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The Other Little House: The Brothel as a Colonial Institution on the Canadian Prairies, 1880–93

Abstract

What role did settler bawdy houses play in Canadian colonial expansion in the 1880s? The trial of "Big Nelly" Webb, a white bawdy house madam and sex worker who shot a Mounted Police constable on the doorstep of her brothel in 1888, offers critical insight into the world of these seldom acknowledged colonial institutions and the women who ran them. Far from simply "women on the margins," Canadian officials in the North-West Territories permitted many white madams and sex workers to operate bawdy houses in emerging prairie settlements because they viewed them as essential workers. Drawing from the archives of the North-West Mounted Police, memoirs and testimonies of bawdy house sex workers and madams, and newspaper and court reports, this article explores the networks of influence that supported these houses, including local police and high-ranking colonial officials. Beyond personal ties, the influence of women like Big Nelly reflected the colonial function of the settler brothel. The waves of migrating bawdy house madams and workers who flocked to Canada's "Last Best West" during this period could serve a very real role in the growth and biopolitical regulation of new Canadian settlements in Indigenous territory. These workers were tasked with protecting and regulating settler sexual and reproductive health, retaining white bachelor migrants in isolated settlements, and fostering urban growth. Settler bawdy houses on the Prairies were also bastions of racial segregation and containment, built to displace (and expose) workers of color and stop the growth of Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race populations and resistance in the 1880s. Indeed, race-based hierarchies did not just exist within the settler brothel economies of Canada's North-West Territories, they were one of the foundational justifications for their existence.

"Big Nelly" Webb stood in a courtroom in Edmonton in 1889. She faced the charge of shooting a Mountie, Constable Thomas Cairney of Canada's North-West Mounted Police. Her chances did not look good. She was found late in the night of October 24, 1888, with a .38 caliber pistol near the injured man. She freely admitted to the shooting and, to make matters worse, she had also broken a host of other laws that night. Big Nelly ran a house of ill fame and her

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victim was found on the doorstep of the business where she managed the sale of sexual services and smuggled liquor to local settler men. More than a sympathetic "fallen woman," Big Nelly was also a madam, considered by many moral reformers an unsalvageable "female satan," who poisoned the nation and destroyed innocent young women for their own profit.[1] On paper, at least, she was the perfect villain. But court adjourned that day with a surprising verdict in the shooting of the Mountie: Big Nelly Webb was found not guilty.[2]

Borrowing its name from a popular television series that used the pioneer cabin home to celebrate Christian settler values during a violent period of Western colonial expansion ("Little House on the Prairie," 1974–82), this article explores another, often-overlooked colonial institution staffed by women in the nineteenth-century West. Using archival documents, maps, surviving memoirs, and the historiography of segregated vice in this region, it argues that many officials believed the settler bawdy house was just as central to the growth of frontier colonial order as the bank, school, jail, or church. By resituating bawdy houses as central to the project of Canadian colonial expansion into the Indigenous Prairie West, this research joins a number of regional studies that attest to the fluctuating but sometimes considerable influence of white settler madams in the West. Despite their precarious status, I argue that madams like Big Nelly were colonial agents, intentionally deployed and tolerated in the service of colonial expansion. These women led colonial institutions considered essential to the growth of settler populations and *could* privately (and sometimes publicly) wield potentially considerable influence in nineteenth-century settlements.

Overview

This article begins with a discussion of some important historiographical developments in the field and historical red-light districts in the Canadian West as they relate to questions of race and colonial expansion. It then discusses the arrival of often white American (and some Canadian) bawdy house workers on the Prairies during a larger period of colonial instability, specifically complains about the drunkenness, incompetence, sexual misconduct, and "immorality" of regional officials, including the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP.) It takes a deep dive into the other male networks that supported settler madams as officials who could stabilize male settler populations in the 1880s, revealing how and why some bawdy house madams could outrank a member of the NWMP. This temporary influence reflected the higher-ranking and influential settler men who backed bawdy houses and considered them vital colonial institutions. White Canadian and American bawdy house workers and madams were not simply prostitutes, they were economic engines and biopolitical agents, providing bastions of sexual and reproductive regulation considered essential to the success of frontier settlements. Settler bawdy houses were medical necessities, officials believed, essential to combatting disease (particularly syphilis and gonorrhea) and curbing homosexuality and "objectionable practices" in predominantly male settlements. Most of all, as the last section of this article argues, bawdy houses helped impose regimes of racial segregation in newly acquired Indigenous territory. Amid larger fears about Indigenous resistance and the growth of mixed-race families, colonial officials welcomed settler madams and

their houses into the Prairie settlements emerging in the North-West Territories to steer settler men towards unions with white women (however temporary). Such a move was also designed to curb Indigenous women's resistance to deprivation-based colonial control, something that could be fought through access to capital, information, and networks of influence in one of the region's most lucrative underground economies. By examining the colonial mission and relatively privileged status of many white settler madams in the North-West Territories, this article seeks to correct the historiographical tendency to sidestep some of the most crucial features of bawdy house economies related to race and colonialism. It argues that racial divides did not just exist within prairie settler brothel economies in the late nineteenth century; they were one of the foundational justifications for their existence.

A range of memoirs and court records from this era encourage us to bring two dimensions of North American prostitution historiography into closer conversations. A growing number of scholars have examined the centrality of race to "how communities and societies organize(d) erotic life" in the North American West.[3] Yet, scholarship on nineteenth-century sex work often remains divided between representations of sex workers in dominant society and "red-light histories," social history case studies that examine life and work in particular cities, towns, and districts. As Robyn Bourgeois points out in her analysis, historiographies of the former often engage explicitly with questions of race, specifically the so-called "white slave trade" and the threats reformers believed sex work posed to white womanhood or how prostitution economies acted as "an institutional extension of settler colonial domination, racism, and sexism."[4] These studies reveal much about the centrality of race to sex work discourse in nineteenth-century society, though they frequently focus on the activities and voices of non-sex working populations, especially officials and reformers. Such a focus, particularly considering the misinformation that circulated about the sex trade at this time in moral reformer literature, often overlook important hidden hierarchies and dynamics at play within real bawdy house economies. Conversely, red-light or segregated vice historiographies of the West in particular use studies of and stories from workers themselves to provide compelling insight into the interior social histories of red-light districts, but many of these studies engage less frequently with larger, pressing questions about race and colonialism.[5]

This project joins a number of studies of criminalized sex in the "Wild" West, particularly Bourgeois, Renisa Mawani, Adele Perry, Sarah Carter, Nayan Shah, Sherene Razack, Leslie Erickson, and Jean Barman, all of whom have contributed to a growing understanding of the relationship between colonial policing and violence, sex work, and racial segregation in nineteenth-century frontier towns.[6] It seeks to contextualize the growth of white settler bawdy houses within larger networks of settler capital, or large-scale investments made in the project of colonial expansion, and race-based campaigns of *biopolitical* regulation, or how officials used bawdy houses to encourage the health and growth of certain preferred populations and the physical decline of others.

By illuminating the well-trodden path between the bawdy house and the police barracks, this article also hopes to potentially offer some additional context for a contemporary crisis in Canada. For roughly a century and a half, the Canadian Mounted Police, now the RCMP, and local police departments have

played a role in the spread of gendered and racialized violence against women, particularly in Western Canada.[7] Their blatant inaction on crimes involving Indigenous women and girls in particular has fueled the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls crisis in the country and endemic violence against sex workers from a range of backgrounds. In many of these cases, police traditionally blamed these victims for such violence, often by assigning them the labels of "prostitute" or "sex-trade involved" (even in the many cases in which the victim had no involvement in the sex trade).[8] This article steps back onto Big Nelly's porch in 1888 to understand the profound "sex-trade involvement" of the police themselves and the powerful roots of this policing practice in nineteenth-century colonial bawdy house economies.

From established easterly cities like Chicago and New York to gritty gold rush and frontier towns, nineteenth-century sex work economies have fueled a wealth of important historical studies about some of the red-light cultures that flourished in North America.[9] Though the precise shape of sex work economies varied from town to town (depending on local attitudes, economic status, and needs), between 1849 and 1910 many North American cities and towns of note experimented with eras of some form of "tolerated vice" or permitted some semi-regulated forms of commercial sex.[10] In the West, bawdy houses dotted settlements on both sides of the Canadian-American border. Bawdy house operating structures were often imported by migrating sex workers and madams who had gained experience in red-light districts across the continent and settler male officials, investors, and clients moving between camps, mines, and other settlements across the transborder West.[11] It was a highly structured form of sex work that many officials considered the easiest to regulate and control and differed significantly from other practices, particularly occasional/casual work and street work. Although operations could differ across regional and national boundaries, a survey of sex work economies along the western border reveals similar patterns that reflect the colonial hierarchies these houses were built to reinforce. Workers were often sequestered according to an early version of the "track" system, working only in designated houses in designated districts and subdistricts. In the Canadain North-West Territories, as this article describes further, police helped build a system in which the best wages were offered to white sex workers, especially younger or popular white workers employed in organized bawdy houses they approved and protected. Conversely, workers of color, older, or disabled women and those engaged in street work or "cribs" (cottages where women usually lived and worked alone), received less pay, less (or zero) official protection, and were often exposed to more dangerous conditions.

Workers traveled frequently in search of better conditions. This migratory aspect of sex work, beyond the creation of trafficking or "white slave" narratives popular with moral reformers, has been understudied. "Wide open towns" or settlements that allowed sex work, drew ambitious workers westward to both sides of the Canada–U.S. border.[12] Dramatic shortages of sex workers and other women in frontier work camps, mining towns, and emerging towns that permeated the West fueled rumors of unlimited business and unparalleled pay as well as permanent financial security through investments, marriage, and other businesses.[13] From 1873 onwards the Canadian West increasingly attracted what Paula Petrik has best described as "capitalists with rooms," particularly as the

American frontier drew to a close in 1890 and Canadian officials tried to position themselves as owners of the "Last Best West."[14]

The growth of bawdy house economies on the Canadian Prairies intensified as North American rail connections grew in the 1880s and 1890s.[15] Easier travel helped encourage a flood of American workers, as well as some women from major Canadian easterly cities like Toronto, into the Canadian West. One worker remembered that the American population in vice districts was so great that Winnipeg's red-light neighborhood was jokingly referred to as "The American Colony."

