

# Victoria City and the Island of Vancouver

## Story of the Founding of Fort Victoria by Officers of the Hudson's Bay Company—Some Interesting Historical Data

WHEN settlers commenced to arrive in Oregon and the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company saw that the United States was likely to get possession of the basin of the Lower Columbia, they looked around them for a site on which to build a

trading post that would take the place of Fort Vancouver. While George Vancouver was exploring the shores and islands of the Gulf of Georgia a Spanish captain had entered a harbor on the south of Vancouver Island which he called Cordoba. He admired the beauty of the place, but finding the Indians unfriendly, he sailed away. In 1837 Capt. McNeill, in the steamer Beaver, visited the harbor which the Indians called Camosun, or "The Place of Rushing Water." The whistle of the company's new steamer, the first on the Pacific coast, brought the Songhees from their village to gaze and wonder at the strange boat that without oar or sail, but with great noise, moved so swiftly through the water. In a letter to Governor Simpson, Capt. McNeill described Camosun as very suitable for such an establishment as Fort Vancouver, except that there did not seem to be water enough to turn mills.

When, in 1841, Simpson visited the Pacific Coast for the second time, he became convinced that the company should remove their headquarters to the south of Vancouver Island. As the change was a more than usually important one Simpson consulted the directors of the company in London, who resolved to build a large fort at Camosun.

In speaking of Fort Vancouver, we have learned that James Douglas was associated with Dr. McLaughlin in the management of the company's business in the Northwest. This man who played so important a part in the early history of this province was born in Jamaica in 1803. He was a descendant of the Black Douglas so famous in Scottish story. In early youth he engaged with the Northwest Company, and while at their headquarters at Fort William became a great favorite of McLaughlin. When the doctor decided in 1823 to take charge of the affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Columbia district he persuaded the lad to accompany him across the mountains. Douglas was placed in charge of factor James Connolly that he might learn to conduct the fur trade in New Caledonia. Here he met and fell in love with the factor's daughter, a girl of sixteen. She became his wife and many of their descendants still live in Victoria. Douglas filled many important positions both in the interior and on the coast, and succeeded McLaughlin as manager of the affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company west of the Rocky Mountains.

In 1843 he came up from Fort Vancouver to make a careful examination of Camosun. Entering what is now called the inner harbor, he saw a tract of land six miles square. A great part of it was already suitable for tillage or pasture. The rest was covered with valuable timber. The soil was fertile. The situation very beautiful and the climate mild. Camosun Canal, the Gorge, with well wooded banks extended inland for nearly six miles. Three miles away was a very fine and safe harbor called Esquimalt, but Douglas considered that its appearance was strikingly unprepossessing, the outline of the country exhibiting a confused assemblage of rock and wood.

Douglas chose Camosun for the site of the new fort, and in March, 1843, he came thither with a force of fifteen men to take possession of the ground and to prepare for building. The Songhees Indians had left their village and were entrenched some distance away to be ready for an attack of a war party of Cowichans, of whose coming they had received warning. Father Bolduc, a Jesuit missionary, had come over with Douglas. He went to the Indian encampment, preached to the savages and baptized a great many. Next Sunday he celebrated mass in a chapel built of fir boughs. The Challons had crossed from the opposite shore and the Cowichans and the Songhees, for the time forgot their quarrel as they looked on at the mysterious rites. As soon as he had decided on a site for his fort and set his men at work squaring timber, Douglas sailed north to get more men and material from two forts, Yako, on the Takn River, and McLaughlin, on Milbank Sound, which the company had decided to abandon. By the first of June he was back and the work proceeded apace. The fort was ready for occupation in October. The Indians from far and near had looked on its erection with unfriendly eyes, but had not attempted to interfere with the fifty resolute men, who watchful and well-armed went quietly on with their work. Fort Camosun was on the eastern side of the inlet directly opposite the village of the Songhees, which was about four hundred yards off. It consisted of a square one hundred and fifty yards on each side enclosed by cedar pickets eighteen feet high. At the angles were two block houses or bastions, and within the enclosure were dwellings, storehouses and workshops. Walls and buildings had been erected without nails. Wooden pegs were used in some places but generally the timbers were so carefully fitted together as not to need fastening.

