very peculiar appearance in the sky, and a little after saw what I supposed to be the new moon and remarked the fact to Mrs. McKay my cousin, who replied that it couldn't be the moon, as it was in an opposite direction from where it rose. As we were looking at this strange phenomenon it suddenly began moving, forming a half circle, & back again gradually increasing in fastness . . . the same thing appeared again, but in another part of the Heavens, and larger, like the moon of a week old, this moved also but not as fast as the former and again dis-appeared, the sky

Some dreams took longer than others to be realized in real life!

### **Artistic/Literary Constructions of the Self**

Susan Holmes' journals provide the main source of information about her life and they thus remain as a major piece of evidence regarding how she constructed and presented her self-image. No such sustained evidence exists for Susan Flood. The very existence of such documents in one case and not in the other may be telling in itself, for there is some suggestion that the use of the diary form was a sign of class and race, that it was an activity which became "associated with gentility" at the end of the nineteenth-century, such that an "ideology of 'refinement' shaped the authorship in terms of class and race as well as gender."<sup>35</sup> But this was not the sole reason for the difference. While the "basic requirements" of literacy and some leisure time were met in the cases of both women (with domestic help, Susan Holmes may have had more of the latter in later life, but she appears to have had relatively little in her younger years), the main difference between the two in this regard was that Susan Holmes perceived herself as a writer whereas Susan Flood did not see herself in that way, even though she too did do some writing. This self-perception was in its own way as influential on the way Susan Holmes lived her life as was her perception of her religious identity, although she would certainly have considered it subordinate to the latter.

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all the time presenting a very strange appearance, presently our looks were directed to a particular spot where the clouds were very dark and wild looking and suddenly there appeared a hand, in the midst of the clouds, a beautiful hand it seemed, in a little this too gradually vanished, and I awoke.

<sup>35</sup>Culley, ed., A Day at a Time, p. 4.



Margo Culley notes that nineteenth-century diarists were more apt to view their writing as that of "family and community historians" rather than as the record of their "individual consciousness," although this does not mean that there is no record present whatsoever of such consciousness.<sup>36</sup> Certainly, Susan Holmes' journals seem to have fit into this pattern, as she dwelt very little on her personal "feelings" as such (as opposed to her more detached opinions) and spent a good deal of time delineating who was doing what around her. Even in the earliest journals, which are generally much more descriptive than the later ones--likely indicating both the material changes that took place in her life and the more interior changes from the young woman newly and enthusiastically articulating her thoughts on the world around her to the older and "wiser" woman perhaps somewhat more jaded in her ideas about that world--she did not write anywhere near as emotionally as did her sister Jessie.

Jessie Nagle's long passages dealing with fiancé Willie Berkeley's financial troubles, and more particularly their fallout on her engagement to him, clearly convey the ups and downs of her emotional state during this difficult time: her disappointment and "wretchedness" due to her dashed hopes, her confusion because of Willie's behaviour, her reluctant acceptance of her parents' perspective, her anger and resentment at the meddling of other people in her affairs. Every development in the story, and her own emotional reaction to each, is described in detail. At times, her

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<sup>36</sup>ibid., pp. 4 & 7.

delineation of events verges on the melodramatic, as when she evoked one stormy encounter with Willie:

Willie was here this afternoon & I was not ready to see him and was rather saucy I think & said if he wished to see me he must go into the Drawing-room . . . We nearly had a quarrel or should have had I think if I had not kept quiet . . . he had asked me if Philip had said anything to me about our engagement and so after some hesitation I told him that he had . . . he was annoyed and then he asked if I wished him to do so and when I said nothing he jumped up and said if I wished it broken off I had only to say the word and then walked up & down the room abusing Philip for giving me such advice. I said nothing until he was a little cooler and then said, You fiery creature come to me, he came saying he was not so at all.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to her sister, Susan wrote sparingly and calmly about her own foundering engagement at around the same time. Whether or not her mind was occupied with this situation is impossible to tell from her journal entries, which succinctly record each particular event, such as letters sent and received and their essential content, but never mention either her fiancé or her feelings about him at any point in-between. However, her recording of several dreams involving Algy Hill during this time and shortly after indicated that she must have suffered considerable angst with regards to her decisions in the matter. Even before she had broken off with him (but after she had begun thinking about such an eventuality), she dreamed that he had sent her a letter "complaining of my treatment of himself" and then that she had seen him and

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<sup>37</sup>Jessie Nagle, 18 June 1870.

"poor fellow he looked wretchedly ill and changed."<sup>38</sup> In the autumn following their break-up, she dreamed that she had heard of his death and that she "fancied they were all blaming me saying he had died from disappointment."<sup>39</sup> Such descriptions provide evidence that Susan had feelings of responsibility and guilt that certainly did not find their way into her journal entries.

The relative lack of emotional expression in Susan's journals may be partly due to her having a more reserved personality than her sister; however, it could just as easily be the case that Jessie's personality may be perceived as more emotional simply because of the way she wrote. Susan may have been more reticent about her feelings in her journals because she had other written outlets for them--her stories, poems, and dream descriptions. The journals themselves likely were seen to have a different purpose, the record-keeping one mentioned earlier--in this case, her feelings might have been considered not only potentially embarrassing, but also irrelevant.

Culley points out that

the presence of a sense of audience . . . has a crucial influence over what is said and how it is said. Friend, lover, mother, God, a future self--whatever role the audience assumes for the writer--that presence becomes a powerful 'thou' to the 'I' of the diarist. It shapes the selection and arrangement of detail within the journal and determines more than anything else the kind of self-construction the diarist presents.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>SAH, "Dream Book", 5 October 1869.

<sup>39</sup>ibid., 31 October 1870.

<sup>40</sup>Culley, A Day at a Time, pp. 11-12.

Did Susan write her journals with a readership besides herself in mind? In general, it would seem that she did so, although it is not obvious who would have comprised that audience. Undoubtedly, she hinted at such an outside audience at many points, though it seems her attitude towards these potential readers underwent some changes over the years.