> . . . All of the girls "on the prairie," with the exception of two or three, were American by birth. Our Canadian cousins seemed to think that the United States supplied the Canadian market with prostitutes; they expressed great surprise if they chanced to find a girl who had not come from the States.[16]

Big Nelly was one of these sojourning workers and business owners. Before she arrived in Edmonton, she had built connections in Calgary's larger red-light district, roughly 300 kilometers south of the little village. Reports suggest that she switched between the position of madam and sex worker as needed, something not uncommon with younger madams in remote areas.[17] She listed her ethnicity as "Norwegian" and her age as "30" in 1891, though women often lied about their age and nationality to census takers and other officials.[18] At the time of the shooting in Edmonton, Big Nelly had built enough credit and capital to establish a popular bordello, one well-stocked with liquor, a piano, and a solid client list (Figure 1).

A local patrolman reported that on October 24, 1888, he followed the sound of gunshots and yelling to Big Nelly's establishment. It was not hard to find in the little settlement of roughly 400 people. The physically imposing woman was not only a bawdy house madam, she was also the village midwife and most people knew where she lived. Big Nelly provided an account of the moments leading up to the shooting. Two drunk off-duty NWMP constables, Thomas Cairney and Thomas Rogers, had tried to force their way into the house. They were so loud and obnoxious that she heard them in advance and so "the door was closed and a chain (drawn) across the inside."[19]

Though Big Nelly and other madams usually served alcohol, seriously inebriated, rowdy clients like Cairney were terrible for business. Inebriated men bought fewer drinks (central to brothel revenue) and required too much attention and care when they became sick or passed out. They could also cause serious property damage. Madeleine Blair, a madam who worked around this part of the North-West Territories recalled one drunk customer "hurled a lamp through one of the parlor windows" during a severe blizzard, ushering in freezing wind and snow drifts that piled up in the parlor and hall.[20] Sally Stanford remembered how another drunk client urinated all over an expensive new pink couch in his sleep. (He dyed much of his body bright pink in the process. She retaliated by sending him the bill and calling him "Pinky" for the rest of his life.)[21] Male clients may have found such encounters funny and entertaining, but workers and madams often saw them differently. Memoirs from this period confirm that workers tried not to let patrons get too drunk. Loud and boisterous men attracted the ire of neighbors and could result in serious financial losses, not to

Figure 1. Edmonton in 1889. Courtesy: City of Edmonton Archives, EA-10-174.

mention the closing of a house by police.[22] Most serious, however, was the threat of violence from drunk men. Big Nelly testified that Cairney "made a threat and had been using some of the most abusive language that ever came out of a man's mouth- said he would go in or wreck the house and kill me. . .."[23] It was a terrifying but common problem. Four years after her trial, Big Nelly lost her colleague, May Buchanan, to violence at the hands of a drunken man in Edmonton.[24] As madam Josie Washburn, a contemporary of Big Nelly's, remembered: "if they are drunk, we fear them. We never get over this fear."[25]

Thomas Cairney and his companion were but one of many examples of the threat that drunk clients could pose. After being refused admission they began furiously kicking in the madam's locked door. They destroyed the lower half of the door and as they were about to gain entrance Big Nelly "lifted my revolver and fired it through one of the panels broken in the door—striking the man who had broken in the door—in self defence."[26] A crowd of local men who many had been clients of the house gathered outside. Concerned about revealing their proximity to the bawdy house, they lifted the shooting victim from the ground and carried him to a local law office where a doctor was summoned. Cairney received a wound to his hip and though the wound was not life threatening, it was of a serious nature and resulted in many months of recovery.[27]

Cairney and Rogers were not from Edmonton, but were travelers from the NWMP post at Fort Saskatchewan (roughly 30 kilometers from Edmonton) (Figure 2). They were part of the territorial police force established by the Canadian government in 1873 to secure its claims to what they called "the North-West Territories," a massive swath of Indigenous territory that would come to constitute roughly one-third of Canada's land mass, including a large, agriculturally fertile Prairie region. The NWMP was tasked with imposing colonial order in the region, which included suppressing Indigenous resistance and the threat of American annexation and "supervising" the signing of treaties.

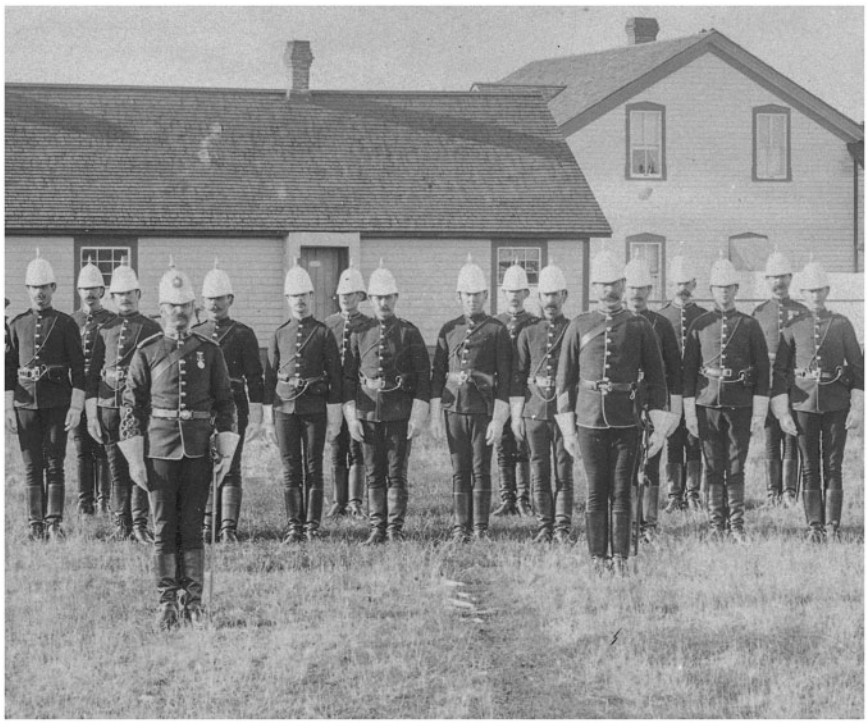

Figure 2. Detail from "North West Mounted Police, (NWMP), Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta." (1894) Provincial Archives of Alberta, A455.

Edmonton in particular lay in Treaty Six Territory, which was part of the territory of a number of First Nations, including the *Niitsitapi* (Blackfoot), *Nehiyawak* (Cree), *Tsuut'ina* (Sarcee), *Anishinaabe*, and the *Nakota Sioux*, as well as a number of *Métis* communities. When the North-West Resistance erupted in the region in 1885 (the second of two major resistance movements under the leadership of Louis Riel), Indigenous forces responded to a long list of offenses by the Canadian state and its representatives. These included land theft, numerous broken legal agreements and treaty provisions, violence, and campaigns of starvation.

The NWMP's efforts to suppress Indigenous resistance helped the Canadian state impose colonial law in the region and helped stabilize and protect the interests of the settler state and investors who made huge profits from settlement schemes, shipping, and construction. Yet, the image of the "benevolent" uniformed Mountie remains a powerful and pervasive national symbol of "fairness" in Canada.[28] As Eva Mackey describes further, this image is rooted in Canadian nationalist mythology from the 1870s and 1880s that imagined the "inevitable and glorious expansion of the nation (and the subjugation of Native peoples) with much less bloodshed and more benevolence and tolerance than the violent US expansion to the South."[29] As the Big Nelly case and a number of other scandals reveal however, the NWMP of this much mythologized age labored

under a different public image, one plagued with reports of drunkenness, violence, and disorder that many believed made the force itself a threat to colonial control over the region.

"The Mounted Inebriate Asylum": The NWMP as a Threat to Colonial Order

Beyond Thomas Cairney, a longer list of serious problems with NWMP stationed in the region seriously tarnished public opinion of the force between 1873 and 1890. In spite of their reputation as enemies of American whiskey traders wreaking havoc in the Northwest, archival evidence clearly reveals that after 1873, Mounties had begun to establish a reputation as some of the thirstiest residents in the territory. Chronic drunkenness in the force was not uncommon, asserted John S. Clark in 1879: "the force out here are properly called 'the Mounted Inebriate Asylum.'"[30] S.W. Horrall similarly reveals that in 1888, the NWMP barracks in Regina were caught importing 1,000 gallons of beer without a permit.[31] Alcohol, poor pay, and substandard living conditions had also helped spark a mutiny in Cairney's post at Fort Saskatchewan and in neighboring Fort Edmonton in 1886.[32] Prior to his confrontation with Webb on the night of the shooting, Cairney's superiors had also already begun to describe him as a "bad character," a quality made worse by his propensity for "drunken and quarrelsome conduct."[33]

Scandals surrounding the territory's booming bootlegged liquor trade compounded the NWMP's image problem. Cairney himself had been drinking at a local hotel on the night of his shooting, but his inebriated state suggests possible access to stronger illegal liquor.[34] The disorderly or controversial conduct of drunken Mounties was a sore spot for locals because it was the NWMP who upheld unpopular liquor laws in the region and frequently seized and destroyed expensive bootlegged shipments. After 1873, the Northwest became largely a dry territory in an attempt to quell violence in the region, but authorities began to loosen these laws in the 1880s by permitting quotas and the sale of weaker beer at saloons and hotels. Networks of smugglers supplied stronger spirits by hiding them in shipments of oatmeal, stewed apple containers, coffins, and even finely crafted fake eggs.[35] The NWMP employed a range of tactics to catch offenders, including controversial undercover sting operations and the payment of crooked informants, leading, as Horrall writes, to outrage among civilian settlers about their duplicity and underhanded tactics.[36] Cairney's drunkenness then, was not simply a moral failure, it was an enraging display of corruption and the hypocrisy of liquor regulation in the North-West Territories.

