

THE FOUNDING OF VICTORIA

AHUNDRED years ago this month, Victoria, the present capital of British Columbia, was founded as a Hudson's Bay Company fort. The establishment of that fort and the part the Company has since played in the growth of Victoria were touched upon briefly in the September 1941 issue of *The Beaver*. Here are reproduced a few extracts from contemporary documents dealing with the foundation of this charming and beautiful city, which has become famous throughout the continent as "Canada's Evergreen Playground."

Most of these extracts are from copies of the original documents sent by the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company to the Provincial Archives in Victoria.

From the dispatch of Governor Sir George Simpson to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, dated at Honolulu, March 1, 1842:

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.

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 is 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.

There follow some remarks on the salmon and whale fisheries, both of which, the Governor considered, could be carried on advantageously from the south end of Vancouver Island. Sir George continues:

From these notes your Honors will observe that an establishment in the Straits of de Fuca would be admirably adapted for prosecuting that branch of business with every prospect of success being in the immediate vicinity or in the heart of the best fishing grounds at present known. Vessels employed in the Fishery might run in and out from month to month as circumstances might render desirable, deliver their oil, receive refreshments or other supplies and thus remain on their stations from years end to years end following the "Right" Whale during the summer when the weather is moderate in the higher latitudes, and the Spermaceti to the Southward during the winter Months, where there is no exposure to bad weather.

There is a very large population of daring fierce and treacherous Indians on, and in the neighbourhood of the Southern Shore of Vancouver's Island, so that a heavy establishment of people say from 40 to 50 Officers and men, will be required for its protection in the first instance; but with the occasional presence of the Steamer [*Beaver*] whose power and ubiquity, has done more in my opinion to tame those daring hordes, than all the other means to that end that have ever been brought into action by Whites, not only the new depot but every other establishment on the Coast may in due time be reduced in point of numbers to as many only as are absolutely required to accomplish the work.

But there was another reason, not mentioned in this dispatch, why the Company deemed it advisable to move their Pacific Coast depot farther north. The Americans were beginning to populate the Oregon country, and it was quite within the bounds of possibility that Fort Vancouver would soon find itself within the territory of the United States. The Council of the Northern Department of Rupert's Land, held at Norway House, June 28, 1842, therefore resolved:

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 for 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.

Chief Factor Jamass Douglas had meanwhile been sent north from Fort Vancouver to investigate the various harbours along the southern coast of Vancouver Island, and to choose a site for the new depot. His report of this expedition follows:

Fort Vancouver 12th July, 1842.

John McLoughlin Esqre:

Dear Sir

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 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.

2. 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.

3. 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 chase [choose] a site for the establishment at that place, in preference to all others met with on the Island.

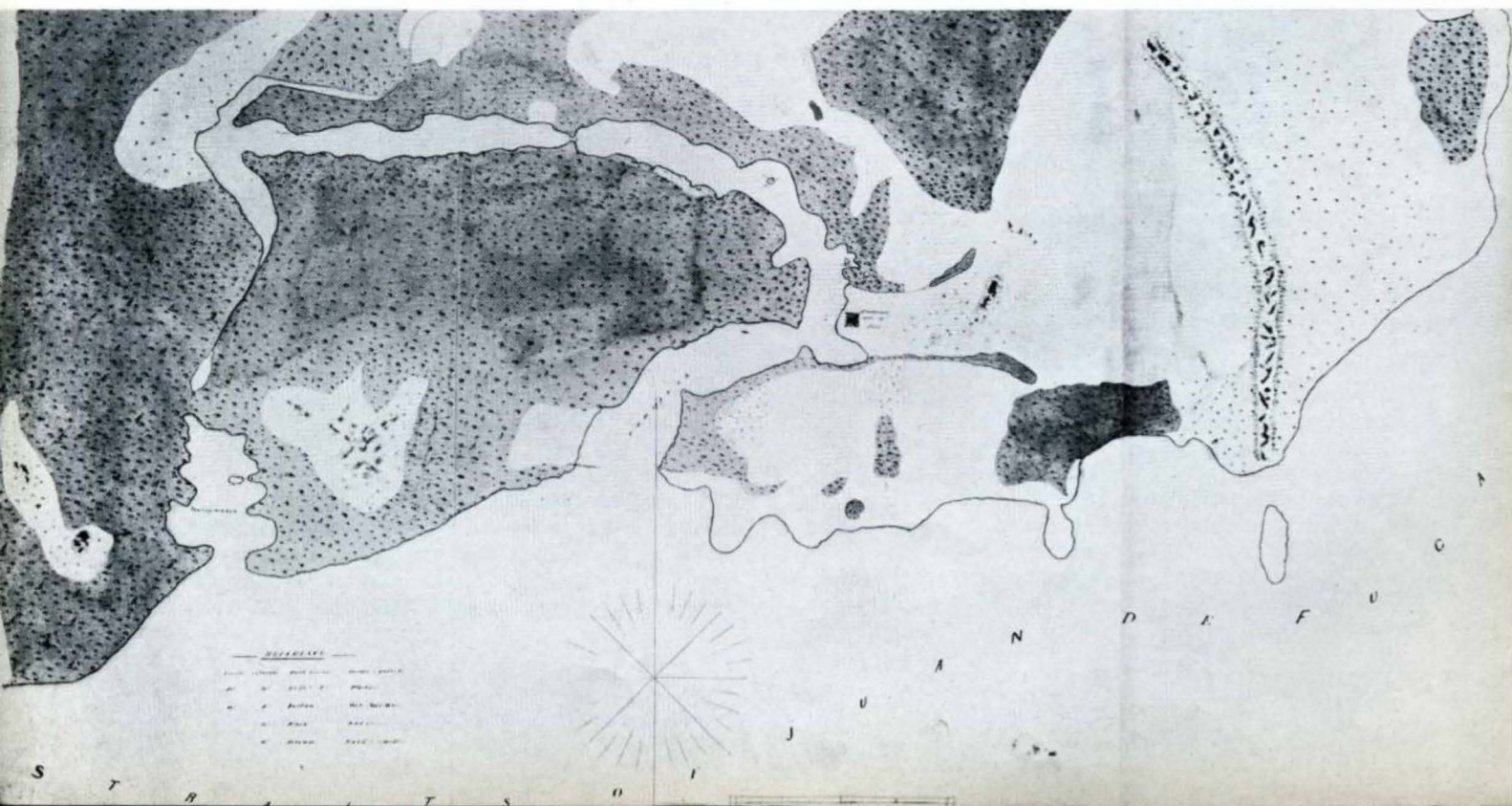
4. I will now proceed to describe the most prominent features of the other Ports visited during this cruise, in order that you may know and weigh the grounds of my objections to them as eligible places of settlement.

