

Fort Victoria in 1847.

From the painting by Paul Kane, who arrived at the fort on April 9, 1847. This is the earliest known view of Fort Victoria.

THE FOUNDING OF FORT VICTORIA.

Be-Ho VT 1900

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—A special word of thanks is due Mr. J. Chadwick Brooks, Secretary to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, who not only granted permission to print the excerpts from documents in the Company's Archives that are included in this article, but also contrived, in spite of war-time difficulties, to have several of these copied from the originals expressly for the use of the writer.

1.

The founding of Fort Victoria in 1843 marked the climax of a controversy—one might almost say a series of controversies—that had lasted for nearly twenty years. The point at issue was the best location for the principal depot of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Pacific Coast. Chief Factor John McLoughlin, who was placed in charge of the Company's operations west of the Rocky Mountains in 1824-25, early became a staunch supporter of the claims of Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia River. Governor Simpson, who travelled westward with McLoughlin, felt from the first that the main depot should be farther north. As the years slipped by, circumstances seemed to favour first one point of view and then the other; but in the end the consensus of opinion turned decisively against McLoughlin.

Two considerations remained paramount throughout the controversy. First came the trading requirements of the Company. In 1825 its activities were limited to a chain of posts in the valley of the Columbia, and in the interior of what is now British Columbia, all of which received their supplies and shipped their furs by way of the Columbia River. The second consideration was the boundary question. Until 1846 the whole area from California to Alaska was in dispute between Great Britain and the United States. A joint-occupation agreement had been arrived at in 1818 and this was renewed for an indefinite period in 1827; but uncertainty about the boundary was nevertheless a continual source of anxiety to the Hudson's Bay Company. Sooner or later the line would be determined; and it was most desirable that the main depot should be located in territory which would ultimately become British.

British Columbia Historical Quarterly, Vol. VII., No. 2.

At first both considerations bolstered McLoughlin's point of view. When Fort Vancouver was completed, in 1825, no one could deny that it was admirably situated to meet the trading needs of the moment. At that time, moreover, informed circles were of opinion that the boundary-line would follow the Columbia River; and with this in mind Fort Vancouver had been built on the Columbia's north bank. The post was thus situated in territory which it was presumed would become British. This being so, McLoughlin felt that it should become the main depot, at least until such time as some change in conditions made it unsuitable for the purpose.

But Governor Simpson was not convinced. For one thing, he hoped that the Company would be able to develop an extensive trade on the Northwest Coast, and Fort Vancouver would not be a convenient depot for this purpose. For another, he felt that it would be prudent to place the district headquarters at a greater distance from the prospective boundary-line. All things considered, the mouth of the Fraser River seemed to him to be the most promising location, particularly as he was confident that the river itself would provide a travel route to the interior comparable to that furnished by the Columbia. By Simpson's order Fort Vancouver was therefore planned as an ordinary trading-post, and built upon a site suitable only for this limited purpose.

Needless to say, when Simpson reached this decision he knew nothing about the canyon of the Fraser. Simon Fraser had descended the river in 1808, and had described in his journal the narrow chasms and swirling waters that made it an impossible route for the transport of supplies and furs; but little was known about his experiences until a later date. A party sent off by Simpson, late in 1824, had had time to explore only the lower reaches of the river. In 1828, however, when travelling westward on his second tour of inspection, Simpson himself investigated the canyon. A few months later he confessed to the Governor and Committee in London that he would "consider the passage down, to be certain Death, in nine attempts out of Ten."¹ The plan to establish a depot at the mouth of the Fraser was at

(1) Rich, E. E. (ed.), *The Letters of John McLoughlin . . . First Series, 1825-38*, Toronto and London, 1941, p. lix. (Simpson's 1829 Report, March, 1829.)

once abandoned, and, to McLoughlin's immense satisfaction, Simpson agreed that Fort Vancouver should become the headquarters of the district. The post was subsequently moved nearer to the river, where shipments of freight and furs could be handled more easily, and rebuilt upon a much larger scale.

At this point the depot controversy seemed to have ended; but circumstances soon led to its revival. In the spring of 1829 the annual supply ship *William and Ann*, inward bound from London, was wrecked on the bar at the mouth of the Columbia River. A year later the *Isabella* met a similar fate. The Governor and Committee had long been aware of the existence of the bar, but these events brought its dangers very forcibly to their attention. Then in 1830 a fever epidemic broke out in the lower valley of the Columbia, and in the course of two seasons it decimated the Indian population. Deaths amongst the whites were astonishingly few, but McLoughlin's men were laid up by the score and the Company's programme of expansion was brought to a standstill.

By the spring of 1834 the Governor and Committee had come to the conclusion that some change in the depot arrangements was necessary. In March they wrote to Governor Simpson:—
The unhealthy state of [Fort] Vancouver for several years past, and the distance at which it is situated from the Sea, render it by no means so well adapted for the sole depot of the West side of the Mountains, now that the Trade is extended to the Coast: we therefore think it advisable that a Depot should be situated on the shores of Puget Sound, where there are many places highly favorable for a Seaside Depot . . .²

Simpson subsequently instructed McLoughlin to explore Puget Sound and examine the various sites available. This McLoughlin endeavoured to do in 1835, but sickness at Fort Vancouver forced him to return before he had completed the survey. He reported to London in September that he had visited Fort Nisqually and the head of the Sound, but that neither place could offer one of the essential requirements for a depot—an extensive tract of land suitable for tillage.³

(2) Governor and Committee to Simpson, March 5, 1834. This and all subsequent quotations from documents in the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company are printed by permission of the Governor and Committee.

(3) McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, September 30, 1835. *Letters of John McLoughlin*, pp. 138-39.

McLoughlin's report crossed a dispatch from the Governor and Committee in which the latter dealt with the depot question at some length. The topic was introduced as follows:—

We have again to draw your attention to the object of removing your Principal Depot from the Columbia River to the Coast, say to Whidby's Island, Pugets Sound, or some other eligible situation, easy of access, as we consider the danger of crossing the Columbia Bar too great a risk to be run by the Annual Ships from and to England, with the Outfits and returns.⁴ Doubtless with McLoughlin's susceptibilities on the subject in mind they hastened to add that "Fort Vancouver must of course always be kept up as a large establishment," and that it "must always be maintained as a Depot" for the interior posts and trapping expeditions. But McLoughlin knew full well that the supremacy of Fort Vancouver was threatened; and in his reply he entered a strong plea for permission to carry on as before, basing his request upon a sincere conviction that the existing arrangement was "the most economical and efficient" that could be made.⁵

