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# Landscape Aesthetics, Water, and Settler Colonialism in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia

JOHN R. WAGNER

## Abstract

*Historic and contemporary patterns of settler colonialism and agricultural development in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia are described, emphasizing the ways in which settler culture has led to the production of a landscape aesthetic that reproduces colonization as an iterative cultural practice. I explore the ways in which this particular landscape aesthetic is dependent on the economic and symbolic meanings of water in Okanagan settlement history. The images of the Okanagan that were used to attract settlers to the valley a century ago emphasized the lush, oasis-like qualities of orchards and lakes set among a dramatic, arid and mountainous backdrop. This oasis aesthetic exists in sharp contrast to that held by the Syilx indigenous people who were displaced and marginalized as a consequence of agricultural development. Today, as land prices escalate and orchards become less economically viable, it is the orchardists themselves who are being displaced by a new generation of settlers who come here to retire or make their livings in the wine tourism industry. As the environmental costs of these changes accumulate, Okanagan residents are challenged to articulate a more sustainable landscape aesthetic rooted in local ecology.*

## Landscape Aesthetics

Landscape aesthetics are often represented as arising from innate biological, cognitive or scientific principles. Gordon Orians (1986) for instance, argues that human beings have a universal preference for savanna landscapes as a result of the formative influence of that landscape on our evolutionary development (see also Heerwage and Orians 1993). Lam and Gonzales-Plaza (2006) propose that aesthetic responses to landscape, as a universal human experience, have shaped the genetic as well as social evolution of the species. Philosophers such as Allen Carlson (1995) on the other hand, argue that nature aesthetics are informed by the science of ecology and natural history, in contrast with the aesthetics of art which are informed by knowledge of art history. What is remarkable in this literature, from a social science perspective, is the absence of consideration given to factors such as economic self-interest and cultural identity.

In a recent article, Kovacs et al. (2006) propose that researchers should pay more attention to the

influence of landscape aesthetics on environmental management. Consistent with Carlson's argument that landscape aesthetics are informed by scientific knowledge, they describe how public responses to forest fires can change as the public gains more understanding of the role of fire in shaping forest ecosystems. They also discuss how scientists are influenced by their own aesthetic sensibilities when choosing their research topics. However, like the authors cited above, Kovacs et al. (2006) fail to acknowledge the much broader range of cultural factors that shape aesthetic preferences. I seek to advance the research agenda proposed by Kovacs and colleagues but do so from a perspective that emphasizes the symbolic and economic characteristics of landscape aesthetics.

Historian Keith Thomas (1996) has demonstrated how the radical transformations of the English countryside during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries engendered a sense of nostalgia among city dwellers for rapidly disappearing wild landscapes. This in turn weakened what was perhaps

the dominant aesthetic of the time, the preference for orderly, controlled and economically productive landscapes. A new aesthetic centered on the preservation of wild spaces emerged and helped shape what Guha (2000) has called the first wave of global environmentalism. Guha (2000), Robbins (2004) and Neumann (1998) are among those who have convincingly documented the ways in which culturally constructed ideas of wilderness have shaped the history of conservation and wilderness preservation throughout the world. Cronon (2003) has also eloquently documented the ways in which colonial New England settlers set about reproducing the familiar landscapes of England, not just as an economic necessity, but as a way of making themselves feel more culturally 'at home' in an unfamiliar environment. While many of these studies emphasize the role of nostalgia and familiarity, or what Brook (2003) has recently termed "making here like there," class distinctions also play a prominent role in the way landscape aesthetics are constructed. The ubiquitous popularity of lawns in contemporary North America, for instance, cannot be explained entirely in terms of nostalgia for a vanished pastoral commons, as Thomas suggests for 19<sup>th</sup> century England (1996:253). Their popularity is also due to the series of events by which lawns became first a feature of aristocratic, then middle class, cultural as well as physical landscapes, and today the centre of a multi-billion dollar lawn and chemical industry (Robbins and Sharp 2003).

These observations, merely echo the seminal work of Bourdieu (1984) and his argument that "good taste" is defined largely on the basis of class relations and not merely on the basis of naturalistic or personal preferences operating in a world of Kantian disinterest (Brady 1998:142). Appadurai's work also supports the theoretical approach taken here, most notably his analysis of exchange, commoditization and the role of imagination in the construction of locality (Appadurai 1986, 1996).

This study includes a description of the historical process by which the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia was constructed as an agricultural society in the first half of the twentieth century but is now being reconstructed as a retirement center and rec-

reational playground. The first stage of this transformation was facilitated by the commoditization of a landscape aesthetic built around the lush, oasis-like qualities of orchards and lakes set among a dramatic, arid and mountainous backdrop. In the current, second stage, orchards are being displaced by vineyards and golf courses, but the oasis aesthetic remains very much the same. I conclude with the argument that the long-term, successful marketing of this aesthetic is contributing to ecosystem degradation and operating in opposition to recent calls by some residents, local governmental agencies and non-governmental environmental organizations to move towards more sustainable ecological management practices.