To make matters worse, a second scandal erupted days after the Cairney shooting when two *additional* Mounties were discovered passed out drunk at Big Nelly's. The madam/midwife was under house arrest for shooting Cairney when she was summoned to a birth. NWMP Superintendent Arthur Griesbach had assigned Constables Casault and Watson to guard Big Nelly's house, two men who suddenly found themselves alone in a brothel, fully stocked with smuggled alcohol, food, and cash. It was not long before "a couple of young fellows from the town" arrived at the house to help the Mounties tackle the brothel's formidable liquor supply. These unnamed men were described as "sports," a reference

to the "sporting life" led by young North American men engaged in the wilder side of masculine leisure activities, from horse racing, hunting, boxing, and other sports to brothel hopping, gambling, and drinking. Together with Casault and Watson, they trashed the house, smashing jars of preserves on the floor and even stealing $45 of the madam's hidden cash. Ultimately, however, the sports outpaced the Mounties. Once they were unconscious, the mischievous locals "took their arms and cartridge belts" and possibly parts of their uniforms. Wearing these symbols of the force, the sports started a small mock NWMP parade in downtown Edmonton, in front of multiple witnesses who quickly guessed where the original owners could be found.[37]

The wild spectacle of local brothel patrons parading around the symbols of an incapacitated police force fanned local and national distrust of the NWMP, whose reputation was already shaky by 1888. It also reflected larger concerns about the fragility of Canada's colonial hold in the region. The North-West Resistance had ended only three years ago and the threat of another serious Indigenous uprising continued to undermine confidence about the future of settlements in the region. Policing in the region was also unreliable, since as the *Winnipeg Free Press* declared, the Mounted Police were "paralyzed by sports"[38]—a reference to the grip that the "sporting life" had on Mounties' lives, but also an embarrassing reminder that Edmonton "sports" (brothel patrons and sex workers in this case) had now repeatedly defeated and disarmed multiple members of Canada's police force. While they were "occupied," critics wrote, the Mounties were failing spectacularly at policing the region's Indigenous inhabitants. This included failing to capture George Godin, or Kiskawasis, a Cree man convicted of murder in Montana who was known to be in the area during the Big Nelly scandal. Kiskawasis had been spotted multiple times in this part of the Prairies, but the incapacitated Mounties, commentators scoffed "are not noted for their skill in arresting criminals."[39]

The "Tiger" Club: Madams, Guns, and Self-Defense

Numerous cases of police inaction or participation in violence against women on the Prairies also cast the NWMP as an untrustworthy and sometimes dangerous force in the region. Reports suggest that Cairney and his companion Rogers had aggressively approached local women for sex before they found Big Nelly's, breaking into three local houses and using "abusive language."[40] Police could not only be physically violent and threatening, their formidable allies and powerful ties could leave workers and other women who occupied a low or precarious status in settler society with little protection. This is particularly clear in Sarah Carter's work on cases involving settler veterans and police accused in the murders of at least two Indigenous women around 1888. NWMP Constable Alfred Symonds murdered an Indigenous woman from the Blood Nation the same year as the Big Nelly shooting. He was a "popular and jocular crickateer and boxer" and although he admitted giving the woman poison and hiding her body, he was acquitted.[41] Similarly, an all-white jury in 1889 sided with an Ontario-born settler, William "Jumbo" Fisk, in spite of overwhelming evidence that he had murdered a Cree worker named Rosalie in Calgary. A judge attacked the clear racial bias in the jury, which declared the "well-liked" veteran of the colonial Canadian forces in 1885, "not guilty."[42] Violence at the hands of

officials also spilled over into settler red-light districts. Jack Ingram, Calgary's chief of police at this time, ran the town's red-light district and was a well-known "brawler" who did not shy from hitting women. During his time as police chief in Winnipeg, several witnesses testified that he forced his way into the home of one woman and physically attacked her in front of her family.[43]

Big Nelly's additional locks, loaded gun, and skill in shooting reflected the dangers of dealing both with clients and police. They also bore the hallmarks of a larger culture of gun ownership and self-defense for women in the sex work industry during this era. Some madams hired bodyguards, but many were themselves a security force. Physically large women (as Nelly's nickname suggests) could respond to threats and violence, but even smaller madams could uphold the laws of their houses. As one madam advised, bawdy house-keepers just needed to establish and maintain a reputation as a "tiger" who knew how to use a gun to ensure local men respected their authority and followed the rules.[44] Guns, as a number of strikingly similar cases to the Big Nelly affair suggest, were commonly kept in bawdy houses and regularly needed to deal with men who had been refused admission. Madam Nellie Dunn shot her gun five times and killed a very inebriated James Wagner in Emerson, Manitoba, in 1890, after he or men in his party attempted to force their way into her house.[45] In 1915, miner Joe Lagoux tried to force his way into a local bawdy house in Circle City, Alaska. Ella Joseph-de-Saccrist, a well-connected "West Indian" worker who went by the name "Lola Belmont," grabbed her 45-gauge shotgun from the kitchen and "nailed him in the left shoulder."[46] Famed Dakota Territory madam "Poker Alice" Tubbs also shot a rejected customer who attacked her house in 1913. The man, a soldier from a nearby military camp, died of his wounds. Shot marks from Tubbs's gun are still evident in a boudoir painting that hung near the window, which is now in the collection of the Days of '76 Museum in Deadwood.[47] Strikingly, the court sided with sex workers and madams in all of these cases and, as in the Big Nelly case, and accepted their claims of self-defense (Figure 3).

The Big Nelly case and the support a number of other settler madams received from local judges, juries, and everyday people on the colonial frontier were not simply about sympathy. They reflected the place of brothels as civic and colonial institutions with deep ties to local settler culture, racial hierarchies, and capital. They also reflected the central role of the male settler elite in creating and running brothel-based economies on the Prairies. With a few exceptions, these "silent partners" in the sex work economies of the West have received far too little historiographical attention.[48] Indeed, many settler men in the West on both sides of the border were regular brothel patrons, investors, merchants, and landlords who benefited from their presence, or simply believed they had a right to operate in settlements. One American madam described the different ranks that appeared on her step at nightfall in the Canadian North West.

> There were railroad men and bank officials, cow-punchers and professional men, wheat-growers and business men, Mounted Police in mufti, bartenders, clerks, and most of the male choir members of the English church.[49]

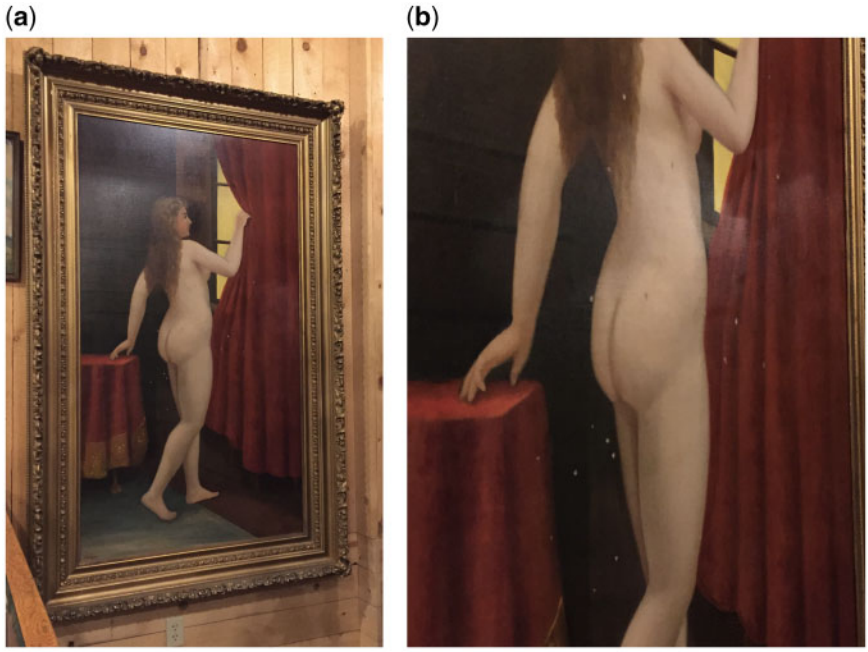

Figure 3. Boudoir painting damaged by gunfire at Alice Tubbs's brothel (a and b). Collection: Days of '76 Museum, Deadwood, South Dakota. Photo by author.