His principal arguments were three in number, and to them he clung tenaciously through the years that followed. In the first place, as the Columbia River was admittedly still the only practicable route to the interior, the supplies for and furs from the numerous posts would have to continue to cross the Columbia bar, regardless of where the principal depot was situated. Secondly, McLoughlin insisted that the bar itself was not nearly as dangerous as it was reputed to be, and charged that the loss of both the *William and Ann* and the *Isabella* had been due to the negligence of their captains. Finally, he pointed out that a new depot on Whidbey Island, or thereabouts, would prove costly to the Company, since it could not take the place of the near-by posts at Fort Langley and Fort Nisqually, as the Governor and Committee evidently supposed. Fort Langley was maintained largely because of the salmon trade, which could not be transferred elsewhere, while it was certain that the Indians who frequented Fort Nisqually would not go instead to the proposed new depot.⁶

(4) Governor and Committee to McLoughlin, December 8, 1835. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

(5) McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, November 15, 1836. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

(6) *Ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

In spite of his strong prejudice in favour of Fort Vancouver it is only just to McLoughlin to say that he seized every opportunity to secure information about possible sites for a new depot. In November, 1836, Chief Factor Duncan Finlayson, returning from Fort Simpson in the steamer *Beaver*, visited Port Townsend, Port Discovery, and Whidbey Island, but could report favourably on none of them.⁷ In the light of later events it is interesting to find that it was apparently McLoughlin himself who first directed that the search should be extended to Vancouver Island. On December 8, 1836, he wrote to Chief Trader John Work, who was then in charge of Fort Simpson:—

The Captain of the steamer [Captain W. H. McNeill] should also be directed to examine on his way to Nisqually next summer the south end of Vancouver's Island for the purpose of selecting a convenient situation for an Establishment on a large scale, possessing all the requisites for farming rearing of Cattle together with a good harbour and abundance of timber, in short containing every advantage which is desirable such a situation should furnish.⁸

In accordance with these instructions Captain McNeill, in the *Beaver*, spent some days in the early summer of 1837 exploring the southern end of Vancouver Island. It is clear that he was favourably impressed, but McLoughlin devoted only a few lines to the subject in his autumn dispatch to the Governor and Committee. He stated that McNeill had "found an excellent harbour, of easy access with good anchorage, surrounded by a plain of several miles in extent, of an excellent Soil"; but added cautiously that it "would require to be more particularly examined before we could rely on it."⁹ If McNeill submitted a written report it has been lost, and it is therefore fortunate that James Douglas returned to the subject of this survey and dealt with it at greater length in a letter to Governor Simpson. This reads in part as follows:—

The survey strictly speaking commenced at Newitti¹⁰ near the north end of the Island and proceeded through Johnstones Straits and the Gulf of

(7) McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, November 18, 1836 (postscript to dispatch dated November 15). *Ibid.*, p. 165.

(8) H.B.C. Archives, B.223/b/15, fo. 62.

(9) McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, October 31, 1837. *Letters of John McLoughlin*, p. 214.

(10) Meaning the region about the present Port Hardy. Fort Rupert was built there by the Company in 1849.

orgia to Pt. Gonzalo. . . .¹¹ On reaching the South end of the Island, decided improvement was observed in the appearance of the Country. Three good harbours of easy access, were found west of Point Gonzalo, at two of which, Captain McNeill passed a few days. The land around these harbours is covered with wood to the extent of half a mile, interiorly, where the forest is replaced by a more open and beautifully diversified Country presenting a succession of plains with groves of Oaks and pine trees, for a distance of 15 or 20 miles. The most Easterly of the harbours 10 miles west of Point Gonzalo is said to be the best on the Coast and possesses the important advantage, over the other, of a more abundant supply of fresh water furnished by a stream 20 Yards wide, which after contributing to fertilize the open Country, flows into it. The plains are said to be fertile and covered with luxuriant vegetation; but judging from a sample of soil brought here, I think it rather light and certainly not the best quality, admitting even this disadvantage, I am persuaded that no part of this sterile Rock bound Coast will be found better adapted for the site of the proposed depot or to combine, in a higher degree, the desired requisites, of a secure harbour accessible to shipping at every season, of good pasture, and, to a certain extent, of improvable tillage land.¹²

There is no doubt that the three harbours examined by McNeill were Victoria, Esquimalt, and Sooke; and of these it was Victoria Harbour, the "most Easterly" of the three, that he and Douglas described with such approval.¹³

It is clear that the Governor and Committee intended that the new depot should be built as soon as a satisfactory site for it had been found. Thus in February, 1837, they informed Governor Simpson that the post was to be named Fort Adelaide,¹⁴ in honour of Queen Adelaide, consort of the reigning monarch, William IV.—a step they would scarcely have taken if the building of the post had not been in immediate prospect. Again, in October, 1838, Douglas remarked that he was awaiting—and by this he obviously meant that he was expecting—"instructions,

(11) The present Cadboro (Ten Mile) Point, not Point Gonzales.

(12) Douglas to Simpson, March 18, 1838. *Letters of John McLoughlin*, p. 286-87.

(13) It is interesting to note that in a dispatch dated November 15, 1837, when they were still unaware of McNeill's survey, the Governor and Committee suggested to Douglas that the southern end of Vancouver Island could be examined. (H.B.C. Archives, A.6/24.) When the report of McNeill's explorations was received, they complimented him on finding so promising a site. (Governor and Committee to Douglas, October 31, 1838; H.B.C. Archives, A.6/25.)

(14) Governor and Committee to Simpson, February 15, 1837. (H.B.C. Archives, D.5/4.)

with the necessary reinforcements of officers and men, to carry into effect your wishes, with respect, to the proposed establishment on Vancouver's Island."¹⁵ But by that time the Governor and Committee had adopted a policy of delay. Why they did so we do not yet know; but it is possibly significant that John McLoughlin arrived in London in the autumn of 1838 to confer with officials of the Company. McLoughlin, whose opposition to the construction of a new depot was well known, may well have asked that the final decision as to a site should be postponed until his return to the Pacific Coast; and in view of his long service in the region it would be a difficult request to refuse.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that McLoughlin paid his first and only visit to Vancouver Island almost immediately after his return to Fort Vancouver, in the autumn of 1839. He was accompanied by John Work and Captain McNeill. The party proceeded first to Fort Nisqually and from there sailed in the *Beaver* for Fort Langley, where they arrived early in December. McLoughlin described their subsequent movements as follows, in a report to Simpson:—

On the 10th [December] left Fort Langley. On the 12th reached the plain on the South end of Vancouver's Island which Captain McNeill examined in 1837 and reported as a fine place for an Establishment. It is a very fine harbour, accessible at all seasons, but it is not a place suitable to our purpose; on the 14th arrived at Nisqually . . .¹⁶

Thus briefly did McLoughlin dismiss McNeill's discovery, and the possible site of a depot that might rival his beloved Fort Vancouver. He made no further reference to the matter in his report to Simpson, and did not so much as mention it in his dispatches to the Governor and Committee.

