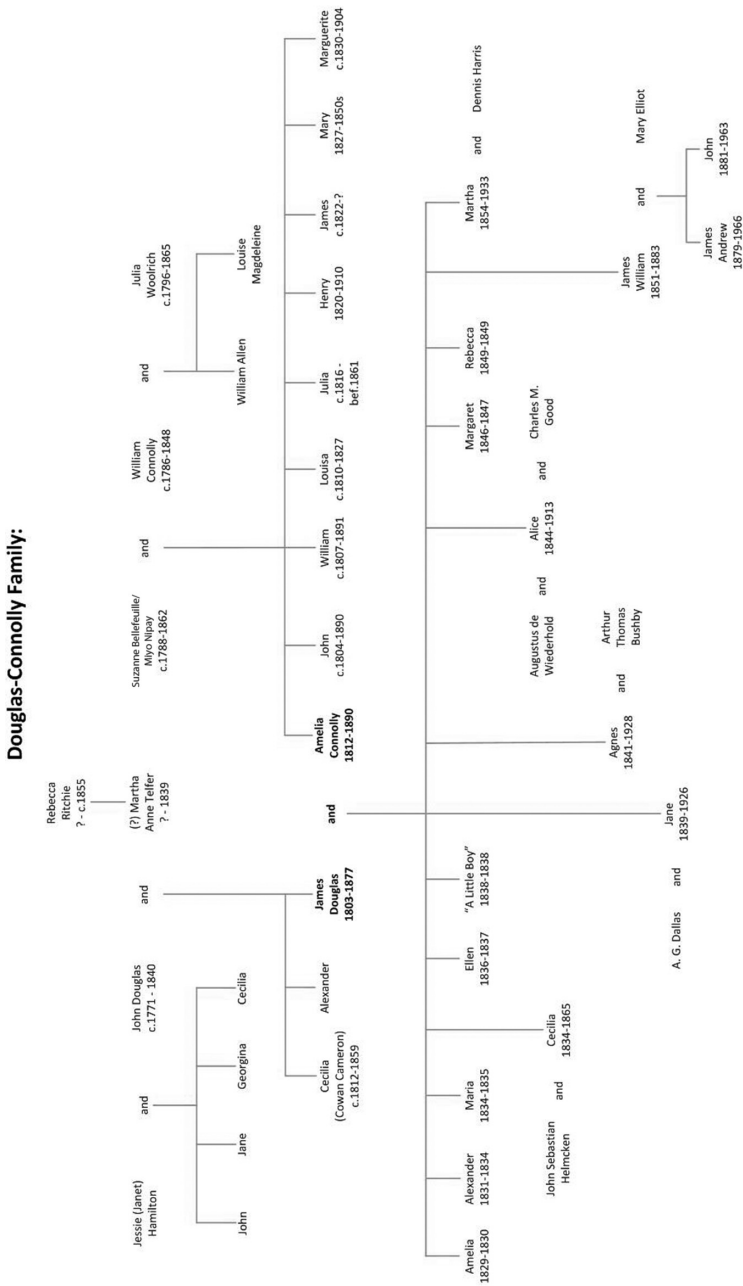


1 Empire, family, and archive

This book uses the story of one family to analyze the vernacular history of the imperial world over what historians call the long nineteenth century. It tracks the histories of James Douglas (1803–1877), his wife, Amelia Connolly (1812–1890), their kin, and peers in the eastern Caribbean, the United Kingdom, and various parts of North America, including the British colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia where Douglas would serve as governor. The story of what I call the Douglas-Connolly family (see Figure 1.1) is a complicated and at times disjointed and oblique one. Part of this story is well known to historians of Canada, and more particularly British Columbia. The story of these colonial relations is less well known to historians of empire, but their history is salutary for historians committed to critically engaging with imperialism’s complicated and consequential past. This history makes clear the power and the possibility of thinking beyond accustomed definitions of empire and nation, and demonstrates the potential of re-reading empire through a critical feminist lens that connects the presumed jurisdictions of the private and the public.