The first time Susan contemplated the possibility of outside eyes reading her words, it seems to have been a surprising afterthought. She had just been amusing herself with a tongue-in-cheek lamentation on how old she was getting at twenty-five when she suddenly stopped short and exclaimed: "I hope nobody will ever get hold of this. What a great goose, they will think me, and very justly so for writing such nonsense."<sup>41</sup> This may indeed have been the first time she had considered such a possibility, and while she said that she hoped no one would read her words, her immediate action was to provide an editorial comment to anyone who *might* happen to do so, to the effect that in reality she was a much more sensible person than her previous words might have indicated. As this supremely sensible person was constantly in the forefront throughout all of her journals, it seems safe to say that this was the self-image she decided (perhaps beginning at this point, when the idea of a future audience may have first occurred to her) to present as the narrator of her journals. A more "frivolous" Susan certainly peered out from behind this one from time to time, but this was clearly the self-construction she wished to offer to posterity.

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<sup>41</sup>SAH, 9 May 1865.

It is possible that the exact purpose Susan saw for her diaries also shifted over time. The early diaries are more preoccupied with public events and people than are the later ones. Late in 1867 she complained, "After all there seems but little use of keeping a Diary in these times or rather in this place, there is really nothing to put down & what there is, is now [sic] worth remembering."<sup>42</sup> This may signify that she originally viewed her role as that of observer and recorder of her time and place, but felt thwarted by what she saw as the inconsequentiality of that time and place. Her later journals did move away from this kind of commentary (although never entirely, as events such as the Russo-Japanese War, the San Francisco earthquake, and the Klondike Gold Rush--and the local effects of all these--continued to intrude in her narrative) towards more of an emphasis on her family and friends and their activities. Her implied audience may therefore have shifted from a more public one to one composed of her future descendants.

Whoever this audience consisted of, Susan did keep it in mind. This is indicated in a number of ways: through self-censorship (pages cut out), through references to, and corrections of, out-of-place entries, through comments on her shame at having neglected the journal. She even addressed her audience directly at one point, in a rather abrupt departure from her more usual indirect style:

[If] in time to come anyone should read this no doubt they would wonder at the erratical [sic] style of writing! So for their information I will state that I am writing in bed, with a book for a desk. The said desk keeps slipping to one side or

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<sup>42</sup>SAH, 18 December 1867.

the other necessitating a change in the direction of the writing. I hope this explanation is satisfactory to my sometime reader!<sup>43</sup>

This passage signifies Susan's acceptance, and indeed expectation, that her words would at some point be read by someone other than herself. Her decision that an explanation was necessary shows that she still felt a need to correct what she thought might be a negative image of herself--and she would certainly not have wanted to be perceived as "erratic." Still, the tone of the passage implies that she did not always take herself as seriously as much of her commentary on various subjects might have suggested.

The presence of evidence that Susan Holmes wrote for an outside audience does not, of course, preclude the possibility that she also wrote for herself. Indeed, it is clear that her journals did represent a "retrospective process of self-discovery" for her, a vehicle for reflexivity or reflection on her life.<sup>44</sup> There is a sense in which "autobiographical writing presupposes reflection on an inner world of experience made conscious; it relates *experienced reality*."<sup>45</sup> Susan's own use of her journals for this purpose is illuminated on many occasions. Her New Year's Eve thoughts were a part of this, as were her birthday reflections, both constituting a regular pattern of self-assessment. Birthdays were a time to consider not only the time that had passed and how it had been spent, wisely or poorly, but also the need to improve in the time

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<sup>43</sup>SAH, 7 March 1877.

<sup>44</sup>Geraldine Joncich Clifford, "History as Experience: The Uses of Personal History Documents in the History of Education," History of Education 7, no. 3 (October 1978): 187.

<sup>45</sup>*ibid.*, p. 192.

that was left, the inevitability of death, and the aging process itself. On the occasion of her fiftieth birthday, Susan expressed surprise followed by humility: "I can scarce realize that I am that old, tho' no doubt I look it--old enough to be much better than I am, may our Heavenly Father enable me to spend the rest of the time that I have to live better than I have hitherto done & more in his service."<sup>46</sup> A few years later, she commented, "Another Birthday & another year nearer the end of my journey."<sup>47</sup> This particular mood was reinforced the next day when Susan read a newspaper account of her brother Harry's death in California. She was "shocked and grieved," particularly given the means of her discovering this news, but as usual comforted herself that Harry was now better off. Her final words were, "one by one we drop out of the ranks & the world goes on just the same and so it will be when I am gone."<sup>48</sup>

Susan's contemplations on her life were much lighter when she reached sixty-four. On that day, she wrote:

I never thought I should reach this age! I used to think if I lived to be 50, I would be an old woman, but I don't feel so very old even at 64! I can't run up the stairs as fast as I once could! but I think my heart is as young as ever!<sup>49</sup>

This greater degree of satisfaction with her life emerged more in her later reflections, such as those prompted by an article on "Victoria in the early days" in which the old Nagle house was "pointed out." This account took her "back to days of yore when I

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<sup>46</sup>SAH, 5 May 1890.

<sup>47</sup>SAH, 5 May 1898.

<sup>48</sup>SAH, 6-7 May 1899.

<sup>49</sup>SAH, 5 May 1904.

was a young girl just beginning, & entering on an untried world." Looking back on her "70 years of 'ups and downs'" with that girl in mind, but from the vantage point of the older woman, she saw "many mistakes & many failures," but also "very many blessings" and overall a sense of confidence that her life had not "all been lived in vain," for she had succeeded both as a mother and as a servant of God--the two connected duties most important to her.<sup>50</sup>

Susan's sense of her own "growth in wisdom" can also be charted through her discussions of her children's activities and attitudes. Her disappointment with some of the "young people's" actions was frequently couched in terms of their lack of understanding for the deeper import of the principles upon which she objected to these actions. While she acknowledged that it was probably the case that people would always do things they might later wish had been done differently "no matter how long we live," she clearly felt that age gave them an advantage in insight in that they could more easily recognize "the uncertainty of life." This was apparently an insight that came with age and experience together and not necessarily with experience alone, for while she referred to "close calls" that both she and Isabel had had during one year, she insisted that "the young do not, indeed cannot feel this like one of my age."<sup>51</sup> Thus, her belief in an increase or improvement with age in knowledge and understanding became a cornerstone of the self reflected in the pages of her diaries as she grew older.

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<sup>50</sup>SAH, 19 September 1910.

<sup>51</sup>SAH, 5 May 1903.