As it turned out, McLoughlin's attitude had little influence upon the course of events. Simpson was planning a third inspection trip to the Pacific Coast, and the Governor and Committee decided to place the whole matter in his hands. The same month that McLoughlin visited Vancouver Island a dispatch left London instructing him not to make any decision as to the location of

(15) Douglas to the Governor and Committee, October 18, 1838. *Letters of John McLoughlin*, p. 267.

(16) McLoughlin to Simpson, March 20, 1840. (H.B.C. Archives, B.223/b/26.)

the new post until Simpson's arrival¹⁷—an order that had the effect of postponing any further action until 1841.

In the interval, however, a new complication appeared on the horizon. It had long been McLoughlin's ambition to build a chain of trading-posts that would extend along the coast all the way from Puget Sound to the far north. By 1834 he had completed Fort Nisqually, Fort Langley, Fort McLoughlin, and Fort Simpson. At that time the Russian American Company controlled Alaska; but the agreement arrived at between that Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1839, while McLoughlin was in London, made it possible for the latter to extend its operations to Russian territory. In the summer of 1840 James Douglas went to Alaska, and there took over Fort Stikine and built Fort Taku.

As he returned southward, Douglas carefully considered the Company's trading requirements on the whole Northwest Coast. He concluded that one more post was needed—a fort that would be frequented by the Indians dwelling in the region of Queen Charlotte Sound and the northern half of Vancouver Island. This area was then served by the *Beaver* and other trading vessels, but Douglas felt that a fort would be both cheaper and safer. On the question of its location he reported to McLoughlin as follows:—

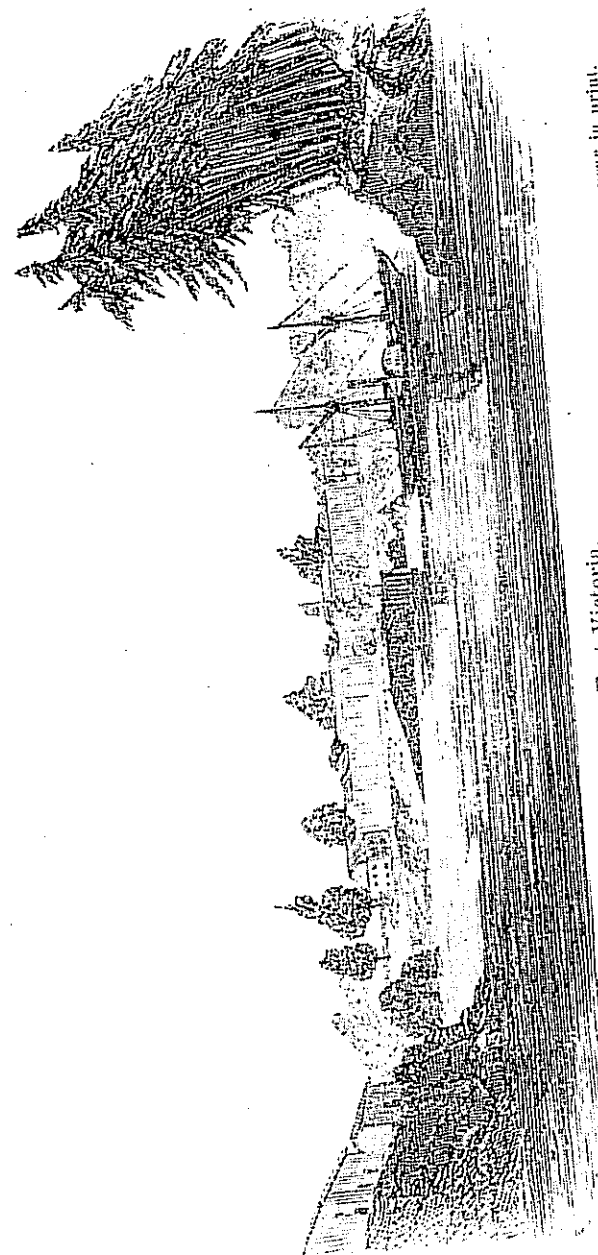
The place which I consider, in all respects most suitable for this purpose, is the neighbourhood of Newceté, near the north end of Vancouver's Island, where there are several good harbours accessible to Shipping at every season, and which is almost directly in the centre of the Native Population . . .¹⁸

McLoughlin, who infinitely preferred trading-posts to trading-ships, and who regarded the steamer *Beaver* in particular as an unnecessary and costly extravagance, welcomed this recommendation and endorsed it heartily in his fall dispatch to the Governor and Committee.¹⁹ To complete the chain of forts on the coast by building a post at the northern end of Vancouver Island

(17) Governor and Committee to McLoughlin, December 31, 1839. (H.B.C. Archives, A.6/25.)

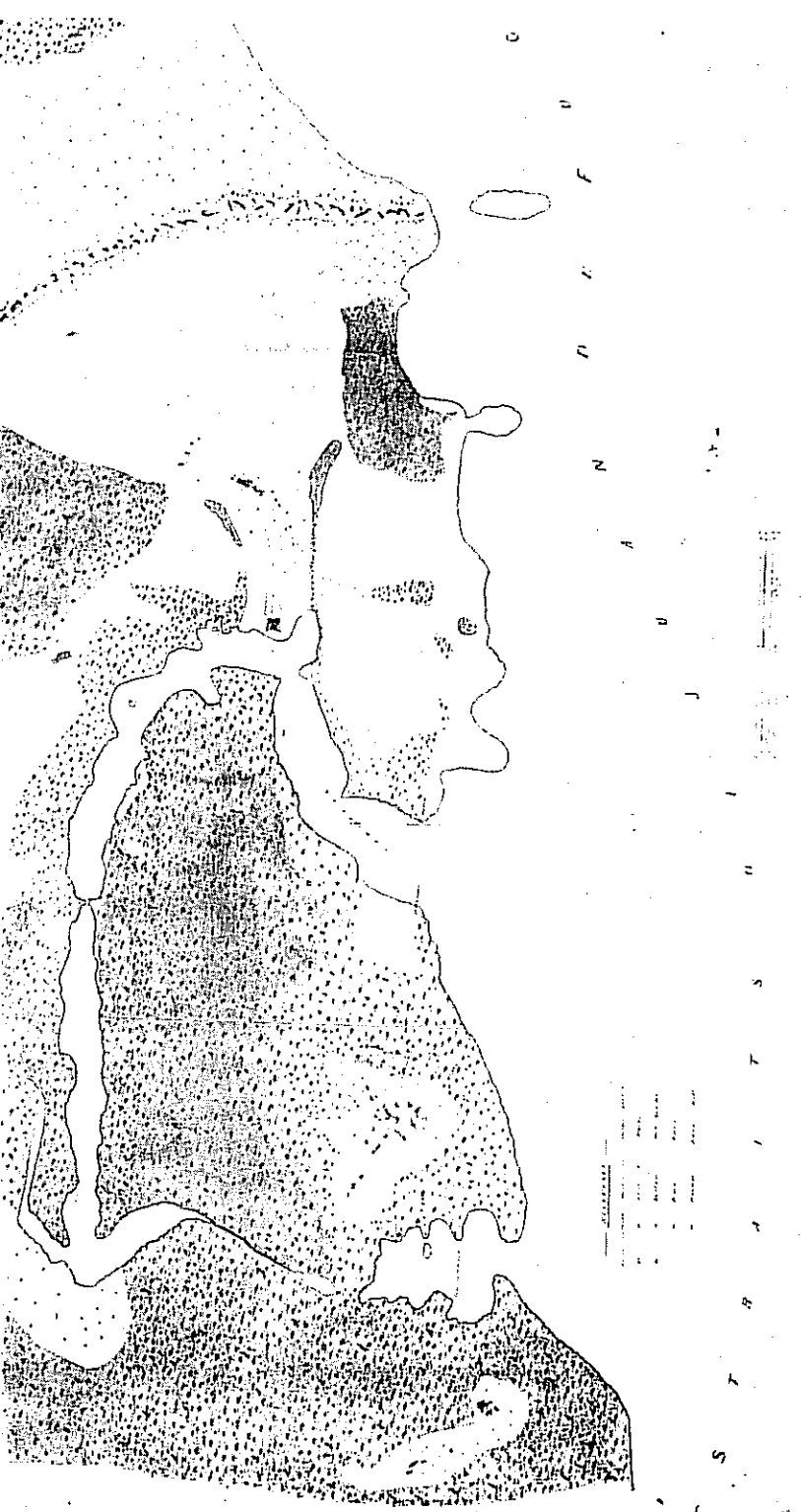
(18) Douglas to McLoughlin, October 1, 1840. (H.B.C. Archives, B.223/b/28.)

