

The White Population

In the late 1800s, Victoria was an industrial port city. It was the largest city in BC. There were many factories, docks, and warehouses. People, who were not Chinese or First Nations, made up the largest part of Victoria's society during this time. Though most of these people were white, many black people also lived in Victoria.

Where They Came from

This group of people came from other parts of Canada, the United States, the British Isles (England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales), and Europe (particularly Italy and Germany). The working-class blacks, some of whom were former slaves, came mainly from the United States.

Some people came from eastern Canada. When the Canadian Pacific Railroad was finished in 1885, more people from eastern Canada came to Victoria. Most middle/upper-class people were white. In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Victoria also had a large number of middle-class black families. They came, mainly, from the northern United States, especially cities like Philadelphia. A few were from the West Indies.

Working-Class

Occupations

Typical working-class jobs in Victoria included:

- labourer (e.g., digging ditches, loading and unloading ships, and construction)
- domestic servant
- office or store clerk
- factory worker producing:
 - » lumber or shingles
 - » cigars
 - » paint
 - » clothing or shoes
 - » vinegar or polished rice

- » soap
- » carriages
- » furniture
- » sails
- » iron work

Most domestic servants were Chinese men. White men, black men, and some women worked as servants too. Restaurants, hotels, and saloons employed many working-class people, both male and female. Office workers and store clerks were mostly men in the late 1800s, but after 1900, women began to work in these areas as well.

Family

The wife of a working-class man may have stayed at home if there were children. Some wives worked part-time taking in sewing or laundry, or as a store clerk. Mothers looked after their children by themselves, although some may have had help from a close relative or older child.

Education

Although boys and girls were required to attend school, it was rare for children of the working-class to complete high school. Even fewer went on to higher education. If you were born in a working-class family at the time, you would most likely grow up to be working-class.

Housing

Working-class people in Victoria lived in several parts of the city. The poorest lived in cabins or shacks near the harbour, in places that resembled shantytowns. Others lived in cheap hotels and rooming houses in the downtown area, near Chinatown. Store clerks sometimes lived in apartments above the stores and domestic servants often lived in the households where they worked.

People of different classes and occupations lived close to each other. Most neighbourhoods included larger homes and rows of workers' cottages close by. Factory owners often lived beside or near their factories.

Transportation

Walking was probably the most popular form of transportation. In 1890, electric streetcars started to operate in Victoria. By the 1890s, bicycles were also used by both working-class men and women as a major form of transportation and recreation. Wealthier people would have owned a horse and carriage.

Leisure

Leisure activities for working-class men included sports of all types, such as hunting and playing cards, as well as music halls. Organizations, such as the Freemasons and Oddfellows, included many working-class members.

The leisure options for women included sewing, horseback riding, and music halls. Families went for walks and picnics, and attended civic activities such as the Gorge Regatta (boat races, sports, and pageants) to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday. Attending church was a big part of most working-class families' lives in the 1800s.

Middle/Upper Class

Occupations

A middle-class man would usually own his own business or be in partnership with another man. Shipping, importing, and wholesaling were typical businesses. Many men owned factories, manufacturing items such as:

- lumber and shingles
- clothing, boots, and shoes
- paint
- cigars
- harnesses and carriages
- beer
- barrels
- bricks
- biscuits

Some wealthy men were bankers, real estate agents, or stockbrokers. Lawyers, accountants, architects, engineers, dentists, and doctors were almost entirely from Britain, Canada, or the United States.

Family

Women of the middle/upper-classes did not often work outside the home. If they did, teaching and nursing were the most common professions. If a middle-class woman got married, she usually stopped working.

Women were expected to run a household. Women often had five or more children to look after. Middle/upper-class households often had servants. Cooks and gardeners were usually Chinese people. A middle-class woman probably did her own cooking, but was sometimes assisted by a Chinese servant.

Education

Wealthier families sent their sons and daughters to private schools, sometimes in England. Victoria had many small, private schools. Some sent their children to public schools.

Housing

A middle/upper-class home would usually be a large house surrounded by lawns and gardens. A fence, hedge, or wall would separate the home from the street or sidewalk. A vegetable garden, stable for the horses, and storage shed would be around the back.

Leisure

For wealthier people, tennis and croquet were popular games played by both men and women. Families also went on picnics and rowed on the Gorge waterway. Victoria had many theatres, and the middle/upper-class probably attended on a regular basis. Church played a more prominent role in the lives of most families.