It seems that it was not until Susan was close to sixty that she began a serious attempt to have some of her other writings published. Since it was only at that time that her younger children had reached their teenage years, this is not surprising. She also seems to have had more time for the writing itself, even when David was away, probably because her children were then able to shoulder their share of the household work. Her first reference to her ambitions in this direction came in 1897, when she mentioned two stories she intended to send to a magazine. After recording this decision, she exhorted herself: "If I never try I shall never succeed! And I do wish that I could make something with my pen."<sup>52</sup> Over the next several years, she occasionally referred to working on or having sent another piece off somewhere, and it is believed that at least some of these were published, though thus far they have proven impossible to trace. She did not likely make much money with her pen but, given that she continued her writing, she evidently did gain from it some sense of satisfaction, of fulfillment of an early self-image that she had never given up.

Susan's identity as a writer was also acknowledged by others. On her death, an "appreciation" published in a local newspaper contained the following paragraph:

Of no small literary ability, Mrs. Holmes's name was well known at one time in the New York papers and she wrote several songs that were set to music. It was her inspiring belief in others that occasioned several young writers to develop their faculties in

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<sup>52</sup>SAH, 17 February 1897.

this line, and amongst these was Robert Service.<sup>53</sup> Susan's grandson believes that the story that she knew and encouraged Robert Service in his writings was probably correct. Service had come to the Cowichan Valley in the 1890s to work in the bank at Duncan, and later knew Isabel in Dawson City.<sup>54</sup> An acquaintance with Susan was more than likely, even more so as she would have been known locally as someone who wrote. Certainly, her energy and perseverance would in themselves have been inspiring.

The bulk of Susan's writing took the form of children's stories. Upon her death, her family discovered dozens, if not hundreds, of these, neatly written-out, folded and labelled. Unfortunately, relatively few survive now. Those that do show that she used elements of her own early experience in the telling of her tales--an example is the story "Mrs. Waddle 'Round the Corner," in which the setting was drawn from Susan's reminiscences of the San Francisco neighbourhood where she had lived as a teenager.<sup>55</sup> Her propensity for writing children's stories may be explained partly by the times in which she lived. Certainly, children's literature, with its presumptive connection to the vocation of mothering, was probably one of the most accepted genres for women writers. A more positive impetus may have been her own experience, as she had probably had the inspiration for many stories when her own children

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<sup>53</sup>Hilda G. Howard ("H. Glynn-Ward"), "Mrs. Holmes, of Duncan: An Appreciation," date and newspaper unknown, Holmes family papers.

<sup>54</sup>Don Roberts, 1 May 1996.

<sup>55</sup>"Mrs. Waddle 'Round the Corner'" is in the possession of Don and Phyllis Roberts.

were young--they may have started off in oral form, as bedtime stories perhaps. Writing predominantly children's stories may have been merely a practical response to the material she already had on hand.

Although these children's stories comprised the major portion of Susan Holmes' writings, she did try her hand at other forms. Some of these she at least submitted for possible publication, for example, her aforementioned article on "mind pictures." Several of her poems have survived as well. For the most part, these are written in a typically sentimental Victorian style, covering themes such as parting from friends and loved ones, pastoral beauty, and dying young. The one poem Susan specifically mentioned having sent to a publisher varies somewhat from the others. This poem is entitled "Keep Back the Dogs of War"; the version that still exists was obviously a working copy, and large sections of it are illegible. It represents an attempt to deal with more broad-ranging issues, while reflecting a complex attitude. Its essential message is a plea for an end to war (it may have been written during the Boer War) based on a mother's sensibilities and on a belief that God willed such an end, but it also maintains a sense of patriotic duty and of submission to this duty. Though its imagery is fairly startling when contrasted with Susan's other poems ("Who comes thus swiftly oer the gory field And gazes on the slain with bleeding hands upraised"), the maternal emphasis ("He was so sweet my darling little child I nursed him on my knee . . . And now he must go! I

thought my heart was broken long ago") is still in keeping with the underlying theme of most of her writing.<sup>56</sup>

The theme of women's (and mothers' in particular) duty during wartime is also present in "Daughters of the Empire," the song Susan had copyrighted in 1918 and dedicated to the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), of which she was a member. The words of this song seem to indicate a bit of a shift in her thoughts on the matter of war:

Your country needs the help that you can give  
Uphold her honour, and the British flag,  
Stand up for her thro' good report or bad  
Cheer on her gallant sons, in khaki clad  
To die, if need be, or for her to live.<sup>57</sup>

The ambivalence apparent in "Keep Back the Dogs of War" seems to have disappeared in favour of a more clearcut patriotic attitude without misgivings; perhaps this change was a function of increasing age or of the First World War experience. What both poems do point to is a desire to engage with events in the outside world and to play a role in commenting on them, even while her life appeared to be fully taken up with the small world of her home and community.

Susan Flood left no such written evidence of her self-construction, yet there is no doubt that she did express herself by artistic means beyond the parameters of the simply domestic life. She did write poetry, and what survives of this exhibits the same

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<sup>56</sup>Poems are found at the back of SAH, 1867-1870, and at the back of Jessie Nagle's journal.

<sup>57</sup>"Daughters of the Empire," words and music by Susan Abercrombie Holmes, copyright 1918, Holmes family papers.

kind of Victorian sentimentality as do most of Susan Holmes' lines. Indeed, many of the themes are quite similar: "the death of a young friend," sadness at parting, anguish at abandonment, and the beauties of nature, with the addition of praise for an unnamed nun. As with the other Susan's poems, there is usually an overtone of religious feeling as well. However, Susan Flood's poetry writing seems to have been confined to her younger years, and there is no sign of any developing sophistication in her verses. She probably wrote, as did many young girls and women of the time, simply because it was an accepted means of alleviating dramatic youthful emotions. She did not by any means perceive herself as a "writer."

However, Susan Flood did express herself seriously through the arts of drawing, painting, and needlework. Given her circumstances, the inclusion of drawing lessons (at extra cost) in her program of studies at St. Ann's probably signified that there was some opinion that this was the direction in which her greatest talents lay. Furthermore, her artwork was something she continued on into her later life. Those around her clearly considered her to be an artist--it was in this aspect of her identity that my great-grandmother was first made known to me--and she obviously perceived herself in this way too. In her notebooks, long lists of the colours needed to obtain various tints indicate a fairly serious orientation to this occupation.<sup>58</sup> The sketches, drawings, and paintings that still exist were executed in pencil, charcoal, and watercolours. Their subjects are predominantly taken from nature: birds, squirrels, rabbits, individual flowers, and floral arrangements. Her choice of subject

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<sup>58</sup>Susan Suckley's "Pacific Diary," Flood family papers.

likely reflected the area of her greatest expertise, as her few portraits of people (all of children) do not show the same level of ability. This bent towards the themes of "nature" is interesting in light of her father's occupation, which must have been known to her, and fits with her love of working with plants in her daily life.