(19) McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, November 20, 1840. (H.B.C. Archives, B.223/b/28.)



Fort Victoria.

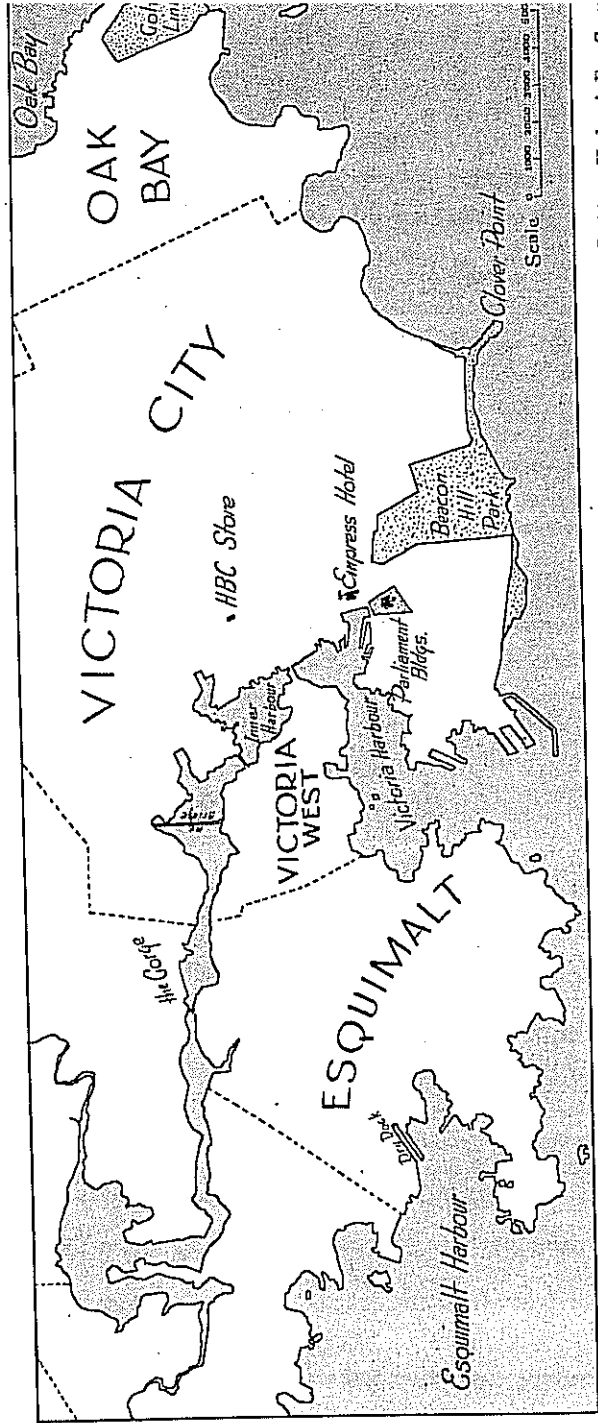
From the *Illustrated London News*, August 26, 1848. This was probably the first view of the fort to appear in print. The original sketch was evidently made before the end of 1847, as the entreated stockade, which enclosed the building here shown outside the walls, was completed at that time. The steamer is the famous *Beaver*.



Part of U. S. map prepared by James Douglas in 1842.

Esquimalt Harbour is shown as "Iswhoymath" and Victoria Harbour as "Camosack." The black square shows the site upon which Douglas proposed that the fort should be built. Fort Victoria was constructed very near this spot in 1843. The original of this map was forwarded to London by John McLoughlin, and is now in the Hudson's Bay Archives. It is here reproduced from the photostatic copy in the Provincial Archives.

Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Co



Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Com

Sketch map of Victoria and vicinity in 1943.

The various features on Douglas's 1842 map may be readily identified by comparing it with this modern sketch.

to him much more sensible than to build a new depot, he was still convinced was unnecessary, at its other side.

It was McLoughlin's frame of mind when Governor Simpson in January had become Sir George Simpson—arrived at Vancouver late in August, 1841. A few days later he left for the north with Douglas on a seven weeks' tour, the course of which he visited every post on the coast except Fort Stikine. Unfortunately the conclusions he reached regarding the conduct of the coastal trade were diametrically opposed to McLoughlin's policy. In November he wrote to the Governor and Committee from Fort Vancouver:—

The trade of the coast cannot with any hope of making it a profitable one afford the maintenance of so many establishments as are now occupying its protection, together with the shipping required for its transport, and it appears to me that such is necessary . . .²⁰

What he had to do, in Simpson's opinion, was to abandon all the posts north of the Strait of Georgia except Fort Simpson, and to concentrate the trade with the *Beaver*, supplemented by sailing-

McLoughlin did not accept defeat without a struggle. He collected facts and figures that proved, to his own satisfaction, that trading-ships—and in particular the *Beaver*—were more expensive to acquire and maintain than trading-posts. Simpson was adamant, and by the first months of 1842 McLoughlin knew that he would receive instructions to abandon Fort Stikine and Fort McLoughlin in 1843, and Fort Stikine in

the depot question McLoughlin fared no better. At Fort Vancouver Simpson had found Commodore Wilkes, commander of the United States Exploring Expedition that circled the globe in 1841-42. From Wilkes he learned that one of his sloops of the U.S.S. *Peacock*, had been pounded to pieces on the bar of the Columbia six weeks before. Even when it was not dangerous, the bar was frequently a serious inconvenience, as Simpson had found when he left Fort Vancouver for California in

Quoted from E. O. S. Scholefield, *British Columbia*, Vancouver, 1917, p. 417.