Such accounts remind us that Thomas Cairney may have crossed a much larger cast of characters in 1888 when he attacked Big Nelly's house, including, potentially, other members of the NWMP, local law enforcement, or higher-ranking officials with business or personal interests in the house. Though frontier houses like Big Nelly's might welcome men from all classes, more established brothels often segregated their internal spaces according to class, age, and affiliations, including political lines, a practice often appreciated by more elite and privacy-conscious patrons.[50] Such a practice protected men of higher standing from "roughs and rowdies and gentlemen who turn their shirts wrong side out when the other side is dirty."[51] Indeed, assurances that a brothel was "quiet" and "orderly" and could control "ruffians" were often advertised in brothel guidebooks and considered important and desirable for respectable brothel patrons.[52] The lack of sympathy for Cairney, a blacksmith by trade, reflected the rules of most houses as well as his lowly status in the community, both as a "rough" and disreputable man.[53]

NWMP documents also suggest the madam had influential ties in the community. As a seller of liquor, she would have had paid arrangements with both bootleggers and the local hotel (for permission to illegally compete with their business). In Edmonton, she clearly had the support of locals as well as access to larger sums of money and expensive legal counsel. Though her bail was set at an exorbitant $2000, she quickly produced $1000 in cash and two bondsmen stepped forward to provide her with the remaining $1000. NWMP Superintendent Griesbach explained to his superiors that many locals were loyal

to Webb. A conviction was unlikely, he apologized, because she had "the sympathy of a certain class in town."[54]

A number of sources from this period also remind us that Cairney had broken the rules in a sanctioned space of prostitution created by other officials. Indeed, local and regional police and officials often established the red-light zones where bawdy houses operated and secretly ran them with madams. For example, the red-light district in Calgary, a larger settlement south of Edmonton, expanded considerably after John Ingram was appointed the city's first police chief in 1885. He had previously managed the urban red-light districts in Winnipeg as chief of police, but was forced to resign after being publicly exposed "in a state of undress" in a bawdy house there run by madam Ella Lewis.[55] Tom English, another disgraced former member of the police in Winnipeg also took up the chief of police post in Calgary in 1891, just as Big Nelly arrived to reestablish herself in the town (Figure 4). English likely knew her and many other members of the Calgary *demimonde*. He had been demoted from sergeant in Winnipeg after being caught in a scheme that passed money from bawdy houses and gambling dens to the Chief of Police David B. Murray "in exchange for protection against raids and prosecution."[56] In Calgary, English's experience was more appreciated, even as he clashed with the nearby NWMP over control of the red-light district.[57] Alongside powerful madams like Lottie Diamond, English made Calgary a "wide open town," where sex workers who observed the rules set forth by city police could operate a house of ill repute with relative freedom.[58]

Growing Town "Attractions": The Economic Power of the Bawdy House

The bawdy house system that spread throughout the North American West in the second part of the nineteenth century represented a new, particular system of commercial sex, one that was firmly anchored to colonial expansion and segregation, defense, and population regulation. As Lesley Erickson describes further in her work, the "continental system of tolerated houses and segregated districts" imported the ideas of European "sanitary engineers," particularly Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, which advocated the toleration of bawdy houses, as long as they were monitored by officials, physicians, and police.[59] Adapted and promoted by North American physicians like William Sanger, such systems helped make North American brothels into what Katie M. Hemphill describes as "the most sanitized, rationally capitalist, and easily governed units of the commercial sex trade."[60] Though some towns and police chiefs were opposed to the toleration of bawdy houses and red-light zones in their communities, many others believed that houses like Big Nelly's were essential to the success of any settlements.[61] This section discusses this popular, still frequently overlooked perspective in the West, with a focus on the economic power of bawdy houses, their relationship to sexual regulation (namely the prevention of homosexuality and the spread of disease), and the imposition of new racial hierarchies in fledgling villages, towns, and camps.

Bawdy houses were more than places that sold sex, they were popular social and leisure spaces that offered music, alcohol, dancing, and networking opportunities in male settler culture. The memoirs of madams reveal that officials regularly patronized bawdy houses themselves and that official functions, including

Figure 4. Thomas English, Calgary Chief of Police. Glenbow Museum, na-2861-4.

election campaigns, conferences, and business meetings, could actually end with bawdy house afterparties.[62] Their special place in male settler culture, at least for a certain percentage of the population, helped make them essential to attracting and maintaining a settler, prospector, and business presence in emerging colonial settlements.[63] Many officials and investors alike believed that the lack of a segregated vice zone was bad for businesses and could even threaten the future of a settlement. The police had reportedly tried to close all of the brothels in one unnamed town near Edmonton in the 1890s but

> after two years the businessmen had raised an objection to the "closed town" because of the decrease in business. They attributed this to the fact that the town had no attraction for the hundreds of single men employed in various capacities in that section. They maintained that as soon as the men drew their money they went to one of the neighboring towns to spend it.[64]

The popularity of bawdy houses also frequently meant considerable financial opportunities for investors and business partners. Many landlords who welcomed bawdy house owners did so because they could charge inflated rent in exchange for permission to operate in designated zones. Rhonda Hinther describes how madams who had enough capital to buy their own houses were still forced to pay extra. In her analysis of Winnipeg's red-light district, she recounts the story of when the city's police chief opened a new zone with Minnie Wood, one of the biggest madams in the city. After they agreed on a

location, however, he notified a local real estate agent who promptly bought up all of the houses for roughly $1500 and resold them to madams for $10,000 to $12,000 apiece.[65] Houses made much of their income from alcohol and similarly paid a premium, so breweries, bootleggers, and saloonkeepers clamored (and sometimes became violent) for bawdy house accounts.[66] Cab drivers, bartenders, and hotel employees also got a cut as advertisers. Men could earn a commission by referring patrons to houses of ill fame, sometimes with photographs of brothel workers.[67] As discussed later, police officers also regularly demanded "graft" (bribes), bail and monthly fines, and legal fees also further diminished worker and house profits.[68] Though they seemed to be generating large amounts of cash, sex workers and madams alike could quickly be squeezed out of their earnings.

"They would examine the men": Brothels and the Regulation of Disease and Male Disorder

A better understanding of the larger financial benefits of houses of ill fame in nineteenth-century settlements illuminates one of the reasons why so many settler men tolerated and even protected these controversial establishments. Beyond profits, however, bawdy houses in police-established red-light districts also clearly served a biopolitical function. Many officials permitted these houses because they believed they helped regulate sexuality and reproduction in a way that would disproportionately encourage the growth of white settler populations on the Prairies. Phillip Howell writes that historians who study regulated sex work "typically understand its workings as a disciplinary project, nodding to Michel Foucault's influential work on power and sexuality."[69] Indeed, in the nineteenth century, "sexuality was invented as a force that required control, attention, and regulation,"[70] corresponding with the rise of Britain's Contagious Diseases Acts and a new era of aggressive Canadian and American colonial expansion into the West.[71] Foucault discusses further in his work on biopolitics and biopower how European and colonial officials at this time increasingly began to focus on regulating populations and governing the forces of "life itself" in the nineteenth century.[72] As Giorgio Agamben elaborates, one of the core facets of this new approach to rule was the policy of "make live and let die," or encouraging, even nurturing the health, well-being, and future of a "desirable" population while *exposing* "undesirable" populations, encouraging their demise, and even tolerating their killing through neglect and the suspension or withholding of protections offered to other humans from dangerous forces like disease, violence, and hunger.[73] Such policies not only served the race-based colonial ambitions for settler population growth (and Indigenous decline) in the Canadian North-West Territories, they did so in a covert way, covering up these deliberate, manufactured campaigns of eradication with narratives of a "natural" and "unfortunate" inability to survive. Canadian officials preferred these kinds of more diffuse, less visible campaigns of control to formal legislation.[74] Segregated vice zones and settler bawdy house systems helped establish an early incarnation of the track system of sex work, offering the best pay and conditions, regular medical attention, and official support to younger, white, able-bodied women. In addition to simply arresting workers of color, officials also employed

more subtle, larger campaigns of eradication, by pushing them into what is now commonly referred to as "low track" work. By deliberately refusing to let them establish stable businesses with access to the protections and medical support offered to white bawdy house workers, police pushed workers of color into the most dangerous and poorly paid work. Such *policies of exposure* were genocidal in their intent and had a direct impact on workers' health, income, well-being, and lifespans, particularly since police often minimized or sometimes openly tolerated acts of violence committed against them by settler men.[75]

Conversely, officials often referred to white settler bawdy houses as a "necessary evil" required to protect heterosexual, patriarchal order in settlements. As centers of both sexuality and potentially reproduction or disease transmission, they believed professionally run bawdy houses like Big Nelly's were essential to securing a healthy, quickly growing population of white settlers. While moral reformers loudly attacked these dens of iniquity, it is clear that many settler men and officials quietly asserted that strict adherence to Christian bans on extramarital sex was not "natural," and actually fueled high-risk sexual liaisons, incest, and sexual violence against "virtuous" settler women and girls.[76] Carter writes in her survey of Assiniboine West in 1891 that the non-Indigenous North-West Territories was "overwhelmingly male" and that only 31 percent of settler men had wives.[77] In their isolated, predominantly male settlements, camps, and barracks, officials believed that bawdy houses were essential to preventing homosexuality and disease. "A large number of undisciplined men, associated together for a considerable length of time naturally formed intimacies which were objectionable," warned NWMP Commissioner Irvine in 1880.[78] Without access to female company, some officials feared that this would include "unnatural" conduct, including cases of "buggery" and same sex sexual liaisons, both in the force and the larger settler population.[79] Patronizing brothels was one way settler men could flaunt their heterosexual prowess in a homosocial environment.[80] Some men in frontier towns might regularly take on other roles designated as female, including donning a dress for local dances, cooking, and doing laundry, but brothel patronage could function as an affirmation of one's masculine heterosexuality.

