Being young in the country: settler children and childhood in British Columbia and Alberta, 1860-1925.

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Abstract:
This dissertation demonstrates that the voices of children and the experiences of childhood provide important new perspectives about the settler societies in British Columbia and Alberta during the period 1860 – 1925. It employs a combination of direct quotations from individual children and analysis across the cohort of one hundred historical children as a means to explore both individual personalities and shared child perspectives of childhood. Child-created diaries and correspondence were selected as the principal documentation in this study as a deliberate strategy to privilege children and to enable clear child-centred voices unmixed with those of adults. The intent is to reveal child-centred understandings about the physical and emotional aspects of growing up in Western Canada that are set within the contexts of specific communities, of family life, of sibling relationships, of friendships and separations. Some significant findings include the phenomenon of boarding school within the childhood experience and the realization that many settler children spent childhoods away from family, the difficulty boys shared in achieving masculinity, and the importance placed by girls and boys on charting and comparing their physical growth and attainment of child-centred milestones of achievement.

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