

The Overland Journey of the Argonauts of 1862

By JUDGE F. W. HOWAY, LL.B., F.R.S.C.

(Read May Meeting, 1919)

The earliest recorded emigration across the prairies to the region west of the Rocky Mountains occurred in 1841, and according to Sir George Simpson, who met them near Edmonton, consisted of twenty-three families. Thirteen years later another party, known as the Sinclair party, numbering sixty-five persons—men, women, and children—followed in their tracks to the Columbia. In this paper an attempt will be made to trace and describe the journey in 1862 of the third immigrant party across the continent through British North America; but the first of such immigrants whose object was to reach a home in British territory. For this purpose liberty has been kindly granted by Mrs. Caroline L. McMicking, of Victoria, to use the original diaries of her late husband, Mr. Robert B. McMicking, and his brother, Thomas R. McMicking. These little books contain the day by day account of the incidents of the whole journey from Queenston, Canada West to Quesnel, British Columbia.

The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway follows, in a general way, the route taken by this party from Winnipeg to Fort George, and covers the distance in three days. We, who travel in luxury at this speed, find it difficult to visualize the slow and steady "grind" of twenty or twenty-five miles a day, the innumerable delays, the constant crossing and re-crossing of rivers and creeks—ferrying, fording, or bridging—the footsoreness, the uncertainties, the wearisomeness, the disappointments and dangers, and the dwarfing sense of man's insignificance that the surrounding vastness impressed upon these pioneers in their four months' crawl across the prairies and the Rocky Mountains. All things are ready-made for the pioneer *de luxe* of to-day; the pioneer of 1862 had to make them for himself.

In 1861 Cariboo had yielded about \$2,700,000. Tales of easily-gotten wealth rolled from West to East, and as they rolled they not only increased, but all the asperities vanished leaving with the hearer only a clear vision of gold to be picked up in Cariboo "by the bucketful," as one old-timer used to phrase it. But El Dorado was far distant from Canada West. To reach it by the usual route meant a journey to New York, thence by water to Aspinwall, across the isthmus to Panama, by ship to San Francisco, and on to Victoria, thence by river steamer to Yale, and by stage four hundred miles to