Susan Flood's needlework was also an extension of her creativity and artistic nature. The "excellence" of her cross-stitch tapestry was recognized in the convent, and a letter from Sister Mary Theodore implies that some of Susan's work made its way into the St. Ann's museum early in the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup> The table cover for which she won the prize in Seattle in 1880, vividly colourful even one hundred and twenty years after it was created, testifies to the skills of which she was undeniably proud.

The primary formats in which Susan Flood expressed herself artistically--watercolours and needlework--were in many ways emblematic of Victorian middle-class womanhood. Painting watercolours was one of the "accomplishments" that were the hallmark of a feminine education, and it has been claimed that "needlework was literally and symbolically the very essence of femininity for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century leisured classes."<sup>60</sup> (Indeed, most middle-class women were thought to have been "constantly sewing,"<sup>61</sup> an image reinforced in Susan Holmes' journals, where she on many occasions remarked that being too sick or tired to "work" gave her the opportunity to get more sewing done.

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<sup>59</sup>Letter from Sister Mary Theodore to Susan Flood, 14 May 1919, Flood family papers.

<sup>60</sup>Buss, Mapping Our Selves, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup>Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 387.

She made no specific mention of doing fancy work, though she undoubtedly did this as well; it was just not a major part of her artistic identity as it was for Susan Flood.) This inscription of a major facet of her identity into the middle-class feminine ideal was echoed in much of the minutiae that emerged from Susan Flood's earlier life. When I was first collecting the fragments from her life, these were the bits and pieces that I amusedly labelled "Victoriana": the calling cards and formal notes of invitation, sending pieces of wedding cake to friends and acquaintances, the fascination with riddles and word games, the lists of flowers with their significations.<sup>62</sup> Such things were obviously a part of Susan Holmes' life too (and she did not break with the tenets of Victorian womanhood in her choices of expressive modes either), but their significance in Susan Flood's life was in many ways much more crucial.

This was because such items represented, once again, that white, middle-class "respectability" Susan Suckley Flood knew her father had desired for her. They helped to fulfil the need to identify herself as a "proper" lady, a need that in her case was intensified by racial anxiety. Her early upbringing, in which she had been taken from her mother's sphere of influence, with the express design of ensuring that she become as little "Indian" as possible at the same time as she was denied any real contact with the "white" family she knew existed, must have created a profound conflict within her. She learned that it was necessary to aspire to be like this family, but

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<sup>62</sup>The "Symbolical Language of Flowers." See Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 374.

also that true acceptance from them would not be forthcoming. Clinging to some of the trappings of the ideal for white womanhood at the time she was growing up was perhaps one means of symbolically resolving the conflict within her own mind.

### **Self-Assertion and Self-Image**

Despite the existence of such conflicts, a strong, positive self-image emerges in the histories of both these women. It does so somewhat indirectly, especially for Susan Flood, but the evidence of a strong will, opinions, and personality are there for both. The development of these images is most apparent in the various ways in which each woman asserted herself throughout her life, often in the face of powerful normative forces.

For Susan Holmes, the church was by far the most important regulator of behaviour and self-image. The extent of her critiques of church representatives is therefore quite remarkable. Unlike her sister Jessie, who at various points described herself as ill-tempered, impatient, irritable, caustic, unamiable (none of which estimations of qualities seem to be borne out by an examination of what she actually did), lacking in confidence and dissatisfied with herself, Susan spent little energy on written self-abnegation. Her self-confidence manifested itself in numerous situations, such as in her defiant attitude towards the people of Yale who criticized her when she taught there. She neither overtly chastised nor praised herself. She did tend to downplay her talents: for example, upon hearing that she had won first prize in a "word contest"--a lot in Michigan valued at \$100.00--her only comment was, "If they had



sent the \$25.00 in cash I should have liked it better!"<sup>63</sup> However, the fact that she continued to apply these talents, fully expecting them to be recognized and appreciated in some way, points to a certain amount of security and confidence in her own abilities. Similarly, disagreements with others might disturb her, but did not usually sink her into any self-doubt, at least none that she recorded on paper. Her discussions of such instances were generally grounded in the firm belief that she was *right*.

Susan evidently felt herself qualified to have an opinion on most things going on around her, from the actions of her husband and children to the quality of performances in plays and other entertainments, and from the running of the organizations to which she belonged to the sermons and characters of the local clergy. In later years, much of her critical energy was directed towards the latter. Her critiques could take the form of simple comments on presentation, such as when a young visiting clergyman drew the following remark: "The Matter of the sermon was very good, but the young man has a very unfortunate delivery."<sup>64</sup> More and more, however, they voiced her sense of frustration with what she perceived as a deterioration in people's attitudes towards the observation of Christianity.

This frustration frequently emerged in criticisms of Mr. Leakey, the local clergyman who eventually became a canon. The earliest instance of this occurred in 1899, with the relatively mild observation that "Mr. Leakey never 'improves the situation' as the

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<sup>63</sup>SAH, 17 June 1903.

<sup>64</sup>SAH, 17 May 1903.

Methodists say, he loses many an opportunity of bringing things home to people."<sup>65</sup> More serious in her eyes was what she saw as Mr. Leahey's timidity in his leadership role. She lamented his (and his colleagues') failure to exert influence over the "young people" who were, according to her, increasingly more attracted to parties than to church services. In this, the clergy were letting down the mothers, who needed all the help they could get: "perhaps we expect too much from them, for they are only human, still I think we might expect more from them, who profess to walk in the apostles steps."<sup>66</sup>

Susan often felt that she was almost alone in her efforts to maintain and improve the good example of the church. This conviction is quite clear in the passage she wrote regarding the use of dances for fundraising:

If people care for the Church & her ministrations they should be willing to make some sacrifice in order to support it. Otherwise they only bring dis-credit on the Church & outsiders only laugh at the religion that allows such things. I wish Mr. Leahey would be firmer in stating & acting up to his convictions, He greatly dis-approves of these worldly amusements in aid of the Church but hasn't the courage to say so except to those who he knows are of the same opinion.<sup>67</sup>

It is fairly certain that Susan's own opinions on these matters were well-known, as she on more than one occasion (for example, her opposition to the selling of tobacco at a fundraiser, or her threats to

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<sup>65</sup>SAH, 3 September 1899.