December. On March 1, 1842, he wrote to the Governor and Committee from Honolulu:—

A three weeks detention inside Cape Disappointment, watching a favorable opportunity for crossing the very dangerous Bar off the entrance of the Columbia river, recalled my attention very forcibly to the importance of a depot being formed for such portion of the Company's business, as is more immediately connected with the Foreign Trade and Shipping department, on some eligible part of the coast instead of continuing Fort Vancouver as the great centre of the business of the west side of the Continent, and exposing many lives and the whole of the valuable imports and exports of the Country to a danger which is becoming more alarming every successive year.

In measure as the natural resources and sources of commerce of the Northern Pacific and its shores and interior country develop themselves, in like measure does it become apparent that we cannot avail ourselves of them advantageously, while entirely dependent on Fort Vancouver as the principal depot; as independent of the dangers of the Bar, the time lost in watching opportunities either to get out or in (frequently from a month to six weeks, while three weeks more are often consumed after crossing the Bar, in getting from Cape Disappointment up to Fort Vancouver) renders it impossible to calculate with any degree of certainty on the quantum of work that ought to be performed by the Shipping, deranging the best laid plans, burdening the different branches of the business with very heavy Shipping charges and depriving us of the means of embarking in other branches of Commerce, which might be carried on with great advantage, had we a depot eligibly situated on the Coast.

Regarding the site for the new depot, Simpson had this to say:—

The Southern end of Vancouver's Island forming the Northern side of the Straits of de Fuca, appears to me the best situation for such an establishment as required. From the very superficial examination that has been made, it is ascertained there are several good harbours in that neighbourhood no place however has as yet been found combining all the advantages required, the most important of which are, a safe and accessible harbour, well situated for defence, with Water power for Grist and Saw Mills, abundance of Timber for home consumption and Exportation and the adjacent Country well adapted for tillage and pasture Farms on an extensive scale. I had not an opportunity of landing on the southern end of the Island, but from the distant view we had of it in passing between Puget's Sound and the Gulf of Georgia and the report of C F McLoughlin and others who have been there, we have every reason to believe there will be no difficulty in finding an eligible situation in that quarter for the establishment in question.²¹

He went on to point out that there was a good prospect that both the salmon and whale fisheries would develop on a large scale

(21) Quoted from the transcript in the Provincial Archives.

the region, and that a post on the Strait of Juan de Fuca would well situated to benefit from this trade.

It is evident, too, that political considerations weighed heavily with Simpson when he was deciding the depot question. Some years later he recalled that "The first idea of forming an establishment at the Southern end of Vancouver's Island was suggested by the danger that seemed to present itself from having the whole of our valuable property warehoused at one depot."²² The proximity of Fort Vancouver to the Willamette Valley, in which there was already an American settlement of some size, carried him, and both then and later he was apprehensive lest the post should be attacked and plundered of its heavy stock of supplies. Moreover, even as early as 1842 Simpson had come to the conclusion that, when the boundary was finally determined, the line would follow the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The Americans, however, was convinced, would insist upon having a harbour on the Northwest Coast, and to grant this it would be necessary to give them Puget Sound. Much as the British Government might regret this necessity, Simpson foresaw that it would yield for the sake of peace.²³ In that event a post on the southern end of Vancouver Island would be of the utmost strategic and political importance, as it would bolster strongly the British claim to the whole of the island.

McLoughlin assigned to James Douglas the task of re-examining Vancouver Island and of selecting a site for the new fort. Douglas carried out the mission with characteristic thoroughness and submitted a detailed report, dated July 12, 1842. As the text of this report is readily available,²⁴ only the first three paragraphs, in which Douglas summarized his findings, need be noted here:—

According to your instructions I embarked with a party of 6 men, in the schooner *Cadboro*, at Fort Nisqually and proceeded with her, to the South

(22) Simpson to McLoughlin, Ogden, and Douglas, June 16, 1845. (B.C. Archives, D.4/32.)

(23) See Simpson to the Governor and Committee, March 1, 1842; transcript in the Provincial Archives.

(24) See, for example *The Beaver*, Outfit 273, March, 1943, pp. 4-7, where the report is printed in full. The map that accompanied Douglas's report was forwarded to London by McLoughlin. The portion showing the vicinity of Victoria is reproduced in the accompanying illustration.

end of "Vancouver's Island," visited the most promising points of that coast, and after a careful survey of its several Forts and harbours, I made choice of a site for the proposed new Establishment in the Port of Camosack which appears to me decidedly the most advantageous situation, for the purpose, within the Straits of De Fuca.

As a harbour it is equally safe and accessible and abundance of timber grows near it for home consumption and exportation. There being no fresh water stream of sufficient power, flour or saw Mills may be erected on the canal of Camosack, at a point where the channel is contracted to a breadth of 47 feet, by two narrow ridges of granite projecting from either bank, into the canal, through which the tide rushes out and in with a degree of force and velocity capable of driving the most powerful machinery, if guided and applied by mechanical skill.

In the several important points just stated, the position of Camosack can claim no superiority over some other excellent harbours on the south coast of Vancouver's Island, but the latter are, generally speaking, surrounded by rocks and forests, which it will require ages to level and adapt extensively to the purposes of agriculture, whereas at Camosack there is a range of plains nearly 6 miles square containing a great extent of valuable tillage and pasture land equally well adapted for the plough or for feeding stock. It was this advantage and distinguishing feature of Camosack, which no other part of the coast possesses, combined with the water privilege on the canal, the security of the harbour and abundance of timber around it, which led me to choose [choose] a site for the establishment at that place, in preference to all others met with on the Island.