Charles Ross, who was put in charge of the new fort, only lived a few months, and was succeeded by Roderick Finlayson. This gentleman entered the company's service when a boy and held several important positions on the Pacific Coast. He spent the greater part of a long life in the city of which the fort he now commanded was the beginning. He performed the many duties which fell to his lot

with perfect integrity and thoroughness. Like most of the Hudson's Bay men, Finlayson was a Scotchman. His position at Fort Camosun called for a brave heart and a clear head. The following story will show that he possessed both. The company had commenced to cultivate a large farm near the fort and cattle were sent from Oregon to stock it. These cattle

with venison. It has been said that the company seldom interfered in the quarrels of the Indian tribes with one another. There was one exception. Indians must not be molested on their way to or from a fort on a trading expedition. A little after the incident just narrated some Skagits came from Whitby Island to trade at

Provisions were sent not only to the company's forts in less favored places, but Russian vessels were loaded with wheat, beef and mutton for Sitka. Whaling ships sometimes called in at Esquimalt for provisions but the fleet found the Sandwich Islands the most convenient port of call.

In 1845 there was talk of war between Eng-

land, the Inconstant, the Herald and the Pandora. Kane street recalls the name of a naturalist who visited the coast in early days. In 1849, the year when James Douglas took charge of Fort Victoria, the only building outside the fort was a small dairy at the head of James Bay.

We will leave the Hudson's Bay people to improve their farm, which occupied the land now covered by the principal streets of Victoria city, care for their quickly increasing flocks and herds, pursue their trade with the Indians and extend their commerce, while we see what was going on in the interior in these last days of the fur-trading period.

The editor of the Colonist has received the following extremely interesting and valuable letter regarding early days on the west coast of Vancouver Island:

Sir,—With pleasure I have read in your edition of March 7th an account of Mr. Carmichael's report of a recent exploratory tour, in which, under the heading of "Historical," there are several items that are not accurate; and it is as well to explain now, as there are, to the best of my belief, only two men alive, Mr. G. M. Sproat and myself, that know the correct account.

In 1857 I and a man named Laughton were trading at Pachina, San Juan Harbor, when the brig Island Queen, Capt. Stamp, anchored in the harbor. The captain came ashore, stating that he was looking for timber. He was much impressed as to the size and quality of the timber. He suggested that we should hire Indians to get spars out for him. He was impressed that it was impossible with the limited means and appliances at our command. He then started for Victoria, from there to Puget Sound, eventually making a contract with the Port Gamble mill company to supply him spars. Some time after he returned to England, and then back to Victoria.

In the spring of 1860 he purchased the schooner Reporter, renaming her Meg Merillies, appointing the writer captain of her; later on went to Barclay Sound, taking with him two timber cruisers—Jeremiah Rogers and John Walton. On arriving at what is now called Alberni, he sent the two men up the river prospecting for timber. They returned the same night, Rogers giving a most favorable account of the size and quality, but Walton's account of the timber was very indifferent. Captain Stamp was satisfied with Rogers' report and returned to Victoria.

The schooner made several trips to Alberni during the summer, carrying down men, timber and provisions; later on started down with a number of men and a quantity of stores to build the mill. Captain Stamp and Mr. G. M. Sproat also on board.

On arriving at Alberni found the barkentine Woodpecker, from London, anchored there loaded with machinery, etc., for the mill (the Woodpecker was wrecked shortly after on the Columbia River Bar); also some passengers, engineer, blacksmith, cooper and two laborers.