I return to these points in the conclusion. I begin where historians like to, which is with the archives. In the past decade historians have explored the records produced and left by the colonial states as particular, racialized, and gendered forms of technology. In different ways, Anne Laura Stoler, Antoinette Burton, Durba Ghosh, Anjali Androkar, Julia Emberley, and Betty Joseph urge us to see archives as a terrain of colonial histories rather than simply as a source of them. Colonial archives are a technology that helped produce the world rather than a window into it.¹

¹ See Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (University of Chicago Press, 2003); Durba Ghosh, “Decoding the Nameless: Gender, Subjectivity, and Historical Methodologies in Reading the Archives of Colonial India,” in Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, Modernity*,



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My analysis of the Douglas-Connolly family and the lived history of empire is based on a critical ethnographic conversation with the colonial archives. The footnotes that follow enumerate sources that are familiar to historians of imperialism, the eastern Caribbean, and western North America: the records of the British colonies of Demerara and Essequibo, Vancouver Island, and British Columbia, the papers created by the administration of slavery and abolition, the records of private fur-trade companies, especially the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the correspondence of missionaries and reformers, metropolitan and colonial newspapers, published travel literature and memories, a range of personal and family archives including letters and journals, and materials gathered by local historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These records are held in the archives and libraries of postcolonial Canada and Guyana, in repositories in the United States and the United Kingdom, and in the distinctly translocal space of the internet.

All of these archives are profoundly shaped by the individuals who created them, the state and private enterprises they labored on behalf of, and by the people, institutions, and societies that preserved them. These archives are multiple, scattered, and episodic. They impose a discipline on the historian who works with them. Social historians and historians of women and the colonial world have long been accustomed to reading archives "against the grain." Here I try what Stoler calls "reading along the archival grain," treating colonial archives "both as a corps of writing and as a force field that animates political energies and expertise, that pulls on some 'social facts' and converts them into qualified knowledge, that attends to some ways of knowing while repelling and refusing others."²

I begin with the probable time and place of James Douglas' birth, early nineteenth-century Demerara. In the 1970s and '80s, historian Charlotte Girard combed the archives of Guyana, Barbados, Canada, the Netherlands, and Great Britain for data about James Douglas' early life. She found little direct evidence, but was able to skillfully link fragments of records to produce a tentative and cautious identification of his

1660–1840 (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Anjali Arondekar, "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14:1/2 (January/April 2005) 10–27; Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Acts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor *et al.*, eds., *Refiguring the Archives* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002); Julia V. Emberley, "'A Gift for Languages': Native Women and the Textual Economy of the Colonial Archives," *Cultural Critique*, 17 (1990/1) 21–50.

² Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009) 22.

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probable mother and grandmother.³ I have found nothing that definitively proves Girard's argument and nothing that either challenges it or provides a plausible alternative. The uncertainty about Douglas' origins is part of the history analyzed here rather than a simple impediment to it. The babies born in nineteenth-century colonial societies were a complicated problem for empire, one that was in part managed by practices of non-recognition. As Ghosh explains in her study of the family in colonial India, the archive "serviced the imperatives of the government by erasing or excluding various subjects," including "native mistresses, out-of-wedlock children, and multiple families."⁴

The colonial state in early nineteenth-century Demerara recorded ordinary people in the greatest detail when they bought property, sold property, or themselves became property through practices of slavery. I know most about Douglas' probable mother and grandmother when colonial governments regulated, taxed, or compensated them for their slaveholdings. Whatever relationships or children they or people like them had did not provoke the same kind of archival attention. British Guiana took no censuses until 1839, and there was no system of registering births until the 1860s.⁵ Only a few sets of baptismal records have survived, and Georgetown's newspaper didn't report early nineteenth-century births beyond an episodic accounting of the numbers of unnamed "free coloured" and "White" boys and girls born in a given month.⁶

The personal archive does not supply all the information absent from the records kept by the state. A list of important events that Douglas kept reflected his own uncertainty about his history. "1803 June 6 Borne?" he asked himself.⁷ As an adult Douglas was notoriously tight-lipped about his own background. A son-in-law recalled that "personal experiences

³ Charlotte S. M. Girard, "Sir James Douglas' Mother and Grandmother," *BC Studies*, 44 (Winter 1979/1980) 25–31; Charlotte S. M. Girard, "Some Further Notes on the Douglas Family," *BC Studies*, 72 (Winter 1986/7) 3–27; Charlotte Girard, "The Guiana World of Sir James Douglas' Childhood," unpublished MS; I thank Charlotte Girard and John Adams for helping me locate this important unpublished paper. Also see W. Kaye Lamb, "Some Notes on the Douglas Family," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, 17:1/2 (1953) 41–51; W. Kaye Lamb, "Ancestry of Sir James Douglas, KCB (1803–1877)," British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), B/90/b741, Transcript.

⁴ Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) 253.

⁵ See Dennis Arthur Brown, *The Political Economy of Fertility in the British West Indies, 1891–1921* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies, 2000) 27.

⁶ See, for instance, "Monthly Return of Births in this Colony," *Esquebbo and Demerara Gazette*, May 30, 1812, accessed January 18, 2012, www.vc.id.au/edg/index.html.