Beyond the question of heterosexual morality, officials believed professional bawdy houses, staffed by workers trained in disease detection could actively curb the spread of both syphilis and gonorrhea in the North-West.[81] Untreated gonorrhea could spread throughout the body, causing fever and infections of the heart lining and brain. Blockages caused by scarring and swelling could be so painful that some committed suicide.[82] Syphilis could spread to the bones and brain, causing terrible pain, insanity, and death. Both diseases could spread from mother to child, elevating infant mortality rates and risks of serious conditions like blindness. In the mid-1880s as enduring fears about Indigenous resistance and declining rates of settler immigration threatened financial and political colonial investments in the North-West Territories, the rising rates of these "unnameable" diseases also posed a serious threat to the colonial project itself. As Phillipa Levine reminds us in her survey of contagious disease legislation in the British Empire, "VD was seen as not only affecting individuals, but as something that would weaken the 'race. . . The spread of disease was potentially ruinous to Britain's powerful empire as well as its alleged racial superiority.'"[83]

While scholars often focus on the targeting of women in nineteenth-century Contagious Disease legislation, many officials privately believed that settler men played a central role in the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In the late 1880s, the NWMP in particular had earned a larger reputation as carriers (and transmitters) of STIs. Though the term "venereal disease" implicitly blames women for the spread of STIs, reports from this period contend that members of the NWMP were experiencing high levels of "loathsome disease" infection and were helping fuel its spread. "Syphilis as a distinct disease has caused more trouble, vexation and loss of time than any other disease," reported NWMP Surgeon Kittson in 1874.[84] As Carter reveals in her work, disease spread further after the influx of settler soldiers during the 1885 Resistance and that up to 45 percent of the force was infected in 1886.[85] According to reports, these rates were behind skyrocketing rates of infection in Indigenous communities as well. As NWMP Constable James Livingston, who was posted at Fort Walsh, remembered,

> I know a chap (at Fort Walsh) who's very bad with a loathsome disease. The doctor reported against him but he was sworn in all the same. . . (Another) was very far gone with a similar disease, yet he was sworn in. . .There's lots of them like that in the force and they spread the disease among the Indians. Nothing of that sort was known here before the advent of the Mounted Police.[86]

Though historians seldom identify brothel-based sex workers as medical personnel in the West, many officials and police clearly saw them as key players in the war against these diseases. Instead of placing the containment of disease in the hands of the state, as the controversial Contagious Diseases Acts had, brothels deployed sex workers to "examine the men" to detect disease and stop or slow its entrance into the local population.[87] At this time, it was customary for all brothel-based workers to be trained in disease detection and control. Each worker was required by the madam to perform inspections and ensure the clients were washed thoroughly before sexual contact.[88] Clients with sores, discharge, or other signs of disease were, as a rule, refused service in bawdy houses.[89] This often forced infected men into over-patronizing less formal street-based sex work economies that were not supported by local officials and where workers often did not have the ability to impose such regulations. Conversely, bawdy house rules regarding safety, sanitation, and disease were long part of their allure for male clients looking for safer encounters.[90] Anxious customers may have also taken comfort in post-service sanitation protocol as well. After a service was performed, house workers used douches, often with dangerous chemicals, to help prevent disease transmission (and pregnancy).[91] However, once a sex worker became ill, or at least too ill to work, her protected status quickly changed. Though some might be offered medical treatment and support, others could simply be forced out. In the segregated vice system, any house that permitted visibly ill women to work would be quickly raided and closed by police.

As a self-described "midwife," Big Nelly and other madams with this imperfect but comparatively advanced understanding of sexual and reproductive health became a resource for a range of local people, including the wives of some of their clients. Many settlers could be isolated from medical help and taboos about STIs prevented many from getting treatment, resulting in

premature death. The archaeological discovery of glass "irrigators" for men (used to apply STI treatments) at bawdy house sites show that some settler men actually turned to these houses, instead of local doctors, to deal with these serious ailments and "avoid the cost or embarrassment of seeking medical services from a physician."[92] Madam Josie Washburn established herself as a kind of local expert in the disease and wrote an extensive essay on syphilis in her memoirs.[93] A coordinated war against loathsome diseases was essential, Washburn wrote, noting that she had known of many infected men who knowingly passed the disease to their new brides and, presumably, their unborn children.[94]

The Zone of "Female Warfare": Race, Anti-Colonial Resistance, and the Establishment of Segregated Districts

Beyond the prevention of homosexuality and the spread of disease, white settler houses of ill fame like Big Nelly's also imposed and reinforced local regimes of racial segregation. Police required white bawdy houses to refuse service to men of color and mug shot archives reveal they harassed and overpoliced the significant number of African American and Canadian workers and madams drawn to the opportunities in the red-light districts of the Northwest. In spite of claims that Canada was ruled by British fairness, "tolerance, and benevolence, particularly as compared to the United States,"[95] these workers and madams found a red-light system defined by racial hierarchies and run by settler officials and police with long, documented histories of racism and institutional violence.[96] Sarah-Jane Mathieu, for example, documents some of the extremes of anti-Black racism in the Edmonton area around the turn of the century, including several coordinated civilian campaigns to bar Black migrants.[97] Anti-Black racism also permeated police forces in the North-West Territories. High-ranking officials like NWMP Superintendent Arthur Griesbach, Cairney's superior and an early architect of the NWMP, was a veteran of the British Cape Town Rifles who had served in South Africa.[98] NWMP Sam Steele "respected some Indigenous people and leaders, but he was unavailingly negative about people of Black African descent in South Africa and Canada."[99] Such sentiments were not solely reserved for the NWMP elite. Frank Oliver, owner of the *Edmonton Bulletin*, the paper that defended Big Nelly following the 1888 shooting, also became the federal minister of the interior in 1905 and aggressively pushed to impose a federal ban on the entry of any Black migrant entering Canada. Other workers of color faced serious barriers and even violence on the nineteenth-century Prairies. Chinese sex workers as well as Chinese men who worked in settler bawdy houses in other capacities, including as cooks and security guards, faced a series of brutal federal and local laws and widespread racist sentiment and violence.[100]

The link between bawdy house economies, racist policy, and invasive policing and violence was particularly clear in campaigns to separate settler men and Indigenous women. Though they largely tolerated (and sometimes patronized) settler bawdy houses throughout the North-West Territories, white police and judges imposed an unspoken ban on Indigenous workers in these establishments. Indeed, any settler bawdy house in a segregated zone that accepted Indigenous workers in the late 1880s risked raids, closure, harsh treatment, and inflated

fines.[101] If caught, Indigenous brothel keepers faced much more severe penalties than their non-Indigenous counterparts.[102] Benjamin Hoy asserts that this severe treatment extended to reserves, where "Indian agents enforced sexual conformity by threatening legal prosecutions against deviants, withholding treaty annuities and rations. . .." Women suspected of or found engaging in "immoral practices" on reserves, he continues, would have their children removed and sent away to one of the country's notorious residential schools.[103] As Constance Backhouse describes further in her analysis of Canadian prostitution law, in 1880 the federal government also amended the already restrictive Indian Act to specifically ban keeping, frequenting, or being found in "tee pees and wigwams" being used as a "disorderly house."[104] Carter writes that officials were so determined to bar Indigenous women from this underground economy that it helped fuel the formation of "the pass system," or the policy of preventing Indigenous people from leaving reserves (without the permission of Indian Agents).[105]

Why were Indigenous workers so aggressively targeted by officials who quietly tolerated (and potentially patronized) white-run brothels in the 1880s? Scholars often convincingly attribute these anti-prostitution campaigns to ideas about race and the much larger political or ideological threat that the image of Indigenous women in this underground economy posed to white, monogamous Christian colonial ideals. But in the 1880s, as the specter of real time armed Indigenous resistance loomed large, it is also clear that some officials feared it could also strengthen Indigenous resistance in at least three ways. First, as Janice Acoose explains in her work, settler ideas about the "squaw" were rooted in campaigns to suppress Indigenous political structures and power. Indigenous women played an important role on "clan, tribal, and council consensus governments," she writes, all of which were under attack by the Canadian state in the 1880s.[106] First-hand accounts from the NWMP testify to concerns that Indigenous women could exert significant political influence over settler men and that some may have been undermining colonial operations in the area. In 1885, "Mother Smoke," a Cree Métis cleaning woman who worked with her daughter at the Prince Albert barracks reportedly induced a Mountie from D company to desert the post with them (and bring his money and supplies).[107] Some may have even worked against colonial forces by engaging in espionage. NWMP veteran George Donkin wrote that there was also a house full of Métis women stationed surprisingly close to the Canadian colonial forces during the 1885 Resistance. The women tried to lure soldiers inside, wrote Donkin, and those who entered found themselves in "a frightful abode of female warfare and liberty of speech."[108]

This reference to "female warfare" is compelling. Often overlooked in histories of espionage and warfare, women working as laundresses and camp followers, as well as dancers, madams, and sex workers could easily gather military intelligence in North American conflicts. One of settler Canada's biggest national heroes, Laura Secord, acted as a spy and informant against American forces during the War of 1812. Mary Ellen Pleasant, a free woman of color with investments in California bawdy houses maintained her own extensive networks of informants. She journeyed to Canada in the late 1850s to help launch and fund a major insurrection in the war against slavery. Sources implicate her as one of John Brown's co-conspirators in the Harpers Ferry Raid in 1859.[109] During the 1880s, British Protestant Canadian officials actually employed their own female

spies to monitor organizers and supporters of Irish Catholic resistance.[110] Larger networks of spies, working both for and against the Indigenous forces, also operated throughout the North-West Territories.[111] The idea that Indigenous women could participate in espionage was so commonplace that it was the subject of a popular 1886 Canadian settler novel, *Annette: The Metis Spy* (Figure 5).[112]

Second, colonial officials were anxious to sever the growth of Métis (blended Indigenous and non-Indigenous) populations and Indigenous-settler family bonds that had contributed politically to the North-West Resistance in 1885. Carter and Renisa Mawani show us how the targeting of Indigenous workers and women entering settlements was not simply about sexuality, it was also about access to land, capital, and status. Settler officials viewed "concubinage and miscegenation as threatening to whiteness and Euro-Canadian dominance," writes Mawani.[113] While treaties and the Indian Act attempted to curtail Indigenous land claims, Carter explains that interracial unions "potentially jeopardized Euro-Canadian efforts to acquire Indigenous land," by building multiple legal inroads and resources for Indigenous communities that could further undermine white settler holds on territory.[114] Such relationships, Sheila McManus argues, could also be potential assets to Indigenous resistance.[115] Officials on both sides of the border derisively referred to settler husbands of Indigenous women as "squaw men," she writes, noting they often sided with their Indigenous in-laws and used their legal status, networks, and money to the fight against the many unjust policies being imposed by the state in the 1880s.[116] As one American official complained, such men "foment discord among the Indians themselves, disturb their peaceful inclinations towards the settlers in the country surrounding the reservation, and incite opposition on the part of the Indians to the measures adopted and regulations prescribed. . .."[117]

Finally, as described earlier, settler officials well knew that the *demimonde* generated significant, sometimes exorbitant revenues in the overwhelmingly male bachelor settler populations of the North-West Territories. These revenue streams should not be overlooked or underestimated, particularly since colonial officials in the 1880s were trying to control Indigenous treaty communities politically, demanding compliance by deliberately withholding lifesaving supplies as hunting-based food economies collapsed. As James Daschuk explains, the Canadian government had "turned the food crisis into a means to control [First Nations] to facilitate construction of the railway and opening of the country to agrarian settlement."[118] New income or supply lines built through underground economies could generate serious amounts of cash that could quickly help undermine deprivation-based colonial control, one of the Canadian government's most pervasive weapons against Indigenous survival and resistance. It is particularly noteworthy that many other workers on the Prairies at this time, including Big Nelly herself, are documented using the economy's considerable revenues for everything from food and medicine to guns and legal defense.