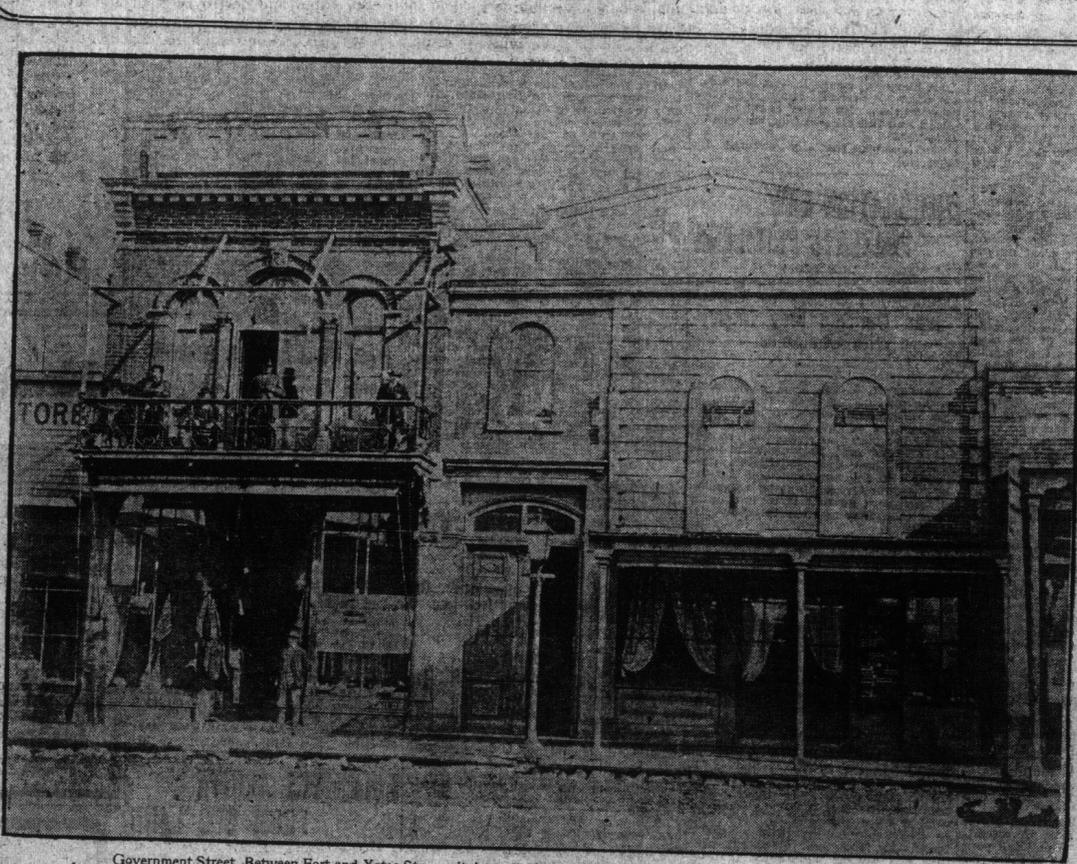
The Indians were camped on the mill site and refused to vacate the land. Captain Stamp ordered me to haul the schooner broadside to the beach and to load the two guns. The Woodpecker also did the same. Then he ordered them to leave or he would destroy their houses. They left in a hurry and the mill was built and soon was cutting timber and shipping spars for some years. Then the mill was shut down, the machinery was sold to the Port Gamble Mill Company, taken away and erected at Port Gamble; and the mill, abandoned some years after, was destroyed by fire. The company owned a small tug, the Diana, and the Thames, which was taken to Honolulu, from there to Japan, by the late Captain Devereaux, and there sold; also a schooner built at and called Alberni.

T. PAMPHLET.

### PIONEER EXPERIENCES

Rev. Dr. Robson, the first Methodist missionary to land on Vancouver Island, related his pioneer experiences to a large audience in Vancouver the other evening; and in the course of his address told many most interesting stories of the early days of the province of British Columbia. Forty-nine years ago Dr. Robson stood on the deck of the steamer Pacific and heard fired the cannon that notified Victoria that the ship was off Deadman's Point. A skiff put off and rowed the party ashore. Dr. Robson sprang out to help the others out, and so was the first of the missionaries to land. Said he, in his address: "We landed close to Deadman's Point, and it has often struck me that British Columbia has too many of these gruesome names. There was a Murderer's Bar on the Fraser River, and I can say what many of you cannot—I have been on both sides of Hell's Gate and have come out unscathed."