<sup>66</sup>SAH, 1 January 1904.

<sup>67</sup>SAH, 13 February 1906.

pull Gladys out of Sunday School) stood her ground in an explicitly public manner.

If the clergy were weak in influence, it was perhaps not surprising that the flock, especially its younger members, did not follow in the path Susan thought was so essential to her idea of a Christian life. Many were the caustic remarks in her journals on their predilections. A cantata drew "a very good attendance--not as many of course as if there had been a dance, for our 'good Christians' some now are very 'light of foot' if not of fingers!"<sup>68</sup> Disrespect for the Sabbath was seemingly epidemic, such that an encounter with one man led her to comment, "It is a pleasure to meet with men who go to Church from principle, without having to be asked--there are so few of them I am sorry to say!"<sup>69</sup> Not only were young men spending Sundays in an inappropriate manner, but many young women also were following suit. By 1910, it seems Susan had given up hoping the young would forgo *all* unsuitable activities on Sundays. She had downgraded her requirements somewhat: "If they went to God's House once on the Sabbath, it would be something but to spend the whole day in doing ones [sic] own pleasures, cannot in any way be pleasing to our Heavenly Father."<sup>70</sup>

Susan's journal entries on these matters may have heralded an increasing cantankerousness, but she herself appears to have been aware that her comments might easily (and reasonably) be interpreted in this way. She frequently remarked on her "old-

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<sup>68</sup>SAH, 30 March 1904.

<sup>69</sup>SAH, 30 October 1910.

<sup>70</sup>SAH, 18 December 1910.

fashioned notions," usually defending them, but still acknowledging that that was what they were, at least to some degree. She was often quite good-humoured in speaking slyly of her own stubborn inclinations, as well as those of others. She was sometimes willing to bend her own rules, as when, in honour of a house guest, she allowed whist to be played in her home during Lent: "on Mr. Robertsons account I withdrew my objections--perhaps I am as the boys say too strict in my ideas."<sup>71</sup> And she herself still enjoyed a good dance, often till four or five in the morning, even in her later years. She must not have come across as overly rigid or judgemental, for her house was always full of young visitors, and her company was sought for numerous activities and entertainments.

Unlike Susan Holmes, Susan Flood seems to have rarely forcefully expressed her own religious opinions. She also appears to have been content to let those around her make their decisions according to their own criteria, though she did let them know (in relatively inobtrusive ways) what her feelings were on the matters in question.<sup>72</sup> Still, her life contained many examples of self-assertions that could be interpreted as resistances to the parameters society would have sought to place around her life according to her racial identity. In short, she showed a remarkable inclination not to "know her place." She could not have been unaware of what the general public view of that "place" was.

Susan challenged this view in many little ways, from the time she was quite young. Her entry in James Douglas' granddaughter

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<sup>71</sup>SAH, 20 March 1899.

<sup>72</sup>Eileen Bonson, 28 January 1996.

Louisa (Dolly) Helmcken's autograph book (presumably a birthday gift from the students at St. Ann's) took pride of place with a poem that took up the first two pages.<sup>73</sup> Her response to the obvious reluctance of her great-uncle to have direct contact with her was to suggest that she go to New York to visit him and the rest of her family there (a family she probably knew had no knowledge of her existence).<sup>74</sup> She sent pieces of her wedding cake to various people with whom she had some acquaintance, including some quite prominent citizens.<sup>75</sup> Her tenacity in holding on to her land and other legacies was in itself something many women in her position were unable to maintain.

Susan's correspondence with the Superintendent of Education is also indicative of a fairly high degree of self-confidence. The number of letters (at least fifteen) she wrote over a two-year period in itself shows little hesitancy in putting forth her wishes and needs to someone in a high position. The tone of her letters was always impeccably respectful, but she was obviously not about to be ignored. While aware that her examination marks were not particularly good, she still presented herself as someone who had options ("offers of situations") but who would simply prefer the teaching job in question.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, her persistence in writing with

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<sup>73</sup>Louisa Helmcken's Autograph Book, 1879: "A Birthday Souvenir," with the postscript "To dear Dolly from her loving friend Susan Cecilia Suckley." Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann, document 35-3-7.

<sup>74</sup>Letter from G. Tillotson to Susan Suckley, 31 March 1874, Flood family papers.

<sup>75</sup>For example, W. F. Tolmie. She had probably had little to do with him herself, but this action might have been intended to concretize her link to him through her father.

<sup>76</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 12 March 1881.

requests for updates of information and reminders of her interest probably eventually did help to gain her the job, despite her racial background. Once she had acquired this position, she continued to write quite regularly to the Superintendent. In this correspondence, while she deferred to his "superior judgement" and expressed gratitude for his "kind advice" with regards to improving her spelling,<sup>77</sup> she was nevertheless not the least bit shy in offering her own opinions on such matters as what kind of textbooks were most appropriate for the various levels of students.<sup>78</sup>

Although her tenure as teacher in Fort Hope was relatively short, Susan seems to have had considerable impact in that capacity. Certainly, the quickness with which she apparently won over the Trustees (who were still extremely disgruntled with the previous teacher and had a year earlier expressed a desire not to have a woman teacher) to an appreciation of "her kindness, firmness, and ability"<sup>79</sup> conveys a sense of the shrewdness those who knew her in later life identified as one of her major personal characteristics. She must have been able to assess the situation immediately and turn it to her advantage. Where her predecessor had perceived many of his charges as "gaol-birds,"<sup>80</sup> she claimed to be "quite pleased with the behaviour of the pupils."<sup>81</sup> The Trustees' attempts to place the former teacher in an unfavourable light had the effect of creating more work for Susan, but she remained tactful and

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<sup>77</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 2 April 1881; 25 September 1881.

<sup>78</sup>Susan Flood to C. C. McKenzie, 15 March 1882.