Just as the Indian Act had, police and local officials also sought to contain or ban other madams and workers of color. Some Black madams, including Ida Dorsey of Minneapolis (a major hub for American traffic heading into the Canadian Prairies), might still be able to operate houses that served segregationist mandates or featured workers of color who catered to white clients in a closed environment. As Penny Petersen writes, Dorsey was one of the most powerful

Figure 5. Frontispiece from Edmond Collins, *Annette: The Metis Spy* (Toronto: Rose, 1886). Courtesy of Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

Black madams in the Midwest and was also known as "Mrs. Pillsbury" because of her rumored relationship with a playboy from the famous white corporate family. In spite of her formidable connections, wealth, legal resources, and letters of reference from the Minneapolis police, Dorsey faced an uphill battle against racist officials when she relocated to St. Paul and had to fight for a single space in the city.[119] These kinds of secretive and informal policies should be considered when approaching police archives that show workers and house owners of color absent, disproportionately represented in arrest records, or engaged in street-based work away from zones established by police, particularly given the larger reputation of Canadian officials for pushing populations of color out of town using informal and undocumented methods.[120]

An understanding of how police and local officials built red-light districts using application and selection processes for madams reveals a larger, often

hidden tactic in the imposition of racial segregation in the region. Just as colonial officials strove to push workers of color out of town, they welcomed and protected approved white American and eastern Canadian sex workers they believed would tackle the hydra-like issues of disease, sexual containment, male settler retention, and racial segregation. This early incarnation of the track system that designated sex workers to a "high" or "low" track of work was created and controlled by police. Settler madams on the Prairies might apply directly to both the chief of the local police and a senior NWMP official for the privilege of operating a house in the 1890s. The police approval process for madams was often accompanied by letters of reference and helped police pre-emptively control red-light districts. Preference was given to white madams (seldom male pimps) who could also assure police that their houses would be run professionally and with discretion, not attracting any unwanted negative attention.[121] Police and investors even created informal advertising campaigns that spread word of better pay, better working conditions, and better treatment in the Canadian West throughout red-light networks in the United States. Madeleine Blair remembered receiving notice about an opportunity not far from Edmonton from "one of the leading professional men in this town." The man told her specifically that the police needed white bawdy house workers to displace "the dissolute squaws and half breed women in this section and the O.C. [Officer in charge] had discovered among his own men an alarming increase in venereal disease."[122]

After approval by local police, madams found houses and began to build their staff, which could include a number of sex workers, cooks, housekeepers, domestic servants, and piano players, depending on the size of their operation. Applicants to their houses, often women still in the United States, usually needed to provide references and once hired, were advanced money for train fare, clothing, and other travel expenses by the madam.[123] Alice Smith remembered journeying north of the border with a whole new bawdy household recruited from the United States to join a madam who went by the name "Lily True." True had found Alice and her other workers through American bartenders working in red-light districts.

> She had gone to every big saloon in town and offered each bartender a flat rate of $20 a girl [if they signed up]... I went in and introduced myself to the madam... "Why don't you come to Canada with me?" she asked. "It's good pickings up there; I run a $3 house and a girl like you –" she looked me up and down, "can make $130 a week."[124]

The Canadian call found an eager audience south of the border. Migration was common in bawdy house work and red-light districts in big American cities could be hard on women's financial and physical health. In spite of the best precautions available at this time, many contracted diseases (both STIs and others, like tuberculosis), became pregnant and endured either childbirth or dangerous abortions, and frequently contended with violence and addiction in bawdy house economies.[125] Though most entered the sex trade for financial reasons, many failed to save their earnings because of the big percentages taken from their pay for commissions, police bribes, legal fees and fines, and inflated prices charged by the madam for room and board. Some Canadian police certainly also

imposed a bribe or collection system[126] but rates could be less severe north of the border. Josie Washburn reported that standard, monthly Nebraska police bribes ranged between $14.70 to $29.70 for madams and $5.70 to $9.70 per worker, in addition to "surprise" raids, collections, and fines.[127] Alice Smith reported that one of her coworkers in a Canadian brothel had escaped an exorbitant American police bribe of $15 a week just for one officer's permission to engage in street work. Trapped into a cycle of debt, she became suicidal, but eventually escaped the city thanks to a recruiter from a Canadian mining town.[128] Finding herself pregnant again, Madeleine Blair remembered being attracted North because the fees were lower or not imposed at all, houses faced less competition, and workers did not need to take on as many clients to make money. Canada, she wrote, offered "the advantage of working and saving money. . . the opportunity of out-of-door life. . . and the wonderful ozone-laden air of the prairies."[129] Even "old timers with the marks of age and vice and alcohol" who would never find a good job in an American bawdy house could come to "this new country" and make a small fortune.[130]

Conclusion

The glowing stories circulating in American bawdy houses about better pay and conditions in the red-light economies of the Canadian Prairies bear an interesting similarity to more official mass migration campaigns to attract white settlers from the United States and Europe to North America's "Last Best West" as the American frontier drew to a close in 1890. Enthusiastic reports about the growth of settlements like Calgary and Edmonton accompanied the Canadian immigration recruiters who blanketed Europe and the United States with posters, lectures, and magic lantern shows depicting a sunny, agricultural paradise on recently acquired Indigenous territory. The symmetry between these campaigns designed to selectively populate (and depopulate) the West reiterates some of the hidden forces behind Big Nelly's arguably unexpected influence in 1880s Edmonton. In spite of their reputation for being spaces of "wildness" and sexual freedom, such houses were institutions of control, designed to grow settlements that served the vision and interests of the Canadian state, investors, and settler law enforcement.

Much more than a "woman on the margins," white madams like Big Nelly were instrumental in the building of settlements and were considered leaders in the settler *demimonde*, responsible for representing their houses and sometimes the larger community in interactions with police and other officials. They were also contracted colonial workers in a larger biopolitical project that fostered the growth of white settler populations by stamping out disease, "objectionable" sexual practices, interracial unions, and undermining Indigenous resistance. As sex workers labored in the project of "making (settlers) live" and possibly found new security, better conditions, and financial opportunities in officially sanctioned commercial sex zones in the West, they did so as officials deliberately withheld protections, permission, and space from many workers of color. Settler madams and workers were, in many regards, part of a powerful night shift in the project of securing white settler reproductive health, political and economic security, and population growth on the Canadian Prairies. As Ann Laura Stoler reminds us, "colonials came in many sizes."[131]

Figure 6. "First Cricket Team: Exhibition Grounds." (Edmonton) 1889. City of Edmonton Archives, EA-10-174.

Stories about the relative influence of white settler madams in the nineteenth-century West also help reveal how race was not only central to how workers accessed opportunity and experienced oppression in sex work, it was foundational to the creation and running of red-light zones. These spaces were carefully organized and cultivated and male settler officials and investors ran them with their own personal, political, and financial interests at heart. For settler madams, this also meant occupying a fundamentally precarious status, one dependent on the inconsistent favors, corruption, and demands of the police and officials who ran local districts. Indeed, for all her privilege and "friends," Big Nelly lost a thriving business, a small fortune in stolen liquor and other damages, and a police constable had tried to kill her. As one American madam in the North-West cautioned, fortunes changed quickly and arrangements with local men were usually very temporary. "No woman could bank on being allowed to remain in (this) country," reported Nona Blake, as "she might have to leave at a moment's notice."[132]

Big Nelly did quietly leave Edmonton after her trial, just as the townspeople were preparing to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday, though many other sojourning workers followed in her footsteps in as Edmonton grew in the 1890s. A simple statement about her acquittal in the *Edmonton Bulletin* was outshone by a discussion of the Ladies of the Church of England's "very successful bazaar" and a heated cricket match (possibly featuring a few of the town's famous "sports") (Figure 6). For local officials, it was time to show off the village's potential as a growing settlement in the Canadian colonial project. A rail line was about to connect Edmonton to the rest of North America and the lieutenant governor and the bishop of Saskatchewan and Calgary were arriving to celebrate. Thomas Cairney was dismissed from the NWMP for his disgraceful

conduct. The bullet lodged permanently next to his thigh bone meant he would walk with a limp for the rest of his life, a souvenir from his failed attack on one of the most formidable nocturnal institutions in the North-West Territories.

Endnotes

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1. Gustav Lening, *The Dark Side of New York Life and its Criminal Classes* (New York, 1873), 357.

2. An overview of the Big Nelly case was first described by James Gray in his popular history, James Gray, *Red Light on the Prairies* (Toronto, 1972), 99–101, 102.

3. Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Oakland, 2012), 3.