The "Port of Camosack" was, of course, the present Victoria Harbour and Victoria Arm, and the word *Camosack* itself a variant of the Indian name usually rendered in English as *Camosun*. It is interesting to note that the determining factor in favour of Camosack was its suitability for agriculture. Its chief deficiency was the inadequate supply of fresh water, which Douglas felt would "probably be found scanty enough for the Establishment in very dry seasons . . ." The report concludes:—

The situation is not faultless or so completely suited to our purposes as it might be, but I despair of any better, being found on this coast, as I am confident that there is no other sea port north of the Columbia where so many advantages will be found combined.²⁵

Douglas was probably still on Vancouver Island when the Council of the Northern Department assembled at Norway House, perused Simpson's reports, and on June 28, 1842, passed the following resolutions:—

(25) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

That in accordance with the 23rd paragraph of Governor Sir George Simpson's dispatch to the Governor and Committee, dated Fort Vancouver 25th November 1841, Chief Factor McLoughlin take the necessary steps for abandoning the posts of Fort McLoughlin and Takoo in Summer 1843, and the Posts of Stikine in Summer 1844; and fitting the "Beaver" Steamer to secure the trade usually collected at these abandoned Establishments.

It being considered in many points of view expedient to form a depot at the Southern end of Vancouver's Island, it is resolved that an eligible site for such a Depot be selected, and that measures be adopted for forming this Establishment with the least possible delay.²⁶

2.

Douglas can have had no conception of the important part the new establishment was to play in his own career, and it is therefore interesting to find that he returned from his visit to Vancouver Island thoroughly enamoured of the "Port of Camosack." Writing to his friend James Hargrave in February, 1843, he described it in glowing terms:—

The place itself appears a perfect "Eden," in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the North west coast, and so different is its general aspect, from the wooded, rugged regions around, that one might be pardoned for supposing it had dropped from the clouds into its present position. . . .

The growth of indigenous vegetation is more luxuriant, than in any other place, I have seen in America, indicating a rich productive soil. Though the survey I made was somewhat laborious, not being so light and active of foot as in my younger days, I was nevertheless delighted in ranging over fields knee deep in clover, tall grasses and ferns reaching above our heads, at these unequivocal proofs of fertility. Not a musquitoe that plague of plagues did we feel, nor meet with molestation from the natives.²⁷

He informed Hargrave further that he was soon to leave for the Northwest Coast to superintend the abandoning of Fort Taku and Fort McLoughlin, and the construction of the new post.

Douglas left Fort Vancouver on March 1, with a party of fifteen men, and on the 9th arrived at Fort Nisqually, at the southern end of Puget Sound. The next day he wrote a private letter to Simpson, in which may be seen the last flicker of the

(26) Formal authority to abandon the posts and build the new fort on Vancouver Island was given to McLoughlin by the Governor and Committee in a dispatch dated December 21, 1842. This probably reached Fort Vancouver by the supply ship *Diamond*, which arrived on June 30, 1843; but by that time, as we shall see, work on the new post had already commenced.

(27) G. P. de T. Glazebrook (ed.), *The Hargrave Correspondence*, Toronto, 1938, pp. 420-21.

depot controversy. Despite Simpson's known opinions and instructions, McLoughlin still felt that a small fort was all that was required; and it is evident that it was upon his own responsibility that Douglas ordered the building of a larger post. To Simpson Douglas wrote:—

I am at a loss on what scale to build the new Establishment, I thought it was designed to serve as a general Depot for our Pacific trade, and to become a rendezvous for the shipping: but it seems I am mistaken, as the Doctor thinks that a quadrangle of 70 yards will answer every purpose of its erection. I am however of opinion that it should be made larger; as whatever may be our present views, I am confident that the place from its situation and accessibility, will eventually become a centre of operation, either to ourselves or to others who may be attracted thither, by the valuable timber and exhaustless fisheries of that inland sea. I would therefore propose to make the stores roomy and substantial, and the Fort on a plan of at least 300 feet square, so that when it is up we may not be put to the expense and derangement of incessant changes and extensions.²⁸

Leaving Nisqually in the *Beaver* on March 13, Douglas arrived off Clover Point, Vancouver Island, about 4 p.m. on the 14th. He appears to have remained on board until the next morning, from which point his activities are recorded in a small pocket diary now in the Provincial Archives:—

Wednesday 15th March. Went out this morning with a boat and examined the wood of the north shore of the harbour; it is not good being generally short, crooked and almost unservicable. On the south shore, the wood is of a better quality and I think I will have no difficulty in getting enough for our purpose. Small wood for picketing [i.e., for the stockade] is scarce, particularly cedar which answers better than any other kind for that purpose from its lightness and greater durability under ground. We will probably have to bring such as we require from a distance.

I am at a loss where to place the Fort, as there are two positions possessing advantages of nearly equal importance, though of different kinds.

No. 1 has a good view of the harbour, is upon clear ground, and only 50 yds. from the beach, on the other hand vessels drawing 14 feet cannot come within 130 feet of the shore, we will therefore either have to boat cargo off and on at a great destruction of boats, and considerable loss of time or be put to the expense of forming a jettie at a great amount of labour.

No. 2 on the other hand will allow of vessels lying with their sides grazing the rocks, which form a natural wharf, whereon cargo may be conveniently landed from the ships yard, and in that respect would be exceedingly advantageous but on the other hand, an intervening point inter-

(28) Douglas to Simpson, Private, March 10, 1843. (H.B.C. Archives, D.5/8.)

cepts the view so that the mouth of the Port cannot be seen from it, an objection of much weight in the case of vessels entering and leaving Port, another disadvantage is that the shore is there covered by thick woods to the breadth of 200 yards so that we must either place the Fort at that distance from the landing place, or clear away the thickets which would detain us very much, in our building operations. I will think more on this subject before determining the point. The weather rather cloudy, but dry, and beautifully clear in the afternoon.

Thursday 16. The weather clear and warm. The gooseberry bushes growing in the woods beginning to bud.

Put 6 men to dig a well and 6 others to square building timber. Spoke to the Samose [Songish] today and informed them of our intention of building in this place which appeared to please them very much. and they immediately offered their services in procuring pickets for the establishment, an offer which I gladly accepted and promised to pay them a Blanket (2½) for every forty pickets of 22 feet by 36 inches which they bring. I also lent them 3 large axes, 1 half sqre head Do. and 10 half round head axes, to be returned hereafter, when they have finished the job.

. . . 5 Men squared 1½ pce of 40 feet, & 1 pce of 32 feet today. 6 men digging the well. . . .

Friday 17th. Clear warm weather. Frost last night. The 5 squares [squarers?] finished ½ pcs of 40 feet and 1 of 32 feet. . . .

Six men digging the well.