<sup>79</sup>The Trustees, Fort Hope, to C. C. McKenzie, 1 June 1881.

<sup>80</sup>E. J. Wood to C. C. McKenzie, 10 March 1881.

<sup>81</sup>Susan Suckley to C. C. McKenzie, 2 April 1881.

unperturbed, trying to solve these problems without developing any rifts in her own relationship with the men. In the end, despite having taught for only slightly more than one year, she was well remembered as a teacher, one of the "few" named "of all that honoured host" in an anonymous poem reminiscing on early days in Hope.<sup>82</sup> Even a woman who could not possibly have been her student (having been born in 1880) later named Susan as her teacher.<sup>83</sup>

Susan's strong sense of self comes through in the recollections of those who knew her later in her life as well. Morley Gillander, a neighbour boy in the 1920s, described her as "a great lady" who was "very tolerant, as well as being blessed with infinite patience" and an impressive "breadth of understanding." He told an anecdote which also illustrated her strength of will: apparently Susan believed that chickens should not be confined, whereas Bill attempted to keep them penned for the sake of the neighbours. However, "Mrs. Flood would release the chickens almost as quickly as they were confined," thus forcing Bill to hire Morley to round them up again. According to Morley, "this appeared to be a never ending business project," for Susan refused to give in on the point.<sup>84</sup> Susan's grandson-in-law, whose reminiscence of her forcefulness in prescribing treatments for illness was mentioned earlier, also often recalls his first introduction to her, which came in the form of a disembodied voice demanding to know why he had stopped singing.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>"The Past, Present and Future," an anonymous poem in Forging a New Hope, p. 284.

<sup>83</sup>This was Susan Alvarez. Forging a New Hope, p. 181.

<sup>84</sup>Morley Gillander, "The Skagit Saga," Flood family papers.

<sup>85</sup>Ross Bonson's recollections, Forging a New Hope, p. 237.

Both humour and firmness in dealing with the foibles of others are apparent in Susan's daughter-in-law's description of one incident at Kawkawa Lake, just east of Hope. Most of the land around the Lake that was not Indian reserve land was owned by the Floods and another family. A man who rented reserve property for an auto court and kept cattle on the land tended to be annoyed by picnickers at the lake. One day, when Susan and her family were picnicking there, he

addressed himself to these strangers, suggesting that they pay for parking there. Quick as a wink, Granny Flood, from her picnic table, replied, 'They should pay you parking? I should charge you and your cows for trespassing on my property!'<sup>86</sup>

Although she was eminently hospitable, she had a firm sense of what was hers, and was not about to be bullied by anyone.

Both of these women have remained large in the memories of their families, presences that have not diminished, and indeed may have in some ways grown, over the years. This in itself is a testimony to the strength of their self-definitions. It is certainly true that their self-images were inscribed within dominant ideologies, but it is equally true that both pushed against the limitations of these ideologies. Their personal identities could not be contained within the parameters of the typical categories for women's lives.

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<sup>86</sup>Forging a New Hope, p. 371.



**CHAPTER SEVEN:**  
**REFLECTIONS ON THE TALE, THE TELLING, AND THE TELLER:**  
**HISTORY AT THE CROSSROADS OF POWER AND**  
**INTERESTED REPRESENTATION**

While I did not set out to write "biography" as such, many of the concerns that have confronted me during this process have echoed those challenges faced by recent practitioners in the burgeoning field of women's biography.<sup>1</sup> In particular, I struggled with the worries that I could somehow, even inadvertently, damage the memories of two women that I grew to care about more and more as the process went on, and that I might be imposing too much of an "authoritative" voice on their stories. These two worries could in a way be viewed as two faces of the same "problem": the characteristic perception of biography in which "the subjects' lives typically adumbrate the myth of the individuated heroic--or antiheroic--self. Integral to that myth is the distanced, authorial voice that provides the illusion that the life actually was as it is presented."<sup>2</sup> This "illusion" is grounded in accounts of "personal identity" which "center . . . on the question of what internal feature of the person established the continuity or self-identity of the person through time."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Ingrid Winther Scobie, eds., The Challenges of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern Women (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>Lois Rudnick, "The Male-Identified Woman and Other Anxieties: The Life of Mabel Dodge Luhan," in The Challenge of Feminist Biography, eds. Alpern et al, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup>Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 16.

The belief in a core, "true," and unchanging identity would seem to go hand-in-hand with the notion of "objective truth" in both biographical and historical writing. The rejection of the possibility of absolute objectivity does not, however, equate with the abandonment of the search for "truths." The authors of a recent work on this subject aver that "truths about the past are possible, even if they are not absolute, and hence they are worth struggling for."<sup>4</sup> Within the genre of feminist biography, Lois Rudnick speaks of the "challenge of creative indeterminacy--the continuous possibility of enriching and transforming our own--as well as our subjects'--lives."<sup>5</sup> This description alludes to the knowledge that the storytellers are also always a part of the stories--stories that will thus remain unfinished. It also underlines the point that, even after a life is over, its meaning cannot be "set" for good.

### **Identity Options**

This study has examined some of the experiences of two women, Susan Abercrombie Holmes and Susan Suckley Flood, with a view to understanding the processes of identity construction in their lives. I saw it as an opportunity to explore, even in a small way, the operations (and interrelations) of gender, race, class, and other shapers of identity in the particular context of later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British Columbia. The differential effects of these can be seen in each woman's life.

Nancy Theriot contends that:

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<sup>4</sup>Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, Telling the Truth About History (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Rudnick, "The Male-Identified Woman," p. 137.

the time itself--the material and ideological constraints within which people find themselves--provides individuals with identity options. In the nineteenth century (as well as today), a person's race, class, sex, ethnicity, and national origin set limits to possible identities simply because these variables define one's place in the power structure and in relation to all others . . . Identity options, subject positions, are materially and discursively formed. In the story one tells about oneself--the construction of a sense of stable identity--there are some narratives that one cannot choose and others that one must 'choose.'<sup>6</sup>

The notion of "identity options," and their role in identity construction, seems one appropriate way to understand the stories of the two Susans.

The starting-point for the "tale" of the two Susans is the one major part of their identities that they seemed to have in common--their female gender. To some extent, their lives were fashioned by this commonality, and to that degree the stories that could be told about them were similar. Many of the particular constraints and ideologies that limited their options in terms of work and marriage and that shaped their identities as religious women, educated women, and community members (for example) only applied to them because they were "Susan" and therefore not perceived in the same way as they would have been had they been "Samuel."