Dr. Robson paid a high tribute to Governor Douglas, a commanding figure in the early history of British Columbia. "The Hudson Bay officers were all men of indomitable courage," he said, "and Douglas was every inch a man. Of splendid physique and with magnificent shoulders, he looked a truly regal figure when dressed in the uniform which his position as Governor of the two colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia called for. He had lived almost all his life among the Indians and well knew how they were impressed by a little show. I remember once when he went up the Fraser on the old Beaver to visit an Indian camp, he was taken ashore in state in a small boat and carried to the scene of the conference on the shoulders of his men.



Government Street, Between Fort and Yates Sts., as it Appeared in 1862—the Buildings Shown Are the Colonial Hotel and Annex.

were wild and the Songhees Indians found some of them roaming in the woods and killed them. When Finlayson found this out he ordered his dishonest neighbors to pay for the stolen cattle, but they refused. "Why should they not hunt cattle as the white men hunted the deer?" asked the savages. Finlayson

threatened to close the fort gates on the Songhees, but they, feeling sure of the help of the Cowichans, threatened to batter them down and force their way through. They, accordingly, began to fire at the fort walls with their muskets. Finlayson let them shoot away till they were tired, not allowing his men to fire a shot in return. Then he called the chief and said: "What would you do? What evil would you bring upon yourselves? . . . Know you not that with one motion of my finger I could blow you all into the bay? And I will do it, too. See your houses yonder? And instantly upon the word a nine-pounder belched forth with astounding noise; a large load of grape shot tearing into splinters a cedar lodge at which it was pointed. The poor savages were terribly frightened, for they thought some of their wives and children were killed. But Finlayson had sent beforehand to warn them away from danger. This object lesson accomplished its purpose. The cattle were paid for and in future the Indians contented themselves

land and the United States. Both countries claimed the territory west of the Rocky Mountains between latitudes 42 degrees and 54 degrees 40 minutes, called Oregon by the people of the United States. The dispute was settled in 1846 by the Oregon Treaty, which made the 49th parallel the boundary between the main-

land of British Columbia and the United States and gave Vancouver Island to England. By this treaty Great Britain gave up her right to the territory on the Lower Columbia and around Puget Sound. The Hudson's Bay Company held many valuable fur trading stations in this region and owned many fine farms. By the treaty it was left in possession of all its property. But as Oregon became United States territory all goods entering its ports must pay the heavy customs duties charged by the tariff of that country. This did not suit the company, and its officers saw, what they had long feared, that Fort Vancouver could no longer be the distributing centre for the Northwest Coast.

During the excitement quite a fleet of warships visited Esquimalt. In the meantime the Hudson's Bay Company had, in 1845, changed the name of their fort to Victoria, and as many of the streets of the city have been called after these ships, their names may be of interest. They were the Cormorant, the Fisguard, the Con-



GOVERNMENT STREET, VICTORIA, AS IT APPEARED IN 1858 (Courtesy of Edgar Fawcett.)

Extract from Victoria Gazette.—The above view of Government street was taken a short time previous to the removal of its most prominent feature—the old Bastion—located at the eastern angle of the stockade of the H. B. Co.'s Fort. The obstruction has since been taken away from the line of the street, leaving a clear sidewalk on the west side.

West of the enclosure is a small building erected since the "Fraser Fever" populated the town, and used as a somewhat altered, and is now occupied as a residence by Lieutenant-Governor Moody and family.

On the opposite side of the street, several changes have taken place since the foregoing was placed in the hands of the engraver, which, while they do not detract from the accuracy of the picture at the time it was taken, render it less perfect in detail than if its characteristics were brought down to the present writing. The principal buildings on this side of the street at this time (1858) are the Colonial restaurant, Metropolitan hotel, residence of Hotel de France (of the H. B. Co.), the large building of Captain Stamp, the store of Wm. B. Smith, Esq., and the erected in Victoria.

[Note.—The building referred to in the last paragraph of the foregoing is still standing. It is known as a window hotel property, is situated on the corner of Government and Courtenay streets, opposite the postoffice, and is owned by Mr. Stephen Jones.—Editor Colonist.]

not be allowed to trade again at Fort Camosun. The savages, not choosing to displease so powerful and so near a neighbor gave up their booty.

Fort Camosun prospered from the first. Four years after its establishment there were three hundred acres of land under cultivation.

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