Saturday 18th. Men employed as yesterday. The well is now about 11 feet deep.²⁹

A parallel narrative is in existence, which, although it is not concerned directly with the founding of Victoria, has an interest of its own. Douglas was accompanied from Nisqually by a Catholic missionary, Father J. S. Z. Bolduc, who has left this description of his arrival at Camosun:—

[On the 14th March] we bore away for the southern point of Vancouver's Island, whither we arrived about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. At first, only two canoes were perceived; but, after a discharge of cannon, we saw natives issuing from their haunts and surrounding the steamboat. Next morning the pirogues (Indian boats) came from every side. I went on shore with the commander of the expedition [Douglas] and the captain of the vessel [McNeill]; having received unequivocal proofs of good-will of

(29) Quoted from the original in the Provincial Archives. On the 17th Douglas described in detail "a luminous streak in the heavens" which appeared that evening and was again visible, when darkness fell, on succeeding days. Dr. W. N. Sage believes this to have been the great comet of 1843 (see *Sir James Douglas and British Columbia*, Toronto, 1930, pp. 121-122); but see also James C. Agnew, "The Okanagan Arc," in *Sixth Report of the Okanagan Historical Society*, 1935, pp. 119-121.

the Indians, I visited their village situated six miles from the port, at the extremity of the bay.

Like the surrounding tribes, this one possessed a little fortress, formed by stakes enclosing about 150 square feet. . . .

My arrival being noised abroad, several neighboring nations came hither in crowds. Saturday, the 18th, was employed in constructing a kind of repository, whereon to celebrate mass the ensuing morn. Mr. Douglas gave me several of his men to aid the work. Branches of fir-trees formed the sides of this rustic chapel; and the awning of the boat, its canopy. Early Sunday morning, more than twelve hundred savages, belonging to the three great tribes, Kawitskins [Cowichans], Klalams [Clallams], and Isanisks [Sanetch], were assembled in this modest sanctuary. Our commander neglected nothing that could render the ceremony imposing; he gave me liberty to choose on board, all that could service for its decoration. He assisted at the mass with some Canadians, and two Catholic ladies. It was in the midst of this numerous assembly, that, for the first time, the sacred mysteries were celebrated; may the blood of the Spotless Lamb, fertilize this barren land, and cause it to produce an abundant harvest.³⁰

The identity of the "two Catholic ladies" has not been established.

Father Bolduc remained at Camosun only until March 24, when he left by canoe. Douglas tarried somewhat longer, but the exact length of his stay is not known. Nor is it certain that, when he sailed on to Fort Taku and Fort McLoughlin, men were left behind to continue work on the new fort. It now seems more likely that Douglas's purpose on this first visit was merely to decide upon the precise site for the new post, and become familiar with local conditions, in order that work might proceed without delay when he returned from the north with the men from the two abandoned forts.³¹ Be that as it may, Douglas and the *Beaver* carried out their northern mission and arrived back at Camosun on June 3. Six days later Douglas left for Fort Vancouver, leaving Chief Trader Charles Ross, who had previously been stationed at Fort McLoughlin, in charge of the construction of the new post. Roderick Finlayson was second

(30) Father P. J. De Smet; *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-46*, New York, 1847, pp. 56-58. Bolduc's narrative is dated February 15, 1844.

(31) We know from Ross's letter of January 10, 1844, that work on the well was not resumed until Douglas returned. As we shall see, the supply of fresh water was a matter of importance, and one would think that if any men had remained at the fort site, they would have continued this work.

command; and Ross tells us that the men numbered "little
t of forty hands."³²
It is frequently asserted that Fort Victoria was originally
own as Fort Camosun, but no available contemporary docu-
t bears out the statement. The name Camosun, or Camosack,
variably applied to Victoria Harbour, or, occasionally, to the
neighbourhood; never to the fort itself. The post was first
own locally as Fort Albert; but when it was so named, or by
m, does not appear. On the other hand, the distinction in
ificance between the names Camosun (which in this instance
pelled *Camosum*) and Fort Albert is shown clearly by an
y in the log of the schooner *Cadboro*, under date August 6,
3. This reads:—

... Made all possible sail . . . and run for *Camosun* . . . at 11.30
I. arrived safe and Moor'd abreast of Fort "Albert" . . .
later entry, which refers to the "Harbour of 'Camosun,'" makes the distinction still more clear. The transcript of the log
the *Cadboro* in the Provincial Archives covers the period from
ly 1 to November 4, 1843. Throughout those months the
Cadboro was acting as a tender to the new post; references both
it and to Camosun are therefore numerous, and it is note-
worthy that not one of them is inconsistent with the distinction
made above.³³

Officially the post was never known by any other name than
Fort Victoria. William IV. having died in 1837, the original
intention of naming it Fort Adelaide, after his Queen, was
dropped, and it was christened instead in honour of the new
reigning monarch. A resolution passed by the Council of the
Northern Department at Fort Garry on June 10, 1843, is interest-
ing both in this connection, and because it shows the wisdom of
Douglas's decision to build the post upon a generous scale:—

Resolved: That the new Establishment to be formed on the Straits de
Fuca to be named Fort Victoria be erected on a scale sufficiently extensive
to answer the purposes of the Depot; the square of the Fort to be not less

(32) Ross to Simpson, January 10, 1844. See *infra*, foot-note 36.

(33) I am aware that this interpretation runs counter to the statement
made by Governor Charles A. Sale in a letter dated April 7, 1927, which is
printed in Sage, *Sir James Douglas and British Columbia*, p. 123.

than 150 yards; the buildings to be substantial and erected as far apart as
the grounds may admit with a view to guarding against fire.³⁴
The text of this resolution presumably reached McLoughlin by
the fall Express, which arrived at Fort Vancouver on November
17, 1843. In any event, the post is referred to as Fort Victoria
in a dispatch to the Governor and Committee written by Mc-
Loughlin the next day.

The most complete description of the original plan of Fort
Victoria at present available is contained in a private letter from
Douglas to Sir George Simpson, written in November, 1843, the
text of which the Hudson's Bay Company has kindly released.
The passage reads:—

We arrived and began operations at Vancouver's Island in the beginning
of June, and after things were fairly started I returned by instructions to
this place, leaving Mr. Ross in charge. In planning the Fort, I had in view
the probability of its being converted into a Depot for the coasting trade and
consequently began on a respectable scale, as to size. It is in form a quad-
rangle of 330 x 300 feet intended to contain 8 buildings of 60 feet each,
disposed in the following order say 2 in the rear facing the harbour and 3
on each side standing at right angles with the former leaving the front
entirely open. The outhouses and workshops, are to be thrown in the rear
of the main buildings and in the unoccupied angles, so as not to disturb the
symmetry of the principal square. So much for the plan now for the prog-
ress made in carrying it out. On the 21st September when we last heard
from Ross the Pickets and defences were finished, and two of the buildings
completed so far as to be habitable, and they were engaged in hauling out
the logs of a third building.