⁷ James Douglas, "Notes," in "Private Account," BCA, Add MSS B/90/1.

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were not much talked about.”⁸ In 1923, one of Douglas’ granddaughters asked her mother about his history. Her response was a sketchy list:

1. His mother was a Miss Ritchie.
2. Born in Lanarkshire.
3. His Father owned sugar Estates in Demerara.
4. Judge Cameron was only married once, to my Aunt, Cecilia Douglas – (she was married twice. R.B.)⁹

As either the sum total of what a daughter knew about her father or what she chose to tell her own daughter, this was scanty, unstable, and at least somewhat untrue. As in the Ngai Tahu communities of southern New Zealand studied by historian Angela Wanhalla, “stories circulated, myths abounded,” and “ancestry was shadowy.”¹⁰

All of this makes it difficult to write a standard biography of Douglas and, for not dissimilar reasons, Connolly Douglas. She was born in Cree territory in what is now northwestern Canada in 1812, and it was only an unexpected court case and some family records that put details about her parents’ marriage and her birth into the colonial archive. Colonial lives like those of Douglas and Connolly Douglas force us to recalibrate our default settings for biographical research. Historian Clare Anderson has recently reminded us that we can and should tell the stories of plebeian colonial people’s lives, however fragmentary our versions of them must be.¹¹ The necessity of working with partial and vexed archives closes down some interpretative avenues, but it opens others up. Joseph argues that “Reconciling oneself to a partial history is ultimately a call for producing a new kind of narrative.”¹² While this book utilizes the analytic frame of the individual life and the family, it is not a conclusive genealogy or conventional biography. Instead, I utilize available archival evidence about one extended family to anchor an analysis of the nineteenth-century imperial world, to ground and focus these wide, wandering, and sometimes daunting histories.

⁸ Dorothy Blakey Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1975) 140.

⁹ Rose Bullen to Walter Sage, February 12, 1925, in Walter N. Sage Papers, Box 36, University of British Columbia (UBC) Archives (hereafter Sage Papers).

¹⁰ Angela Wanhalla, *In/Visible Sight: The Mixed Descent Families of Southern New Zealand* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010) 2.

¹¹ Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) 17.

¹² Betty Joseph, “Proxies of Power: Women in the Colonial Archive,” in Felicity Nussbaum, ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 137. Also see Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

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Douglas entered the colonial archive as an unmistakable biographical subject when, in 1819, he became an unfree laborer in North America's fur trade. He surfaced occasionally in the records kept by the North West Company and more often in the records of the HBC, in the direct employ of which he would remain for more than three decades and with which he and two of his sons-in-law would remain associated for their working lives. The HBC archives are an enormous and often fastidious record of furs secured, trade goods exchanged, provisions needed, and workers and workplaces managed. Douglas became a routine presence in these records when he was appointed to a position of authority in the 1830s. From 1839 to 1858, he was the leading authority of the HBC on the Pacific coast and, as a result, a constant and formative presence in the records it left. Douglas became governor of the British colony of Vancouver Island in 1851 and of the colony of British Columbia in 1858, and in these capacities was the most powerful local representative of the British imperial state on North America's west coast. He remained as such until his retirement in 1863/4. As chief factor and governor, he was central to the making of two enormous archives of empire, and I can make no claims to comprehensive knowledge of them.

The records of the HBC and the colonial governments were mainly produced in colonial space, but with the interests and concerns of the metropole always in mind. And it was there that these records were gathered, sorted, and archived. Over the course of the twentieth century, the records of British North American colonies and the fur trade were increasingly claimed as part of the domain of *Canadian* history and relocated, literally as well as figuratively, from the space of the empire to the space of the nation. In the early twentieth century, Canada's national archive acquired copies, first in transcript and photostat and later in microform, of the Colonial Office records relating to British administration of northern North America. In 1974 the Hudson's Bay Company Archive was patriated to the Archives of Manitoba, a maneuver registered as a return of a national treasure.¹³ Historians' interests made a similar sort of journey, becoming increasingly engaged with narratives of nation and region, and less engaged with imperial or oceanic frames. This book is part of a wider scholarship that aims to reconnect histories of Canada and the territories that preceded it with a critical historiography of empire.¹⁴

¹³ See Jarett Henderson, "I Am Pleased with the Lambton Loot: Arthur George Doughty and the Making of the Durham Papers," *Archivaria*, 70 (Fall 2010) 153–176; Deidre Simmons, *Keepers of the Record: The History of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009).

¹⁴ See Lisa Chilton, "Canada and the British Empire: A Review Essay," *Canadian Historical Review*, 89:1 (March 2008) 89–95.