### Research Methods

The data on which these arguments rely were gathered as part of an on-going study of water management in the Okanagan Valley. Since water management policy in this region was originally created to facilitate agricultural development, orchard development in particular, a study of orchard culture has been a primary goal of the project. Data has been gathered through a combination of archival research, interviews with orchardists and water managers, field site visits to orchards and irrigation facilities, and an examination of published literature on irrigation systems, local ecology, economics and demography. The study is also informed by previous and on-going collaborations with Syilx researchers who have conducted a series of interviews with members of their community regarding changes to riparian environments situated on their reserve lands (Caldwell 2004; Sam 2004). The Syilx people are indigenous to the Okanagan region and today live in several communities in the Okanagan and Similkameen watersheds on both Canadian and US sides of the international border.

The issue of landscape aesthetics was not part of the original study design but emerged as a consequence of my examination of archival materials, notably the fruit box images used to sell Okanagan produce in the early decades of the twentieth century as well as the literature used to promote the region to prospective settlers during that same period. Following my discovery of these materials, I began a systematic

examination of contemporary representations of the region as they appear in various print media. The findings and conclusions presented here are based on my comparative and symbolic interpretation of these images, supported by the larger body of economic, ecological and historical data described above.

I begin my analysis with a description of Okanagan ecology, briefly outlining the region's vulnerabilities and record of environmental degradation. I then describe the European settlement history of the valley, focusing on the role of irrigation and the emergence of a commoditized landscape aesthetic grounded in the economic and symbolic meaning of water to settler culture. I then compare the early settlement period to what is occurring today, emphasizing the continuity of the two as colonial practice, despite their disjuncture in other terms. I conclude with a discussion of how studies of landscape aesthetics might be more systematically pursued within the field of ecological anthropology as a whole.

### Okanagan Landscape and Ecology

The Okanagan Valley stretches 200 km from the city of Vernon in the southern interior of British Columbia, Canada, to the town of Brewster, Washington, in the United States. It lies between the Fraser and Columbia watersheds and empties into the Columbia River in Washington state. Although the southern end of the Okanagan Valley in Canada is often described by residents and visitors as a desert or semi-desert, lower elevation ecosystems are formally classified as shrub-steppe and grasslands and are typically dominated by such species as Bunchgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*, *Festuca scabrella*), Sage brush (*Artemisia tridentata*) and Antelope brush (*Purshia tridentata*). At slightly higher elevations, grasslands gradually give way to forests, dominated first by scattered stands of Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), then Interior Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *glauca*), Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*), subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*) and finally alpine tundra at the highest elevations (British Columbia Ministry of the Environment 2007a).

With an average rainfall of about 30 cm per year, the region is arid and desert-like, especially at its southern end, and many species common to the

Great Basin desert further south are also found here (Cannings 2000). Despite the aridity of the region, a series of lakes extend throughout the valley with the largest, Okanagan Lake, being 135 km long and 4 to 5 km wide. The Okanagan River, which begins at the south end of Okanagan Lake, flows through several of these lakes before joining the Columbia River near Brewster. Wetlands and riparian ecosystems, found predominantly around the lakes and along the Okanagan River, once comprised a significant portion of the bottomlands in the South Okanagan. The close proximity of wetlands to arid grasslands, dry Ponderosa pine forests and subalpine forests results in a rich mosaic of habitats and a unique and highly diverse assemblage of plant and animal species (Cannings 2000).

Unfortunately, over the last several decades the Okanagan has also become home to the largest concentration of rare, endangered and threatened species in the Province of British Columbia. Figures released by the Provincial Ministry of the Environment in 2007 report that the area has 30 percent of the province's red-listed wildlife species and 46 percent of its blue-listed species<sup>1</sup> (British Columbia Ministry of Environment 2007b; see also Central Okanagan Regional District 2002; Environment Canada 2000). Since 2002 the Okanagan River has also been classified as one of Canada's most endangered rivers (Rae 2005:1). As demands on water resources escalate due to a combination of rapid population growth, agriculture, tourism development, and climate change, water supply and quality are also becoming issues (Cohen et al. 2004; Cohen and Neale 2007; Okanagan Basin Water Board 2008; Rae 2005). The series of lakes in the valley bottom provide the illusion of water abundance, but average renewal rates for these lakes is very low. It has been estimated that Okanagan Lake, by far the largest and deepest lake in the valley, has a turnover time of 52.8 years (International Lake Environment Committee 2007). This is because the lakes were created as a result of glacial scouring in the valley bottom and filled with glacial melt and outwash as the glaciers retreated. Withdrawing more than the limited annual inflow would thus result in a permanent lowering of lake levels and significant ecological damage.