The climate of the place is pleasant, and I believe perfectly healthy. It
is rather a singular fact that no rain fell there between the 10th of June
and 8th Sept., though we had heavy showers, both at this place [Fort Van-
couver] and Nisqually. The great and only inconvenience of the situation
is that which I mentioned in my survey report, as likely to be felt, until such
time as wells are dug, the scarcity of fresh water in the months of August
and September. They were at times badly off for water last summer, and
had to cart it from a distance of 1½ miles in consequence of the failure of
the stream which supplies the Fort. There is a numerous Indian population
about the place, who have so far been quiet and civil, though they had many
opportunities of displaying an unfriendly disposition if they had been evil
disposed.

The summer returns from June to September amount to 300 Beaver and
Otter, with a few small furs, and probably the trade will increase, when the
Cape Flattery Indians and the people inhabiting the west coast of Van-
couver's Island begin to frequent the establishment. There has of course

(34) E. H. Oliver (ed.), *The Canadian North-West: Its Early Develop-
ment and Legislative Records*, Ottawa, 1915, II., p. 862.

been no time to attempt any thing in the way of farming, and the resources of the country in fish, are only known as yet through the supply procured in trade from the Natives, which was abundant after the arrival of the salmon in July; other kinds of fish were not regularly brought in; a proof of their being, either, less sought after or not so easily caught.³⁵

A second letter from Charles Ross to Simpson, dated Fort Victoria, January 10, 1844, gives a few additional details:—

Our progress in regard to the Establishment is as follows—a Quadrangle of 330 by 300 ft. surrounded with Stocccades, eighteen feet high—one octangular Bastion of three stories erected—also, two men's houses, and one Store each measuring 60 by 30 ft. with 17 ft. Posts & Pavilion roofs. These have been thoroughly completed, and an Officers' & main house of 60 by 40 ft. are rapidly advancing to the same end. The farming is as yet little more than an embryo—there being only about five acres under cultivation, and about the same quantity prepared for the Plough.³⁶

Trade had continued quiet, and Ross reported that he had "as yet collected little beyond 400 skins—Beaver & Land Otter."

Little more than five months after this letter was written, Ross, whose health had frequently been a cause for anxiety, died after a brief illness, and was succeeded as officer in charge by Roderick Finlayson.

3.

At this point, strictly speaking, the story of the founding of Victoria should end; but a few notes relating to later events, and to the ultimate fate of the fort buildings, may be of interest.

The year 1843, in which Fort Victoria was built, is known in the history of Oregon as the year of the "great immigration" and of Champoeg. The arrival of a thousand American citizens in a single season, and the establishment of a provisional government, made it more than ever clear that the days of British influence in the valley of the Columbia were numbered. The future of Fort Vancouver became increasingly uncertain, and the Hudson's Bay Company attached more and more importance to Fort Victoria. In the autumn of 1844 the Governor and Committee instructed Captain Mott, of the annual supply ship *Vancouver*, to proceed direct to Fort Victoria instead of to the Columbia; and, although the formal transfer of the Company's

(35) Douglas to Simpson, Private, November 16, 1843. (H.B.C. Archives, D.5/9.)

(36) Charles Ross to Sir George Simpson, January 10, 1844. (H.B.C. Archives, D.5/10.) This letter is printed complete elsewhere in this number of the *Quarterly*; see pp. 113-117.

district headquarters was delayed somewhat longer, this event was unmistakable evidence that the position of primacy was already passing from the Columbia to Vancouver Island.

One journal of the old fort has survived and is now in the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company. It covers the period from May 9, 1846, to May 28, 1850;³⁷ and when the text becomes available it will throw a flood of light upon the development of the post during four eventful years. Meanwhile notes in the possession of the writer, made from this journal many years ago, reveal that Fort Victoria soon grew beyond the original dimensions set by James Douglas. At least two buildings were erected outside the walls, one of which was a powder magazine. In 1847 the stockade was partly rebuilt and at the same time extended to the north, in order that the whole establishment might once more be enclosed. The work was completed on Christmas Day, 1847. Such details as are available indicate that the fort enclosure was enlarged to measure 300 by approximately 465 feet, or about half as big again as the original area. A new bastion was constructed at the north-east corner, and upon its completion the old bastion to the south-west was rebuilt as well.

The stockade and bastions seem to have been kept in repair as fortifications for a good many years; but the serious need for them passed quickly. Soon after Ross's death a clash with the natives occurred, but owing to Finlayson's courage and forbearance it only served to enhance the prestige of the fort.³⁸ By 1850 both the Company and private individuals were erecting buildings at considerable distances from the stockade. In 1851 James Douglas himself completed a large residence on property adjacent to what later became the site of the Parliament Buildings. The following year Douglas's son-in-law, Dr. J. S. Helmcken, built a more modest dwelling next door. The gold-rush of 1858, which in a few months caused Victoria to grow into a town with a population of several thousands, completed the transformation. The pickets and bastions that had been a practical necessity only a few years before had become an anachronism.

(37) H.B.C. Archives, B.226/a/1.

(38) Finlayson's own account of the incident is printed in A. S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, London, n.d., pp. 731-32.

An agitation was soon afoot urging the removal of the fort, and in particular of the north-eastern bastion, which stood on Government Street, the main thoroughfare of the new town. Popular feeling seems to have been well expressed in a letter printed in the *Victoria Gazette* in December, 1858, that poured scorn and ridicule upon the now superfluous fortification:—

It cannot be used to fire a salute without endangering the lives of pedestrians, as well as smashing the windows in neighboring houses, as was the case the last time a salute was fired off, and for which window-smashing a bill has been presented to the Government for payment—so remove the concern.³⁹

But the bastion survived this blast and held its ground for another two years. By that time the Hudson's Bay Company had built a new brick store and warehouse on Wharf Street and had decided to sell part, at least, of the old fort property. In preparation for this sale a portion of the fort was demolished, as recorded in the newspapers of the time:—

The old picket fence [i.e., stockade] that has so long surrounded the fort yard, is fast disappearing. Piece after piece it is taken down, sawed up, and piled away for firewood. Yesterday afternoon workmen commenced removing the old bastion at the corner of View and Government streets, and before to-day's sun gilds the western horizon, the wood comprising it will no doubt have shared the ignoble fate of the unfortunate pickets. Alas! poor bastion. Thy removal should be enough to break the heart of every Hudson Bay man in the country.⁴⁰

Late in 1864 a second sale caused another orgy of destruction, and the last remnants of the fort disappeared. Its passing was thus chronicled in the press:—

Bit by bit all traces of the Hudson Bay Company's old fort are being obliterated. The work of demolition of the remaining fort buildings has been going on gloriously during the last few days. Yesterday evening the last of the number, an old log house, adjoining the Globe Hotel, formerly used as a kitchen, was brought to the ground.⁴¹

So passed old Fort Victoria, after a relatively brief life that scarcely equalled in length the controversy that had preceded its construction.

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(39) *Victoria Gazette*, December 9, 1858.

(40) *Victoria Colonist*, December 15, 1860.

(41) *Ibid.*, November 25, 1864.