But each was also not perceived in the same way as the other. Even the similarities in their experiences were affected by the divergences in society's perceptions of them. Above all, their racial identifications (being perceived as "Indian" as opposed to "white")

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<sup>6</sup>Theriot, Mothers and Daughters, p. 8.

influenced these divergences. Thus, for instance, while both, as women, experienced some outside control over their marriage choices, there was a qualitative difference in that control. In both instances, control was exercised partly to help maintain the appropriate structure of gender relations. However, in Susan Flood's case there was also a racial subtext, an attempt to influence her "options" with regards to the construction of her racial identity, whereas the maintenance of her place in the class structure of her society was more the issue for Susan Holmes.

In the matter of their starting positions as white or mixed-blood women, they had no option; they were born into a particular position within a particular context. However, race (and class) only helped to shape their experiences; it did not necessarily determine them. Susan Flood's choices in life were constrained and limited because of her race, and there were no aspects of her life and experience that were not in some way affected by it. Her upbringing and education took the courses they did because of the circumstances of her parentage, her marriage options were directed in explicitly racial terms, and her daily life was imbued in many ways with the material artifacts that signified an ideal she could not achieve "naturally" (like Susan Holmes could) by virtue of having been born white. However, the life story that she "told" was certainly not the most obvious construction she could have come up with from her given starting-point. She could easily have suffered an entirely different fate, and indeed one closer to typical for a woman in her situation. Her career as a teacher, however brief, was the most marked divergence from the life that would more likely

have been expected for her. While teaching was a logical path for an educated white woman to follow, this was certainly not the case for a "halfbreed" woman, whose employment opportunities would more likely be confined to domestic service.

This divergence was the result of a number of factors. First, Susan was better-educated than most other mixed-blood women, and she did have connections that could have helped her. She also clearly had some financial resources (though even being able to assertively pursue and retain these in itself may have set her apart from many other similarly-positioned women). She was apparently able to persist in pressing her own claims in the face of what she must have known the prevailing negative attitudes to be. Indeed, this was one of the aspects that most struck me about her--what was most likely perceived as her "presumptuousness." She seemed at times to act as though she were oblivious to the implications of her racial background for the "proprieties" of others' interactions with her. Perhaps this was partly because of her apparent need to construct a "white" self. Yet this need and her evident response to it co-existed with the impulse *not* to erase the "Indian" self, even when she might have had the opportunity to do so.

Such overt choices were not an issue for Susan Holmes. Nevertheless, it could not be said that her racial identity itself had no impact on her life, for it certainly did. While her life might be seen as taking a shape entirely predictable for one of her background, this was not necessarily the case. Her life story could have been told differently--she could have remained unmarried, teaching or staying with her parents; indeed, given the sentiments

she expressed on many occasions in her journals, this latter course would seem to have been a reasonable one for her. Her decision to marry was certainly not based on passion (to begin with, anyway), but could easily be perceived as a choice to script a life (one of several possibilities) fitting to both her background and some of her inclinations. Her place in the hierarchical power relations of the province was influenced as much by her race and gender as was Susan Flood's, but she too had some room to manoeuvre within these "definitions," and thus to construct, in part, her own identity.

Thus, although both women were constrained in similar ways by their gender, the effects of these constraints also differed by virtue of their race. This can be seen quite clearly in the matter of occupational choices, while in other areas it may have been more nuanced. Teaching was an appropriate choice for both of them as women, but it was an unlikely (and generally disapproved) choice for Susan Flood as a "halfbreed." Although they both ended up making the same choice in this area (one an expected and one an unexpected choice), differences in possibilities were less assailable in other areas, for example, in their artistic expressions. Here, Susan Holmes' whiteness undoubtedly made a difference: it was certainly much easier for her to embark on a writing career given her racial identity. Her gender was to some degree an obstacle, but her choice of forms mitigated its effects. The impediments to Susan Flood's pursuing even a limited career as an artist would have been much more forceful. Such an "identity option" might otherwise have been a reasonable one for her to make, but the combination of her gender and race in the particular context in which she lived, and in the

absence of the kinds of circumstances that made teaching a possibility for her, effectively made it an option she "could not choose."

### **Implications**

Few empirical studies have taken seriously relational markers of identity such as gender, class, race, and nationality, documenting and exploring how these interact and shift across multiple contexts and sites of practice. I have attempted to demonstrate that this can be done, through an analysis that is interdisciplinary in that it draws attention to certain problems in history and sociology that the two disciplines share, but that approaches these problems in different ways methodologically and epistemologically than is usually the case. The kinds of methodological and epistemological issues with which this study has been concerned are similar to those addressed by Toril Moi in her recent work on Simone de Beauvoir. Describing her account as neither a biography nor a traditional history, but rather as a "personal genealogy," Moi explains that:

Personal genealogy is not biography. I can best explain the difference by saying that personal genealogy is to biography as genealogy is to traditional history for Michel Foucault. Like traditional history, biography is narrative and linear, argues in terms of origins and finalities and seeks to disclose an original identity. Genealogy, on the other hand, seeks to achieve a sense of emergence or production and to understand the complex play of different kinds of power involved in social phenomena. Personal genealogy does not reject the notion of the 'self' or the subject but tries instead to subject that

very self to genealogical investigation.<sup>7</sup>

In subtitling her analysis "The Making of an Intellectual Woman," Moi stresses the notion of "construction," and she further claims that the personal genealogist "feels no obligation to preserve the illusion of generic purity . . . [but] is not surprised to discover that every discourse (including her own) is haunted by the ghosts of the individual and social unconscious."<sup>8</sup>

Like Moi, I claim no "generic purity" for this study; indeed, it represents a self-conscious attempt to connect historical and sociological discourses in such a way that a viable alternative might be illustrated. To that end, my account of the two Susans' lives started from an empirical base, but also took a feminist materialist discursive approach. The hope was to produce a study that was both historical and mindful of contemporary feminist sociological debates on experience, voice, and representation, and thus to account for the gender, race, and class "locations" (among others) of the "subjects" while at the same time maintaining a recognition that this account was an interested one. The "tale" that I have told is not "history as usual," in that it could ignore neither these locations nor my own interested position in telling it. However, it also did not subscribe to the radical relativism of some poststructuralist approaches, which hold that any one of the potentially infinite number of stories that could be told is as valid as all the others.