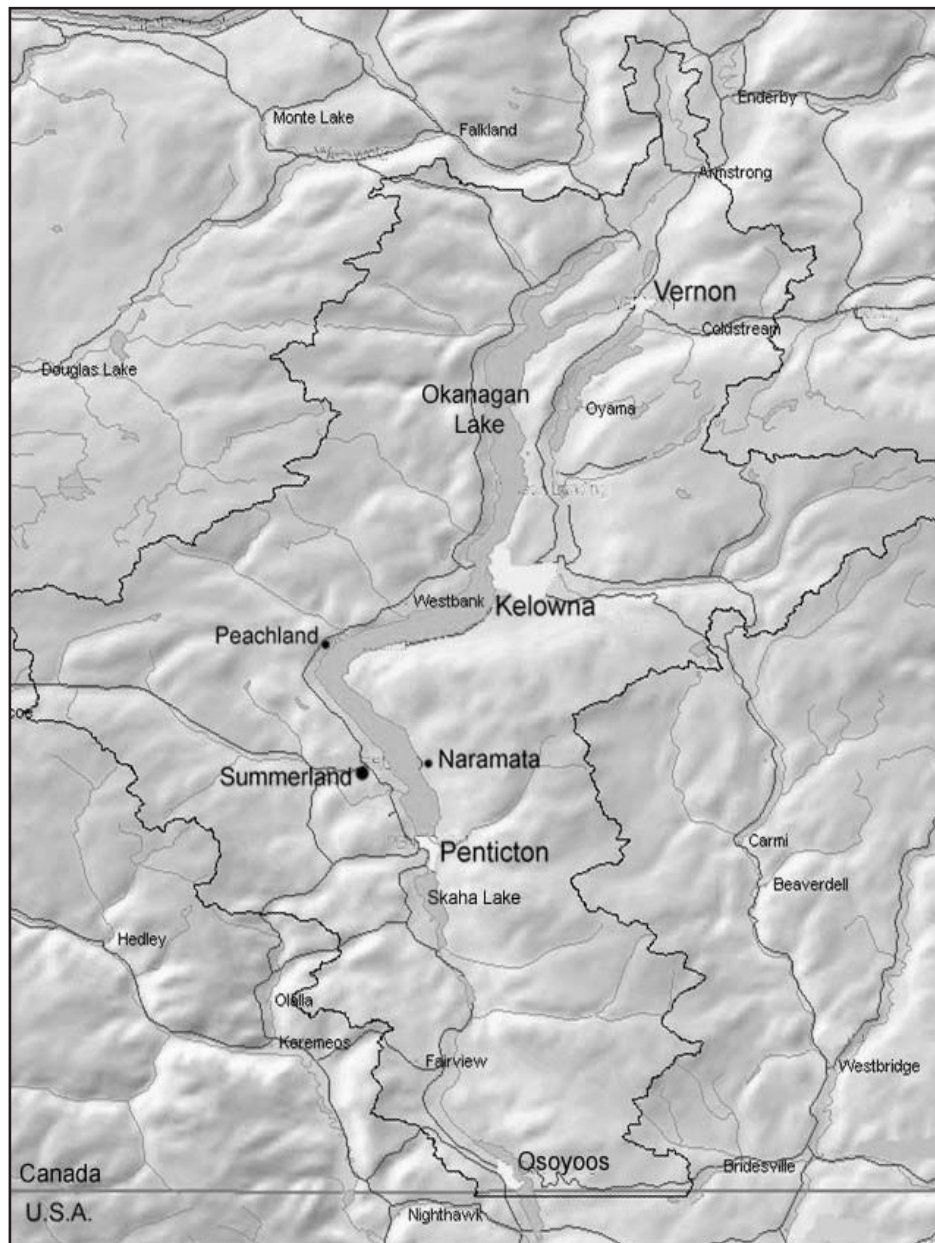


Figure 1. Okanagan watershed in Canada.

### Early European Settlement

Europeans began to arrive in the valley in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; first fur traders, then missionaries, gold miners, and finally settlers. The combination of an open, grassland environment at lower elevations, together with easily accessible supplies of lake and creek water made cattle ranching an ideal early settlement strategy for Europeans (Mather 2002; Thomson

1985, 1990). The first European ranchers, like the indigenous Syilx people among whom they lived, relied on resources found at many different elevations from valley bottom to high forest. Cattle would be pastured in the valley bottom early in the year and moved to successively higher elevations as drier conditions prevailed during the summer and early fall

months. During winter, when the ground was frozen and covered with snow, cattle were brought back to the valley bottom and fed with forage that was cut and stored during the summer months. Much of this forage could be grown and harvested without irrigation, using wetland areas near rivers and creeks where sub-irrigation provided enough moisture. Settler knowledge of the landscape was acquired from their Syilx neighbours and many Syilx also became commercial horse and cattle ranchers during this period (Cohen 1998; Thomson 1985).

Although the ranching industry has contributed to loss of biodiversity in general and environmental degradation of grasslands in particular, the most severe losses in the region have occurred as a result of the more intensive pattern of agricultural, residential and industrial development made possible by the later introduction of an irrigation-based tree fruit industry. In the early decades of the twentieth century, when fruit farming began to displace ranching as the primary agricultural activity, a farming family could make a living on as little as 2 to 4 hectares (ha) of irrigated land, whereas ranchers required several hundred hectares. Irrigation agriculture quickly led to much higher population densities and development of roads, railways and light industry. Beginning in the 1950s, an extensive program of flood control measures was implemented involving the straightening of rivers, most notably the Okanagan River, and the consequent loss or degradation of many wetland and riparian habitats. Invasive and introduced species such as knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*, *Centaurea maculosa*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), Eurasian water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), and Mysis shrimp (*Mysis relicta*) are also displacing native species in increasing numbers (Cannings and Durrance 1998; RDOS 2007). Most recently, as agricultural and residential developments expand up onto the dry bench lands above the valley bottom, these more arid and fragile habitats are also coming increasingly under stress.