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The range of authors, interests, genres, and administrative regimes at play here make clear that this is not a single colonial “archive,” but a polyvocal set of archives. The subjects included or excluded from these archives reflect their different priorities, interests, and optics. The records of the HBC and British colonial governments are full of men, figured as curiously separate from their lives as sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers. As an author, subject, audience, and authority, Douglas is everywhere in the archives of the HBC and of the colonial governments of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. But Douglas as a person with a history and a family is mainly absent from the formal letters, despatches, and reports. It is not that kinship and intimacy were irrelevant to this or other institutions of empire. Relations between Douglas and the male in-laws with whom he worked throughout his adult life – first his father-in-law in the HBC, then two sons-in-law in the HBC and colonial government, and finally two more sons-in-law in Vancouver Island and British Columbia’s colonial governments – were key to this local colonial state. Intimate relations between male kin run subcutaneous throughout the history of the nineteenth-century empire, obscured by patriarchal naming practices that disassociated male kin from one another. These ties were not unnoticed by critics of British North American states, who deemed the colonial governments run by Douglas and other tightly knit local elites as those of the “family compact.”¹⁵ Here, I try to excavate the connections between kin and the endurance of women’s connections to the families of their birth. Whenever possible I follow the practice of a number of members of the Douglas-Connolly family and use women’s surnames of birth alongside their married names in an effort to trace the complicated ties that bound men and women to one another and helped to structure local states and the nineteenth-century British Empire as an aggregate.

The colonial archives imagine men in specific ways and figure women at best infrequently and in ways that obscure their histories. As Burton has argued, the official archive is gendered from the start, associated with male authority and textual records, and disassociated from women, speech, and fiction.¹⁶ The gendered schism of record-keeping calcified

¹⁵ On elsewhere in British North America, see Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1993) Chapter 7; Cecilia Morgan, “‘When Bad Men Conspire, Good Men Must Unite!’: Gender and Political Discourse in Upper Canada, 1820s–1830s,” in Kathryn M. McPherson, Nancy Forstell, and Cecilia Morgan, eds., *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Oxford University Press, 1999). That Douglas was at the center of a “family compact” was a point made from the 1860s onwards. See Chad Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History, 1784–1958* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009) 27.

¹⁶ Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*, Chapter 1.

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in the North American colonial contexts when primarily oral Indigenous cultures met primarily textual European ones in charged and uneven ways. As in colonial India, Indigenous women are often tellingly nameless in fur-trade records, described only by a first name or an association with a place or a man.¹⁷ Amelia Connolly Douglas was the daughter of one powerful man in the fur trade and then the wife of another, but her presence in the fur-trade archive was never much more than uncertain. But women and children sometimes surface in the records that desired and, at the same time, helped to constitute their presence as both tangential and unknowable. The rich historical scholarship on women and the fur trade that I draw on throughout this book would not be possible otherwise. Here, I too use the information about women found scattered throughout the fur-trade archive to piece together information about Amelia Connolly Douglas, her female kin, and the women they lived alongside. The records left by Connolly Douglas' sister, two of the family's daughters, and other female friends and kin help us situate elite colonial women within the imperial world and some of the local spaces remade within it. But this remains an archive where men speak with greater frequency, detail, and volume than do women.

I do not and cannot adequately restore Amelia Connolly Douglas to the story told here. She was recognized as the chief factor's and then the governor's wife and shared in whatever honorifics her husband accrued. Her small role in the local imperial public sphere was codified in an official archive that only rarely admitted her presence. The family's daughters were more regular participants in the public performance of empire in Vancouver Island's capital city of Victoria, and their intimate relationships and social connections were closely observed by settlers and passers-by alike. The colonial archive produced under Douglas' early administration was in part created in space that was both the family home and office of state. In the 1850s, the family's eldest daughters both assisted their father with the paperwork of governance, and Jane was recalled as Douglas' "amanuensis." This is a different iteration of the complicated politics of gender, kinship, and authorship in the nineteenth-century imperial world traced by historian Zoë Laidlaw.¹⁸

This pattern of voluble husbands, quiet daughters, and quieter wives reflects hierarchies and schisms between orality and literacy as well as

¹⁷ Durba Ghosh, "Decoding the Nameless."

¹⁸ Smith, ed., *The Reminiscences of Doctor John Sebastian Helmcken*, 81; Walter N. Sage, *Sir James Douglas and British Columbia* (University of Toronto Press, 1930) 339; Zoë Laidlaw, "'Aunt Anna's Report': The Buxton Women and the Aborigines Select Committee, 1835–1837," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32:2 (May 2004) 1–28.