4. For a helpful overview of this position in the Canadian context, see Robyn Bourgeois, "Race, Space, and Prostitution: The Making of Settler Colonial Canada," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 30, no. 3 (2018): 371–397, 374.

5. Exceptions to this division include more easterly studies of Chicago and New Orleans as well as Penny Petersen's study of Minneapolis, all of which reveal the central role that race played in the everyday workings and power structures within red-light districts. Cynthia M. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago, 2018); Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 2013); Penny A. Petersen, *Minneapolis Madams: The Lost History of Prostitution on the Riverfront* (Minneapolis, 2013).

6. Bourgeois, "Race, Space, and Prostitution," 371–397; Renisa Mawani, "'The Iniquitous Practice of Women': Prostitution and the Making of White Spaces in British Columbia, 1898–1905," in *Working through Whiteness: International Perspectives*, ed. Cynthia Levine-Rasky (Albany, 2002), 43–68; Shah, *Stranger Intimacy;* Sherene H. Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George," *Canadian Journal of Law & Society/La Revue Canadienne Droit et Société* 15, no. 2 (2000): 91–130; Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal, 1997); Jean Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900," *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly* 115/6 (1997): 237–266; Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto, 2001), 51–56, 118–121.

7. See for example Razack, "The Murder of Pamela George."

8. Bourgeois, "Race, Space, and Prostitution," 372–3, 376.

9. Rail lines shaped sex worker migration. Rail connections to major red-light districts in places like Montana and the many major American cities linked to Minneapolis all facilitated an influx of American-based workers in the late 1880s. Court reports, memoirs, and police archives all conclude that the majority of sex workers on the Canadian Prairies were actually sojourners from the US, however contingents of Ontarian workers also moved West as travel from centers like Toronto and Ottawa were made faster and more affordable. This study attends to the cross-border foundations of settler sex work culture in this period by focusing both on the historiography of major centers in American sex work economies and a comparatively small but growing group of studies of sex work on the Canadian Prairies. American works include Pamela D. Arceneaux, *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1997); Blair, *I've Got to Make*

My *Livin'*; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York, 1994); Holly Karibo, "Detroit's Border Brothel: Sex Tourism in Windsor, Ontario, 1945–1960," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 3 (2010): 362–378; Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*; Jan MacKell, *Brothels, Bordellos, and Bad Girls: Prostitution in Colorado, 1860-1930* (Albuquerque, 2007); Petersen, *Minneapolis Madams*. A more extensive list of older contributions can also be found in Timothy Gilfoyle's excellent 1999 overview, T. Gilfoyle, "Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 117–141. Important contributions on sex work economies on the Canadian Prairies include Carter, *Capturing Women*; Lesley Erickson, *Westward Bound: Sex, Violence, the Law, and the Making of a Settler Society* (Vancouver, 2011); Rhonda L. Hinther, "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: The Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909–1912," *Manitoba History* 41 (2001): 2–13 and S.W. Horrall, "The (Royal) North-West Mounted Police and Prostitution on the Canadian Prairies," *Prairie Forum* 10, no. 1 (1985): 108–128. The shape of Canadian sex work economies on the Prairies arguably differed significantly from other parts of Canada, particularly places like Quebec Ontario and British Columbia with older, more established settler populations, but scholarship from these regions also provide helpful detail and insight, including Constance Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 18, no. 36 (1985): 387-423; Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality," 237–266; Patrick A. Dunae, "Sex, Charades, and Census Records: Locating Female Sex Trade Workers in a Victorian City," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 42, no. 84 (2009): 267–297; Mawani, "The Iniquitous Practice of Women," 43–68; John McLaren, "Recalculating the Wages of Sin: The Social and Legal Construction of Prostitution, 1850-1920," *Manitoba Law Journal* 23 (1995): 524; Mary Anne Poutanen, *Beyond Brutal Passions: Prostitution in Early Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Montreal, 2015); Mariana Valverde, "The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse," *Victorian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1989): 169–188.

10. Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore, 1982), 30–1; Neil Shumsky, "Tacit Acceptance: Respectable Americans and Segregated Prostitution, 1870–1910," in *History of Women in the United States: Prostitution*, Vol. 5 (New York, 1993), 326–340, 326.

11. For examples of the frequency with which sojourning sex workers in the Canadian West had already traveled, compare the career overviews in Madeleine Blair, *Madeleine: An Autobiography* (New York, 1919) and Alice Smith, *Alice: Memoirs of a Barbary Coast Prostitute*, ed. Ivy Anderson and Devon Angus (Berkeley, 2016).

12. The term "wide open town" was used by North Americans with knowledge of sex work economies to describe a settlement where officials generally permitted sex workers to operate. For a discussion of the term see Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, 30.

13. Blair, *Madeleine*, 188–9; Smith, *Alice*, 182.

14. Paula Petrik, "Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana," *Montana: Journal of Western History* 31: 28–41, 28; Hinther, "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg," 2–13.

15. For an overview of the Canadian colonial state's policy of suppression in the West in the 1870s and 80s, see James W. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Toronto, 2013), 79–180.

16. Blair, *Madeleine*, 177.

17. Arthur Griesbach to Commissioner of NWMP, Regina, letter, December 22, 1888, in "Constable Cairney, shooting of by a prostitute at Edmonton," Subject Files, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, RG B18-2-1, 533–88.

18. Statistics Canada, "Nellie Nebb," 1891 Census of Canada. Library and Archives Canada, item number 4724523, accessed October 6, 2021. https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1891/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=4724523

19. "On going to press. . .," *Edmonton Bulletin*, November 1, 1888, 2.

20. Blair, *Madeleine*, 265.

21. Sally Stanford, *Lady of the House: The Autobiography of Sally Stanford* (New York, 1966), 106.

22. Smith, *Alice*, 175, 204; Josie Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871-1909* (Lincoln, 1997), 38–9, 49; Blair, *Madeleine*, 159.

23. "Nelly Webb's Story," *Edmonton Bulletin*, November 3, 1888, 3.

24. "Murder," *Edmonton Bulletin*, December 7, 1893, 1.

25. Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 188.

26. Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 188.

27. "Shooting case," *Edmonton Bulletin*, October 27, 1888, 1.

28. Eva Mackey, *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (New York, 2005), 1.

29. For a prominent example of this narrative see Edward Butts, "North-West Mounted Police," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* 2016, accessed September 19, 2021. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-mounted-police.

30. Clark as quoted in Carter, *Capturing Women*, 168.

31. Stan Horrall, "A Policeman's Lot is not a Happy One: The Mounted Police and Prohibition in the North-West Territories, 1874-91," *Papers Read Before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions Series III* 30 (1974): 1–14, 7.

32. Brock Silversides, *Fort de Prairies: The Story of Fort Edmonton* (Victoria, 2005), 73.

33. Arthur Griesbach to L. Herchmer, letter, April 25, 1888, in "Constable Cairney, shooting of by a prostitute at Edmonton," Subject Files, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, RG B18-2-1, 533–88.

34. "Excitement at Edmonton," *Weekly Herald* (Calgary), November 14, 1888, 5.

35. John G. Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin in the Far North-West: Recollections of Life in the North-West Mounted Police, Canada, 1884-1888* (London, 1889), 72.

36. Horrall, "A Policeman's Lot is not a Happy One," 6–7.

37. Personnel file of Const. (Philippe) Casault, 1342 North West Mounted Police, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 18, volumes 10037–10047.

38. "Shot at Edmonton," *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 8, 1888, 1.

39. "Shot at Edmonton," *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 8, 1888, 1.

40. "Shot at Edmonton," *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 8, 1888, 1; "On going to press. . .," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2.

41. Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion," 156.

42. Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion," 156–7.

43. "City and Provincial News," *Daily Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 10, 1875, 2.

44. Pauline Tabor, *Memoirs of the Madam on Clay Street* (Louisville, 1972), 145.

45. "Death in a Debauch," *Manitoba Free Press*, October 20, 1890, 2.

46. Lael Morgan, *Good Time Girls Of the Alaska Gold Rush* (Fairbanks, 1998), 232.

47. The source of these marks was confirmed by Alice's friend, a madam known as "Big Hulda," who owned the painting after her death, as well as by several locals with knowledge of the affair. "The Poker Alice Painting," didactic panel, Days of '76 Museum, Deadwood, South Dakota.

48. Notable exceptions include Thomas C. Mackey, *Pursuing Johns: Criminal Law Reform, Defending Character, and New York City's Committee of Fourteen, 1920-1930* (Columbus, 2005); P.C. Cohen, Patricia Cline, Timothy J. Gilfoyle, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York* (Chicago, 2008), and published primary source collections like Evelyn Booth, *Buffalo Bill, Boozers, Brothels and Bare-Knuckled Brawlers: An Englishman's Journal of Adventure in America*, ed. Kellen Cutsforth (Helena, 2015).

49. Blair, *Madeleine*, 151.

50. For a more detailed discussion of the separation of political factions into different parlors, see Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 191-3.

51. Anonymous, *The Gentleman's Companion: New York City in 1870* (New York, 1870), 19.

52. Anonymous, *The Gentleman's Companion*, 19.

53. For references to the influx of rough working-class recruits from the "slums of Ontario towns" after the 1885 Resistance, see Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin*, 37.

54. Griesbach to Commissioner of NWMP, December 22, 1888, 533–88.

55. "Police Court," *Winnipeg Daily Free Press*, June 9, 1875, 3. Police chiefs in Winnipeg were generally responsible for ensuring that local red-light districts operated without disturbing respectable Winnipeggers. Ingram was, by all accounts, terrible at that job. Respectable Winnipeggers chafed at "unrestricted commerce allowed at houses of ill fame within The City limits and the great loss resulting therefrom to holders of property in the vicinity where they are located." C.V. Alloway and others, "Houses of Ill Fame," City Clerk's Office Communications, Winnipeg, August 4, 1875, No. 0373.