### Okanagan Settler Culture (1900 to 1970)

Who were the people who came to settle the Okanagan during the first decades of the twentieth century when the orchard industry first came to

dominate the region? Many advertising schemes concentrated on England, Eastern Canada and the eastern United States where brochures and pamphlets with glowing descriptions of British Columbia and the Okanagan Valley were circulated. Advertising materials were also widely circulated at agricultural fairs throughout North America. By 1905 the Okanagan was being advertised as “the land of fruit and sunshine” (Vernon News 1905) and, in a booklet circulated by the Grand Pacific Land Company in 1912, the valley was described as the “garden of Canada,” the “lost garden of Eden,” and as a “new found earthly paradise” (Grand Pacific Land Co. Ltd. 1912:14).

The histories of development of the communities of Summerland, Naramata and Peachland (Figure 1) are typical of the region. All three communities were established by J.M. Robinson, a land developer who was able to accumulate large tracts of land in each location, all adjacent to Okanagan Lake and to the local creeks that emptied into the lake. He then sub-divided these tracts into small lots, some as small as 2 ha with the average being closer to 4 ha. Next he constructed gravity fed irrigation systems to bring water to each lot by way of wooden flumes and open ditches. Lands which had never been used for agricultural purposes, other than for seasonal grazing, now became highly productive. The combination of a long, hot growing season and a controlled irrigation system made it possible to grow tree fruits like cherries and apricots, exotic for the Canadian climate, as well as the more standard Canadian fare of apples and pears.

Robinson (1912:8) circulated the following promotional material about Summerland in 1912:

Among the significant names aptly chosen for the towns of the famous Okanagan none are more fitting than that of the unique little commonwealth called Summerland. Water front stretches of shining sand, bottom lands of deep black loam, broad benches of fertile silt, radiating fruitful valleys, backed by measureless areas of dark green timbered ranges, all lie open to the morning sun. Snow and zero weather are rare and of brief duration; thunderstorms and sudden changes are a novelty; blizzards are unknown. It is a sun-lit land where summer dominates.



**Figure 2. Land of fruit and sunshine.**

"The history of Summerland," Robinson continues (Robinson 1912:9):

... is an unparalleled romance of reclamation. Twelve years ago the site of today's producing orchards was an arid cattle pasture, covered with sage brush, cactus and scrub pine. After dark one lone light, the dim fire of an Indian camp, was the sole indication of human habitation. Now waterfront and orchard benches glow with all the brilliancy of electric lighted streets and roads, and hundreds of happy homes send twinkling gleams far over the lake and across the mountains.

From the outset Robinson and other developers clearly understood that promotion of an irrigation-intensive tree fruit industry could serve as an ideal engine for development for the region as a whole.

Since one family could make a living from a 4 ha tract of orchard, population densities were likely to increase rapidly by comparison to areas practicing less intensive forms of agriculture. The advertising booklet distributed by the Grand Pacific Land Company in 1912 stated:

In a few short years, picture Kelowna. The 75,000 acres of rich valley land will be divided into thousands of farms, supporting many thousands of people. Two or more railroads will be rushing in supplies and hurrying the products to market.... Three or more boatlines will be in operation on the lake. Numerous packing and canning houses, with the box, basket and can factories required, will, month by month, distribute their enormous pay roll....



The developers of that era also fully understood the tourist potential of the region. The Grand Pacific pamphlet exhorted potential investors to act fast, since in the near future:

Palatial tourist hotels will be crowded with seekers after healthful climate and scenic beauty. Kelowna, the Orchard City, the Queen of the Okanagan will come into its own and repay bounteously those who believed in her future and became shareholders in her prosperity (Grand Pacific Land Co. Ltd. 1912:12).

The landscape aesthetic developed during the early days of settler culture is clearly illustrated by the images created to adorn the boxes in which Okanagan fruit was shipped to market. Although there was a good deal of variation in the earliest images, they

eventually coalesced around a particular motif that emphasized the seductive qualities of sun and fruit (Figure 2), as well as orderly, green rows of fruit trees, and panoramic views of the lake or mountains or both (Figures 3 and 4).

The widespread introduction of irrigation technologies thus led to an entirely new orientation of people to the landscape. As irrigation water was delivered to low lying areas, a ribbon of green developed around the lakes in the valley bottom and within these ribbons the first small communities sprang up. The dry hills and mountains became, increasingly, a mere scenic backdrop to this oasis of green. Newly settled orchardists had little reason to regret the displacement of grasslands, shrub-steppe, wetlands and riparian habitat with the orchards, vegetable gardens, highways and towns on which their livelihood depended.



Figure 3. The new landscape aesthetic: A1 brand Canadian apples.