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between men and women. My methodology reflects a discipline forged in the sinews of empire and nation and predicated on the colonial state's production and maintenance of the archive and the privileging of alphabetic texts. The extent to which histories of Indigenous North American societies that communicated, honed, and preserved knowledge primarily through oral and material means can be adequately addressed through this sort of lens is an enduring question worth asking again and again.¹⁹ We might also ask whether presuming the absolute difference of Indigenous and European societies' forms of archives reifies difference and occludes the range of archival practices in both Indigenous and settler societies in nineteenth-century North America. The written archive left by settler society is far from seamless or representative. Indigenous peoples also left written archives, and this study makes use of the correspondence and memoirs created by English-speaking, Indigenous elites like Marguerite Connolly, Andrew Dominique Pambrum, Ranald MacDonald, and Cecilia Douglas Helmcken. How to describe people like these has been and continues to be a complicated question in Canada, as it is in many colonial and postcolonial societies.²⁰ Moving between the eastern Caribbean and northern North America, I used the terms Metis and Creole to describe people born in colonial space and tied to both local and imperial genealogies and economies. This is admittedly an imperfect way of capturing histories that were complicated in their time and remain consequential in the present.

It was after Douglas left the colonial service in 1864 that he created a significant archive of his intimate life. This reflects his attainment of secure bourgeois status, and in this sense, the association between written records, worthy and interesting stories, and class. The journals and letters Douglas wrote as an older man are not lists of furs traded and servants employed, or correspondence between different and distant levels of an imperial state, but personal documents: journals, memoirs, and the vivid and at times disarmingly intimate letters of fathers, daughters, and sons. Here the danger of becoming what Jill Lepore memorably dubs "a historian who loves too much"²¹ is a real one. So is the risk of taking such material as more representative than it is even within the

¹⁹ See Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, 2nd edition (University of Toronto Press, 2003).

²⁰ See Chris Andersen, "'I'm Métis, What's Your Excuse?': On the Optics and Ethics of the Misrecognition of Métis in Canada," *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, 1:2 (2011) 161–165; Brenda Macdougall, "The Myth of Metis Cultural Ambivalence," in Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall, eds., *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

²¹ Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *Journal of American History*, 88:1 (2001) 129–144.

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frame of one life. Douglas' private archive was overwhelmingly created in the 1860s and '70s, when he was an older, relatively wealthy man with unparalleled local influence and ample time. We cannot read the relations and subjectivities mapped in these archives backwards in time. But alongside the large and eclectic collection of papers of Douglas' son-in-law James Sebastian Helmcken and the less voluminous but still revealing diary of his other son-in-law, Arthur T. Bushby, Douglas' correspondence and journals offer a remarkable window into colonial masculinity, elite Creole-Metis life, and bourgeois domesticity. Correspondence exchanged between family members in North America and the United Kingdom later in the nineteenth century documents a different layer of bourgeois colonial life, as do the records produced by the administration of the family's estate in the twentieth century.

All of these archives reflected the societies that produced them and the ones that preserved them or were unable or uninterested in doing so. In 1888 Nicholas Darnell Davis, a colonial official and local man of letters in British Guiana, voiced the familiar *cri de coeur* of colonial peoples unable to access their own archives and write their own histories: "Our records! Where are they?"²² Guyana's national archives were established in 1958. They did not fare well in the complicated and fractious years that preceded and followed Guyanese independence in 1966. In 2008, the archives were renamed the Walter Rodney National Archives after the socialist Guyanese historian assassinated in 1980. And there I read church and census records under a stern and magisterial portrait of the slain Rodney, a reminder that the work of history is always political and sometimes very dangerous. The Walter Rodney National Archives continue to inspire criticism and both local and international reform plans.²³ The history of Guyana's archives cannot be separated from its status as one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. The Guyanese histories mapped in this book are prised from an underfunded archive in a radically unequal world.

The archives and historiographies of Canada's westernmost province have had different colonial and postcolonial histories. British Columbia became a relatively secure settler society in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. Catherine Hall explains the critical role that capital H history played in justifying Britain's sense of itself as a justly imperial nation. History performed a different but not unrelated work in British Columbia, situating it within an

²² N. Darnell Davis, "The Records of British Guiana," *Timehri*, new series, 2 (1888) 339–357.

²³ See, recently, "Records in the National Archives to be Digitized," *Stabroek News* (March 3, 2013), available at www.stabroeknews.com/2013/news/stories/03/03/records-in-national-archives-to-be-digitized-microfilmed/, accessed April 2, 2013.