56. Neil B. Watson, "English, Thomas," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed October 18, 2021. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/english_thomas_14E.html.

57. Horrall, "The (Royal) North-West Mounted Police and Prostitution on the Canadian Prairies," 178–9.

58. James H. Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies*, 129; William Beahen, "Mob Law Could Not Prevail," in *The Mounted Police and Prairie Society, 1873-1919* (Regina, 1998), 102.

59. Erickson, *Westward Bound*, 84.

60. Katie M. Hemphill, "Bawdy City: Commercial Sex, Capitalism, and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2014), 7.

61. The tourist centre in Banff, Alberta, for example, was considered a "closed" town around the turn of the century. "Sporting women" could reportedly not even stop

overnight at a hotel while they were travelling through town without being arrested. Blair, *Madeleine*, 249.

62. Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 190; Tabor, *Pauline's*, 175–9.

63. "Death in a Debauch," 2.

64. Blair, *Madeleine*, 254.

65. Hinther, "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg," 3.

66. See, for example, Tabor, *Pauline's*, 40–41 and Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 49, 94.

67. Smith, *Alice*, 155.

68. For later examples of this practice see Tabor, *Pauline's*, 41; Kenneth Marlowe, *Mister Madam* (Los Angeles, 1964), 112–114; Curt Gentry, *Madams of San Francisco* (New York, 1964), 206–207.

69. Philip Howell, "Race, space and the regulation of prostitution in colonial Hong Kong," *Urban History* 31, no. 2 (2004): 229–248, 230.

70. Howell, "Race, space and the regulation of prostitution," 233.

71. Philip Howell, "Sexuality, sovereignty and space: law, government and the geography of prostitution in colonial Gibraltar," *Social History* 29, no. 4 (2004): 444–464, 445.

72. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York, 2008), 317–8.

73. Giorgio Agamben, *HOMO SACER: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto, 2020), 195–7; Katia Genel, "The Question of Biopower: Foucault and Agamben," *Rethinking Marxism* 18, no. 1 (2006): 43–62.

74. As Constance Backhouse points out, Canadian officials passed but never really enforced the country's controversial "Contagious Diseases" laws, which included the incarceration of only sex working women (not male clients) with STIs. Constance Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 18, no. 36 (1985): 387–423, 391–3.

75. For more on this policy see Carter's work on the trials of settler men for the murders of Indigenous women in the 1880s in Carter, *Capturing Women*, 189.

76. Peter C. Hennigan, "Property War: Prostitution, Red-Light Districts, and the Transformation of Public Nuisance Law in the Progressive Era," *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 16 (2004): 123–198, 155.

77. Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, 38.

78. Lieut-Colonel A.G. Irvine, "North West Mounted Police Force," in *Annual Report for the Department of the Interior* (Ottawa, 1880), 3:15.

79. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 48; Lyle Dick, "Same-sex Intersections of the Prairie Settlement Era: The 1895 Case of Regina's 'Oscar Wilde'," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 42, no. 83 (2009): 125.

80. See for example 1895 reports from witnesses in a homosexual act case that they were en route to a bawdy house in Dick, "Regina's Oscar Wilde," 107–145, 127 (n74).

81. Sex workers themselves were far better versed than most at disease prevention, treatment, and birth control and were understood to be a safer sex option by settler men. In terms of external supervision, if needed, settler doctors could carry out this service as well

as early NWMP surgeons. Allan Duncan reported that in the 1930s the RCMP placed him on the payroll as acting assistant surgeon to medically supervise Yukon brothels. Duncan, *Medicine, Madams and Mounties*, 74. On the dangers of "unprofessional" workers see declarations by San Francisco health officer and physician, Dr. John L. Meares in *Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration* (Ottawa, 1885), John L. Meares, October 24, 1876, 201.

82. Allan Duncan, *Medicine, Madams and Mounties: Stories of a Yukon Doctor* (Vancouver, 1989), 57.

83. Phillipa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (Oxfordshire, 2013), 2"

84. As quoted in E. Morgan, "The North-West Mounted Police: Internal Problems and Public Criticisms," *Saskatchewan History* 26, no. 2 (1972): 41–62, 49.

85. Carter, *Capturing Women*, 166.

86. "Canadian Constabulary: Life in the North-West Mounted Police," *Manitoba Free Press*, July 20, 1881, 1.

87. Lucius Duncan Bulkely, *Syphilis in the Innocent* (New York, 1894) 206.

88. Archaeologists have been among the first to track the formidable sanitation culture of some bawdy houses, often through detailed investigations into the large quantity of hygiene-related material culture, including copious washstands, disinfectant bottles, and even toothbrushes. Rebecca Yamin and Donna J. Seifert, *The Archaeology of Prostitution and Clandestine Pursuits* (Gainesville, 2019), 79–82.

89. Hollie Marquess, "The Frontier Demimonde: Prostitution in Early Hays City, 1867-1883," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 43, no. 4 (2021): 216–233, 223–4.

90. Bulkely, *Syphilis in the Innocent*, 206.

91. Yamin and Seifert, *The Archaeology of Prostitution and Clandestine Pursuits*, 80–1.

92. Mark S. Warner, Dan Martin, and Jamelon Brown, as quoted in Yamina and Seifert, *The Archaeology of Prostitution*, 81.

93. Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 307.

94. Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 149.

95. Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Halifax, 2017), 26.

96. See for example, the large mugshot collection at the Winnipeg Police Museum and Archives. In spite of a long, documented Black history on the Prairies, Karina Vernon's ground-breaking work reminds us that a much larger Black historical presence in the North-West Territories has been historically suppressed. Karina Vernon, *The Black Prairie Archives*, Vols. I & II (Waterloo, 2020), 2-5.

97. Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Colour Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 24–63.

98. William Joseph Hulgaard and John Wesley White, *Honoured in Places: Remembered Mounties Across Canada* (Victoria, 2002), 75.

99. William F. Stewart, "Lion in Winter: Sam Steele, the Yukon, and the Chaos in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in England," *Northern Review* 44 (2017): 267–291, 270.

100. This article does not explore bawdy houses run within the Chinese community because their operating models usually differed substantially from settler bawdy houses. For

more on Chinese men who worked in settler bawdy houses see accounts about Fawn Kee in Blair, *Madeleine*, 260–282; Hinther, *The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg*, 5. For a discussion of anti-Chinese violence in the area that became Alberta see Kristin Burnett, "Race, Disease, and Public Violence: Smallpox and the (Un) Making of Calgary's Chinatown, 1892," *Social History of Medicine* 25, no. 2 (2012): 362–379.

101. Blair, *Madeleine*, 254.

102. See for example, coverage of the Joseph Busheen trial in Winnipeg: "The police last evening," *Manitoba Free Press*, November, 3, 1879, 1.

103. Benjamin Hoy, "Policing Morality: Regulating Sexuality across the Canada-United States Border," *Canadian Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (2018): 30-62, 40-1.

104. *An Act to Amend and Consolidate Laws Respecting Indians*, 43 Vict. (1880). The use of the term "disorderly house," argues Backhouse, enabled the Crown to take action against a house without needing to "prove its character." Backhouse, *Nineteenth-Century Prostitution Law*, 420.

105. Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, 52-3.

106. Janice Acoose, *Iskwewak Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws* (Toronto, 2016), 37.

107. Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin*, 97.

108. Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin*, 142-3.

109. For more on women as military spies beyond the famous Mata Hari scandal, see also the case of Belle Siddons who was said to have "wormed many a military secret" out of a number of Union Generals and kept Southern officials "constantly posted on every move made by Union Headquarters" until she was caught in 1862. "A Remarkable Woman," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 18, 1881, 1; "Belle Siddons," *The Clarion Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), June 11, 1884, 1.

110. See for example John A MacDonald's correspondence with Fenian spy Mrs. E. Forrest in Jane M. Cote and Daniel M. Knight, *Fanny and Anna Parnell: Ireland's Patriot Sisters* (New York, 1991), 143.

111. Canada, Parliament, Sessional Papers, Vol. 19, Issue 12, 1886, 11, 15; Canada, Department of the Secretary of State, *Trials in Connection with the North West Rebellion* (Ottawa, 1886), 113, 114, 157.

112. This novel, written by a settler author, was decidedly anti-Riel. Edmond Collins, *Annette: The Metis Spy* (Toronto, 1886).

113. Mawani, "The Iniquitous Practice of Women," 45.

114. Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, 152.

115. Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln, 2005).

116. McManus, *The Line Which Separates*, 100-101.

117. Lamar as quoted in McManus, *The Line Which Separates*, 101.

118. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, XXI.

119. Petersen, *Minneapolis Madams*, 167.

120. For a discussion of the centrality of informal policing to racist policies in Western Canada see Isabel Wallace, "Komagata Maru Revisited: 'Hindus', Hookworm & The

Guise of Public Health Protection," *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly* 178 (2013): 33–50.

121. During this period in the West, police often expressed a preference for madams because they were considered to be more "matronly," less violent, and easier to manage. Hinther, "The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg," 5; Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 142–150.

122. See for example, Blair, *Madeleine*, 254.

123. Blair, *Madeleine*, 263.

124. Smith, *Alice*, 197.

125. A single workplace-related medical bill could destroy months of savings. Alice Smith, a California worker who traveled the Canadian West around the turn of the century recalled the dangers she imposed on her own health having to take on additional work to pay for an abortion. Smith, *Alice*, 140-1; 155-5; 160-3. On tuberculosis and STIs see Blair, *Madeleine*, 46; Smith, *Alice*, 212.

126. See for example Watson, "English, Thomas," 1.

127. Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer*, 28.

128. Smith, *Alice*, 207–210.

129. Smith, *Alice*, 175.

130. Blair, *Madeleine*, 248.

131. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley, 2002), 11.

132. Blair, *Madeleine*, 247.