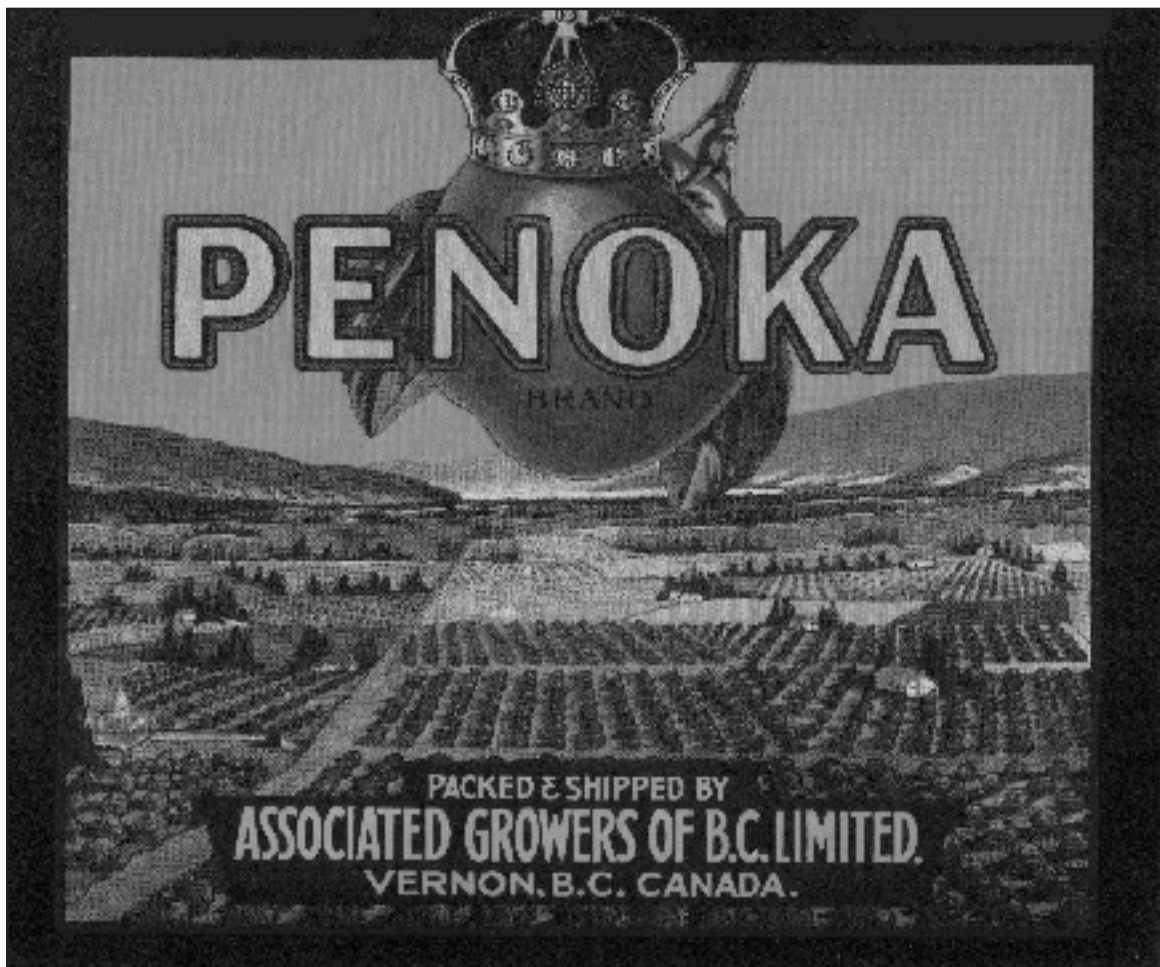


Figure 4. The new landscape aesthetic: Penoka brand apples.

### The Syilx

Indigenous Syilx people, by contrast, had many reasons to grieve the loss of habitat that occurred with European settlement since for them it was synonymous with loss of autonomy and access to resources. However, despite the changes of the past century, Syilx perceptions of Okanagan landscapes continue to be demonstrably different from that of Okanagan settler culture. A review of both historic (Mourning Dove 1990) and contemporary literature written by indigenous researchers and writers (Armstrong 1998; Caldwell 2004; Sam 2008), together with evidence gathered during recent interviews with Syilx elders and knowledge keepers<sup>2</sup>, reveals an aesthetic rooted in a diverse apprecia-

tion of landscape features with a high value placed on grassland environments, forest and forest edge habitat where game and berries were abundant, as well as wetland and riparian zones. When water is mentioned, it is mentioned in the context of its value as fish habitat or as a source of life for other species, or for its cleanliness in relation to its use for drinking, bathing or spiritual purposes.

As a hunting and gathering society with a seasonal round that extended from valley bottom to the high mountains, it is not surprising that their aesthetic appreciation remained quite different from that of settlers whose economic lives and daily rounds were restricted mainly to the

oasis environment they had themselves so recently created. Particularly striking in the reminiscences of several elders was the emphasis on bunchgrass environments, one individual reporting that: "grass flowed in the winds like waves on the lake" (Sam 2008:14). It is not surprising that the Syilx, a people long accustomed to the use of horses (Cohen 1998), would value the grassland environment on which both wild and domestic horses depended. It is also worth noting that Syilx use of fire to manage the Okanagan landscape was instrumental in shaping both the grassland and forest edge environments that feature so strongly in their descriptions (Blackstock and McAllister 1994).

The evidence demonstrates that, historically, the aesthetic preferences of both Syilx and European settlers were shaped by their differing economic adaptations. The European aesthetic, however, was also distinct by virtue of the fact that it had been created as a marketing tool well before most settlers arrived in the valley. It provided settlers with a ready-made European perspective but also with a charter for colonization and ecological transformation.