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<sup>7</sup>Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1994), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 6-8.



Therefore, the possibilities presented by this study for future research directions lie mainly in its implications for historians who wish to meet the challenge of reflexivity in presenting their narratives on subjects' experiences in the past. If it is accepted that the experiences and voices of these subjects cannot be unmediated, then the same must also be understood for the voice of the historian writing the narrative. The question thus becomes one of how historians/researchers will speak to the issue of their own particular locations in relation both to the insights these locations afford them and to the limits then placed on their mediations of the voices and experiences of subjects who cannot "speak back" to them. Taking these factors into account, and proceeding with the continually self-conscious and self-questioning perspective discussed in chapter one, could thus lead to historical research of a depth and understanding beyond the reach of "history as usual." It may not offer conclusions as such, but rather insights.<sup>9</sup>

What, then, of my fears of misrepresenting or imposing meaning on these women and their stories? It is certainly true that only a small number of the possibilities of their lives can be found within these pages. It is also true that I can claim neither "objectivity" nor to "know" for certain how they themselves would interpret their lives. What I can say is that, when I was just beginning the process and contemplating "the problem of speaking for others," I recalled a comment once made to me regarding my "compassion for the texts" I had been discussing. I liked this notion

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<sup>9</sup>This section has benefitted from personal communications from Leslie Roman.

because I felt it connoted a level of involvement rather than detachment and because it seemed to me that compassion was a necessary companion to the respect, humility, and honesty with which I think the interpretive process must be approached.

Compassion should not lead to "whitewashing," but rather to a caring consideration of whatever unfolds during this process--and a recognition of its limitations. I can only hope that I have had such compassion both for the lives of these two women and for my own part in these stories--because the "tale" of two Susans is singular, double, and multiple. It is one tale in that it is my story of my search to know two women, two tales in that these women's lives and experiences cannot be conflated, and many tales in that we all speak with more than one voice.

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### Appendix 1

#### Chronology: Susan Abercrombie (Nagle) Holmes

1840:	Born, on board Thomas Lowrie, 10 days out of Sydney, Australia
1850:	Nagle family moved to San Francisco
1858:	Nagle family moved to Victoria, B. C.
1869-1871:	Teaching in public school at Yale, B. C.
1871:	Married to Rev. David Holmes, Victoria, B. C.
1872:	First son Harry born
1873:	Moved to Cowichan Valley
1877:	Fred born
1878:	Beatrice born
1880:	Isabel born
1882:	Zephie born
1884:	Philip born
1907:	Son Phil's death
1915:	David's death
1921:	Died, Duncan, B. C.

### Appendix 2

#### Chronology: Susan Suckley Flood

1855:	Born, near Fort Steilacoom, Washington Territory
1870-1878:	At St. Ann's Academy, Victoria, B. C.
1881-1882:	Teaching in public school at Fort Hope, B. C.
1882:	Married to William Flood, Fort Hope, B. C.
1882:	Charles born
1892:	Leila born
1917:	Daughter Leila's death
1928:	William's death
1943:	Died, Flood, B. C.

**Appendix 3**  
**Family Tree: Nagle/Holmes**

Jeremiah William Nagle

b. 1801 (Cork, Ireland)

d. 1882 (Victoria)

m. 1834 to Catherine Holmes (b. 1811-Liverpool; d. 1886-Oakland)

Children

Grandchildren

Catherine (Kate)

b. 1835 (Liverpool)

d. 1874 (San Francisco)

Jeremiah William

b. 1836

d. 1836

Mary

b. 1838

d. 1838

Susan Abercrombie

b. 1840 (at sea, near Sydney, Australia)

d. 1921 (Duncan, B.C.)

m. 1871 to David Holmes (b. 1837-Lincolnshire;  
d. 1915-Duncan, B.C.)

David Henry Berkeley (Harry)

b. 1872 (Yale, B.C.)

d. 1925 (Duncan, B.C.)

m. 1900 to Annie Carmichael

Frederick Crease

b. 1877 (Duncan, B.C.)

d. 1946 (Duncan, B.C.)

m. 1906 to Isabella Duncan

Beatrice Mary

b. 1878 (Duncan, B.C.)

d. (Oliver, B.C.)

**Children****Grandchildren****Susan Isabel**

b. 1880 (Duncan, B.C.)  
 d. 1962 (Duncan, B.C.)  
 m. 1904 to R. Percy E. Roberts

**Josephine Catherine (Zephie)**

b. 1882 (Duncan, B.C.)  
 d. 1974

**Philip Clement**

b. 1884 (Duncan, B.C.)  
 d. 1907 (Duncan, B.C.)

**Henry**

b. 1842 (New Zealand)  
 d. 1898 (San Francisco)

**Jessie Melville**

b. 1844 (Great Barrier Island, New Zealand)  
 d. 1873 (Victoria)  
 m. 1871 to Christopher Berkeley

**Isabella Gertrude**

b. 1846 (New Zealand)  
 d. 1903 (Hamilton, Ont.)  
 m. 1865 to Philip Hankin

**Frederick Gough**

b. 1848 (Auckland)  
 d. 1928 (Santa Rosa)

**Elinor (Ella) Josephine**

b. 1853 (San Francisco)  
 d. 1925 (Napa Co. Ca)

**Edward Robert**

b. 1855 (Oakland)  
 d. 1908 (Lakeport Lake Co.)

**Appendix 4**  
**Family Tree: Suckley/Flood**

George Suckley

b. 1830 (New York City)

d. 1869 (New York City)

m. Cecilia

**Children**

**Grandchildren**

Susan Cecilia

b. 1855 (near Fort Steilacoom, Washington Territory)

d. 1943 (Flood, B.C.)

m. 1882 to William Lewis Flood (b. 1846-Woodstock, Ont.;  
d. 1928-Flood, B.C.)

Charles Suckley

b. 1882 (Hope, B.C.)

d. 1962 (New Westminster)

m. 1919 to May Lawrence (b. ?;  
d. 1995-Chilliwack, B.C.)

Leila Cecilia

b. 1892 (Hope, B.C.)

d. 1917 (Flood, B.C.)