

*One cannot understand the implications of free trade without understanding the geography of free trade.*

Christopher D. Merrett, 1996

The settlement of the Oregon Boundary Dispute between Great Britain and the United States in 1846--an event whose 150th anniversary is commemorated by this conference--was a definitive moment in the social, economic and political evolution of the interior Pacific Northwest (Hutchison, 1955; Merk, 1967; Thompson and Randall, 1994). But, as has been noted in several other presentations here, the creation of the new international boundary and the consequent evolution of a distinct northern borderland region has been little appreciated, especially by historians and sociologists. From Frederick Jackson Turner's classic writings on frontiers and sections (1961), to the most recent work of the so-called "New Western Historians," the central role of the 49th parallel west of the Great Lakes has been either neglected or ignored. In the latter case, for instance, the most distressing cases are Patricia Nelson Limerick's 1987 The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West, and Richard White's 1991 It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own, two recent and popular works, neither of which even acknowledge Canada's existence, much less the border.

It is our contention that if the issue of the northern borderland is approached via the discipline of geography a much clearer image emerges, and some significant details stand out in stark relief. The term "borderlands" has been developed and utilized by geographers to refer to distinctive regions which have formed along the political boundaries of nation-states. While the