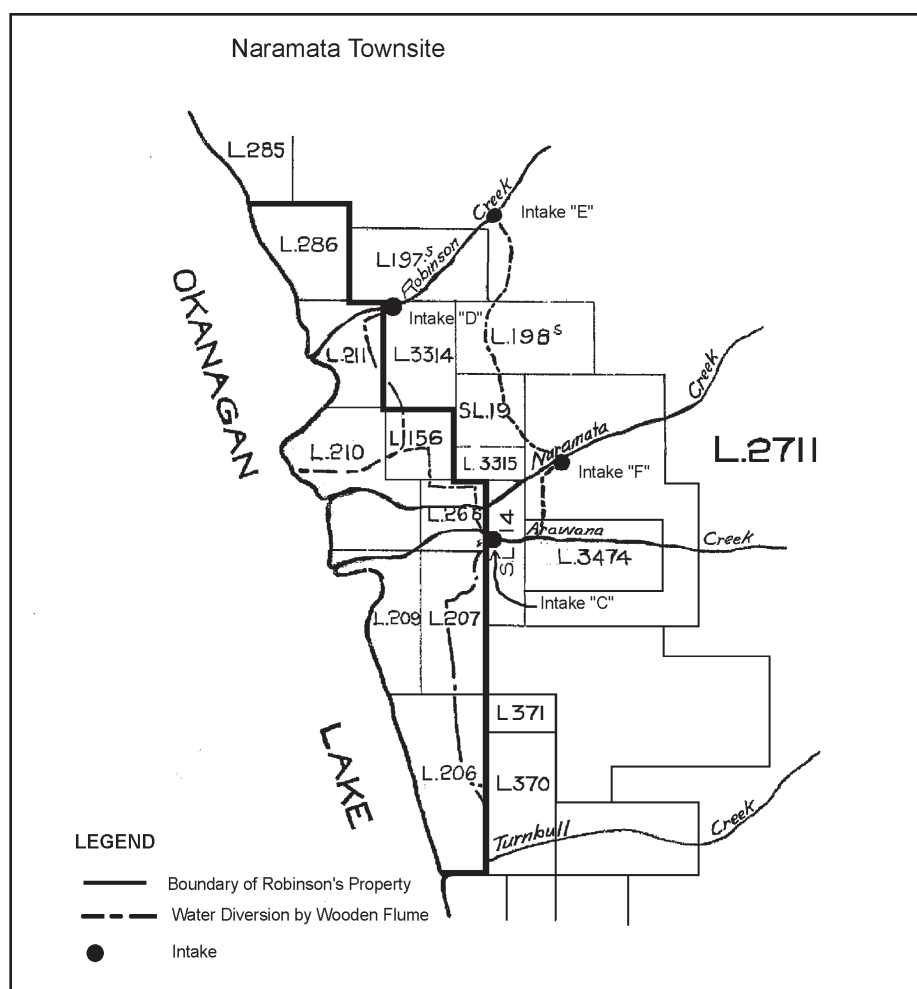
### **Water as an Instrument of Development**

By 1912 promotional literature was claiming that the Okanagan possessed "an inexhaustible supply" of water in the form of "natural or artificial reservoirs...in the mountains" (The Okanagan Valley Land Co. Ltd. 1912:27). The British Columbia government had long recognized, however, that water was in scarce supply throughout the southern interior of the province. Water rights legislation was developed, from the outset, for the purpose of maximizing the development potential of the area. Water was declared the property of the Crown and riparian rights, as they existed in England at that time, were discarded in favour of a centrally controlled licensing system. For the most part, British Columbia riparian rights policy followed the precedents implemented since the mid-nineteenth century in the American southwest. Mormon settlers in Utah are often credited with being the first to construct large irrigation works based on non-riparian principles. Their approach provided a model that quickly spread to other western States and to

western Canadian Provinces facing similar water scarcity issues (Sam 2008; Wilson 1989; Worster 1985). Water thus came to be considered a public resource under government control and licensing systems based on the principles of beneficial use and prior appropriation. Under the rule of beneficial use, water rights were granted to anyone who applied to use them for what were considered to be legitimate, non-wasteful purposes, such as irrigation, mining or domestic use. If a water rights holder ceased to use the water for the purposes specified in the license, the license could be revoked. The rule of prior appropriation in turn states that those who were first to acquire rights, hold 'senior' or stronger rights than those who come later.

Early water licenses in the Okanagan thus typically included the right to divert a specified volume of water from a particular point in a creek located on Crown land and to construct a right-of-way to carry the water to one's own property. Since riparian rights were not recognized under this system, those owning property along a creek had no special privileges. Water deemed available for irrigation purposes could be distributed to lands far distant from the source of water rather than being limited to contiguous lands. Recognizing early on that individual ranchers and farmers would not be able to construct the large scale water diversion projects required to maximize the development potential of the province, legislation was enacted in 1892 that expanded the list of possible water license holders to include private corporations. In the case of Naramata, for instance, J.M. Robinson was able to acquire a license to store and divert 4250 acre-feet (5.2 million cubic meters) of water from three local creeks, through a series of flumes and ditches, to the 4200 ha of bottom land he had purchased in the area. This area encompasses what is now the town site of Naramata as well as much of the best agricultural land in the vicinity (Figure 5).

By 1912, 56 land companies and 18 water companies had been incorporated in the Okanagan and adjacent areas (Cleveland 1922:13 as cited in Wilson 1989:22). However, the corporate water rights model did not provide the region with a successful long term growth strategy. It worked well



**Figure 5. Map Accompanying Water Licenses Issued to J.M. Robinson in 1903 and 1905.**

in the short term by creating a lucrative market in agricultural land and thus attracting settlers to the region, but once the best land was sold and land sales began to decline, the corporations could not afford to maintain their irrigation systems. Orchardists themselves, under the umbrella of the Western Canada Irrigation Association (WCIA), proposed that cooperative irrigation institutions be created and managed at the local level. The government agreed and in 1914 created new legislation to enable the establishment of "public irrigation corporations" (which eventually came to be known as "irrigation districts" or "improvement districts") run by the orchardists themselves (Wilson 1989:26). Most private corporations were eventually dissolved, their

water rights were acquired by irrigation districts, and individual farmers became voting members of their local district.

The cooperative system became one of the most characteristic features of the family farm orchard economy and culture that subsequently developed in the Okanagan Valley. By the 1940s, fruit shipping, storage and marketing, as well as irrigation, were being managed by growers' cooperatives throughout the region (Dendy 1981; Fisher 1978; Wilson 1989). In the case of marketing, as in the case of water management, the cooperative system that emerged did so largely as a result of the organization skills and lobbying efforts of the orchardists themselves (see especially Dendy 1981).

### The 'New' Okanagan Settler Culture

By the early 1950s the population of the Okanagan Valley had reached about 50,000; by the mid-1970s it had reached 150,000. Over the past few decades the Okanagan region has been experiencing one of the most rapid growth rates in Canada (Momer 1998). The valley's population in 2003 was estimated at just under 350,000 and economic planners have predicted that it will reach half a million by 2026 (Westland Resource Group 2003:7). This rapid growth has had predictable environmental consequences that stand in sharp contrast to the images typically used to represent the region. Loss of species, habitats and biodiversity has reached extreme levels, the agricultural land base is steadily shrinking, urban sprawl is rampant, water sources are increasingly polluted, and the risk of water scarcities during drought periods has become a significant issue. Water scarcities are predicted to increase significantly over the next few decades as growth continues and the effects of global warming intensify (Cohen et al. 2004; Cohen and Neale 2007).

So who are the new settlers in the Okanagan today? Many are relatively wealthy by comparison to long-term residents and many of them come here to retire (Aguiar et al. 2005; Momer 1998). Some come only for their holidays. Many of the larger land development projects today, as in the distant past, are financed by corporations based outside the region or outside the country (Summerland Hills Golf Resort 2007). Housing costs have risen sharply, forcing a significant out-migration of young people. Although provincial legislation was enacted in the 1970s to protect agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural use, agricultural land prices have also risen sharply over recent decades. The orchardists I have interviewed uniformly report that escalating land prices mean that income from the sale of fruit is no longer sufficient to pay the mortgage on land purchased at full market value. As a result, very few people can afford to buy into the business and even those born into orchard families are unlikely to inherit the family farm.

Other forms of agriculture have emerged that are more economically viable under these conditions. Vineyards and hobby farms are now replacing orchards throughout the Okanagan. Vineyards are proving to be especially successful since growers can make wine and sell it at their doorstep, or sell to specialized high-end retail markets, rather than watch most of the profit go to middlemen, as tends to be the case with tree fruits. Very often vintners combine wine sales with a restaurant and bed and breakfast operation and have thus generated a vibrant and expanding wine tourism industry that is rapidly displacing the orchard industry in many parts of the valley. In Naramata, one third-generation orchardist whom I interviewed stated that he could increase the value of 1 acre (0.4 ha) of orchard land by \$20,000, simply by removing the trees. A buyer can then re-plant the raw land in vineyard and avoid the expense of removing the trees himself.

Hobby farmers who grow both tree fruits and grapes also form a significant group among today's new settlers. The small size of agricultural lots is largely responsible for this fact since such properties can be sold off by retiring orchardists to wealthy hobby farmers who can build a new house on the property and lease the agricultural land to a local grower. The strategy followed by the first land and irrigation companies, of sub-dividing their holdings into 2 to 4 ha lots, thus continues to facilitate rapid population growth throughout the valley.

Another third-generation orchardist I interviewed was among those who expressed serious regret about the changes now underway. However, pointing to one of the new mansions dominating the landscape, the orchardist offered the opinion that the owner of the mansion was following the same dream that had brought his grandfather to the region a century ago. When questioned about the nature of that dream he pointed out that his grandparents and many other settlers from that time period:

... were in their 40s, and I kind of compare them to the grape growers moving in here. They are all at least 40 and they're probably 50 and 60 and they come here already established. And they came here originally most of them *not* farmers. And they've decided to farm.



When asked whether economic factors may have influenced their decision to come to the Okanagan, he mused:

I think it was more than that. I think it was a bit of a dream, too. And this dream is still alive is what I think is important here....the grape industry has kept that dream alive. I don't think apples are doing it anymore. I know they're not doing it ...

As this orchardist indicates, today's dream is more likely to be represented by images of vineyards and golf courses than by orchards. Whereas promotional materials dating as far back as 1905 contain references to the Okanagan as the "California of the north" (Vernon News 1905:3; Bulman 1908), comparisons today are more likely to refer to the "Napa of the north." Such references are particularly common in local British Columbia media but also appear regularly in national Canadian print media such as the *Globe and Mail* (2007) and in international media including the *New York Times* (Tsui 2006). The following excerpt from a *Globe and Mail* article provides evidence of how the Okanagan is typically represented today:

Our touchdown at Kelowna International Airport was perfect – a smooth landing that set the tone for a long awaited getaway. Moments earlier, our descent into the Okanagan Valley had afforded expansive views of shimmering Okanagan Lake and surrounding orchards, vineyards and pine-topped mountains. It was a veritable call to action – playtime. (Mang 2006:TK1)

From the perspective of the landscape aesthetic I am describing here, the inclusion of golf courses, vineyards and wine tourism, in addition to orchards, represents a variation on a theme. The imagery contains new elements and is now geared almost entirely towards recreation, but the oasis aesthetic remains fundamentally the same. It also remains fundamentally colonial in nature with respect to the environment, to Syilx culture and now to orchard culture as well. The experiences of today's displaced orchardists and the indigenous Syilx peoples differ radically in scale and intensity. The Syilx people experienced the usual ravages of colonization: epidemics, loss of land

and livelihood, confinement on reserves, systemic discrimination and, in more recent generations, the devastating effects of residential schools. While the neo-colonial losses experienced today by orchardists are nowhere near this magnitude, orchardists are, nevertheless, having to deal with the loss of a way of life. The cooperative packing house and marketing system is shrinking rapidly and is likely to disappear entirely in places like Naramata since grapes are not marketed through this system. Orchardists no longer have the political clout they once had or the same level of respect within their communities. Most of the orchardists I interviewed in Naramata mentioned the declining number of children enrolled in the local elementary school. Since rising land prices are forcing young families out of the community in favour of more wealthy retirees and semi-retirees, this trend is expected to continue and will probably lead to closure of the school.

It is also true that many orchardists are actively benefiting from the economic restructuring now underway. They are able, for instance, to either sell their land for prices ranging from five to ten times the purchase price of a generation ago, or convert them to vineyards and participate in the new economy. But I use the term colonization here in order to emphasize the fact that colonization is fundamentally an ecological process and not merely a social or economic one. Colonial social relations are typically constructed as part of a process in which new and more intensive patterns of resource exploitation are put in place and wholesale transformations of local ecologies occur as a normal course of events (Cronon 2003). The tendency to think of colonization as an event of the past, or as having to do exclusively with European settlers and indigenous peoples, masks the extent to which colonial practices continue to dominate the relationship of mainstream North American societies to the physical environments in which they live.

In ecological terms, colonization exists in opposition to sustainability since it transforms ecologies rather than conserving or sustaining them. From this perspective, settler cultures act as agents of ecological change, colonizing and transforming their adopted environments on the basis of cultural practices developed elsewhere. As Wendell

Berry (1996) has argued, settler culture is in fact “unsettling” in ecological terms. In the Okanagan situation, this process has led to the creation of an irrigated oasis around the valley bottom and, as a consequence, to environmental degradation and a significant loss of biodiversity. As long as the oasis aesthetic remains a dominant feature of Okanagan culture, and a dominant feature of the marketing strategies used to bring new settlers to the area, these negative outcomes will intensify. Achieving a culture of sustainability will thus require the development of a new landscape aesthetic, one grounded more deeply in local ecological realities.

### Conclusion

I have used the term *settler culture* in order to emphasize the continuity of current neo-colonial economic processes in the Okanagan with the colonial practices of the previous century. Settler cultures take many forms and no single use of the term has emerged in the postcolonial literature I rely on (see especially Young 2001). In relation to development ideologies in general, the values of the settler culture I describe here are not that different from those found in many settings around the world where existing societies have not been over-run by settlers, although it could be argued that contemporary, global flows of capital, knowledge and technology make permanent settlers a non-essential part of contemporary forms of neo-colonialism.

A new phase of research will be necessary before I can fully document the flows of people and capital that are now reconfiguring Okanagan culture and ecology. Conclusions about the Okanagan environmental imaginary as a site of contestation must also remain somewhat tentative at this stage. Research to date has revealed some of the fault lines of contestation, many of which are apparent in the local public forums held to discuss water management issues. The sharpest lines of contestation are drawn during public debates over regional and urban planning, the fate of agricultural land, and the often heard call to limit growth and urban sprawl. Debates over the need for water conservation and valley-wide water governance institutions also demonstrate the divergent positions of different economic sectors, different waves

of settlers, and the many government agencies that have a say in water management. The most striking outcome of my research to date, however, and my main argument here, is that a single landscape aesthetic can have the capacity to facilitate two very different transformations of culture and ecology at two different time periods.

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### Notes

- 1 Red listed species are defined as species considered extirpated, endangered or threatened; blue-listed species are defined as vulnerable (British Columbia Ministry of the Environment 1998).
- 2 The first round of these interviews were conducted in 2004 during the course of a project I carried out in collaboration with Jeannette Armstrong, noted Syilx scholar, writer, Executive Director of the En'owkin Centre, and faculty member at UBC Okanagan. Student collaborators Rose Caldwell and Marlowe Sam conducted interviews and wrote reports that are now housed in the En'owkin Centre library. Under my supervision, Marlowe Sam conducted further interviews in 2007 as part of his MA research at UBC Okanagan.

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