5. The finest and only district of Vancouver's Island which contains any considerable extent of clear land is situated immediately on the Straits of De Fuca beginning at Point Gonzalo the south east corner of the Island and running westward from it, to the Port of "Sy-yousung" [Sooke] from whence to the south west point of the Island opposite Cape Flattery, there are no safe harbours for shipping and the country is high, rocky and covered with woods, presenting in its outline the almost unvarying characters of the coast of North west America, to which unfortunately it bears a too faithful resemblance.

6. On the contrary, the former District of the Island extending from Port Sy-yousung to Point Gonzalo [Gonzales], is less elevated, more even and diversified by wood and plain; the coast is indented with bays and inlets; there are several good harbours, with anchorage at almost every point where vessels may bring up in calms. To this part of the coast I directed much attention and having travelled over almost every mile of it, I will here state the result of my observations, beginning with Port Sy-yousung the most westerly harbour deserving of notice.

7. "Sy-yousung" (see map) is a spacious inlet extending more than two miles into the country; where shipping may lie at all seasons of the year in perfect safety, as it is protected from every wind; there is however a strong current setting through the entrance, with the flood and ebb that might detain and prove

Part of Douglas's map of 1842. Esquimalt Harbour is shown as "Iswhoymalth," Victoria Harbour as "Camosack." The black square shows the position of the fort. From the photostat in the B.C. Archives. The original is in the Company archives.



inconvenient to vessels entering or leaving Port, otherwise it is unexceptionable as a harbour. A shallow rivulet 30 feet wide, which takes its rise from a Lake in the interior of the Island, falls into the north end of the Inlet, remarkable as being the largest and only fresh water stream capable of floating a canoe that we found on this part of the Island.

It can however hardly be called navigable, as during a short excursion I made upon it, we had to drag our canoe, over banks of gravel that traverse the bed of the stream at every hundred yards. An extensive mud flat also lies off its mouth, which is nearly dry and impassable in the smallest craft at low water. It has also the reputation of being a good fishing stream, and as far as I could learn from the natives of the place, a considerable quantity of salmon is caught there annually; a consideration which would make it exceedingly valuable to an establishment. These are the only good points of this harbour, which the character of the country in its vicinity, render of no avail, as the place is totally unfit for the purpose, the shores being high, steep rocky and every where covered with woods. In ranging through the forest we found one small plain containing 3 or 400 acres of land at the distance of one mile from the harbour; but the rest of the country in its neighbourhood, appeared to consist either of wood land or rocky hills.

8. Eight miles east of Sy-yousung is the Port of Whoyung [Whyring] divided from the former by a ridge of wooded hills extending from the coast to the central high land of the Island. This is a pretty good harbour, but has nothing further to recommend it, as a single glance at the high broken hills of naked granite, which form the east side of the basin, and the equally sterile character of the west shore, satisfied me that this place would not answer our purpose.

In one of our excursions we found a narrow plain nearly a mile long at the same distance from the harbour, which is the only clear land in its vicinity.

9. Metsho-sin is an open roadstead one and a half mile east of the former Port. It is a very pretty place, and has a small fresh water run near it. There is however no harbour and the anchorage is exposed and must be insecure in rough weather; in addition to that disadvantage, the extent of clear ground is much too small for the demands of a large establishment, and a great part of what is clear, is poor stony land with rolling surface, so that on the whole it would not do for us.

10. Is-whoy-malth [Esquimalt] is the next harbour to the eastward and appears on the ground plan accompanying this letter. It is one of the best harbours on the coast, being perfectly safe and of easy access; but in other respects, it possesses no attraction.

Its appearance is strikingly unprepossessing, the outline of the country exhibiting a confused assemblage of rock and wood.

More distant appear isolated ridges thinly covered with scattered trees and masses of bare rock, and the view is closed by a range of low Mountains which traverse the island at the distance of about 12 miles. The shores of the harbour are rugged and precipitous and I did not see one level spot, clear of trees, of sufficient extent to build a large Fort upon. There is in fact no clear land within a quarter of a mile of the harbour, and that lies in small patches here and there, on the activities and bottoms of the rising ground. At a greater distance are two elevated Plains, on different sides of the harbour, containing several bottoms of rich land, the largest of which does not exceed 50 acres, of clear space, much broken by masses of Limestone and Granite.

Another serious objection to this place, is the scarcity of fresh water. There are several good runs in winter, but we found them all dried up, and we could not manage to fill a single breaker in the harbour.

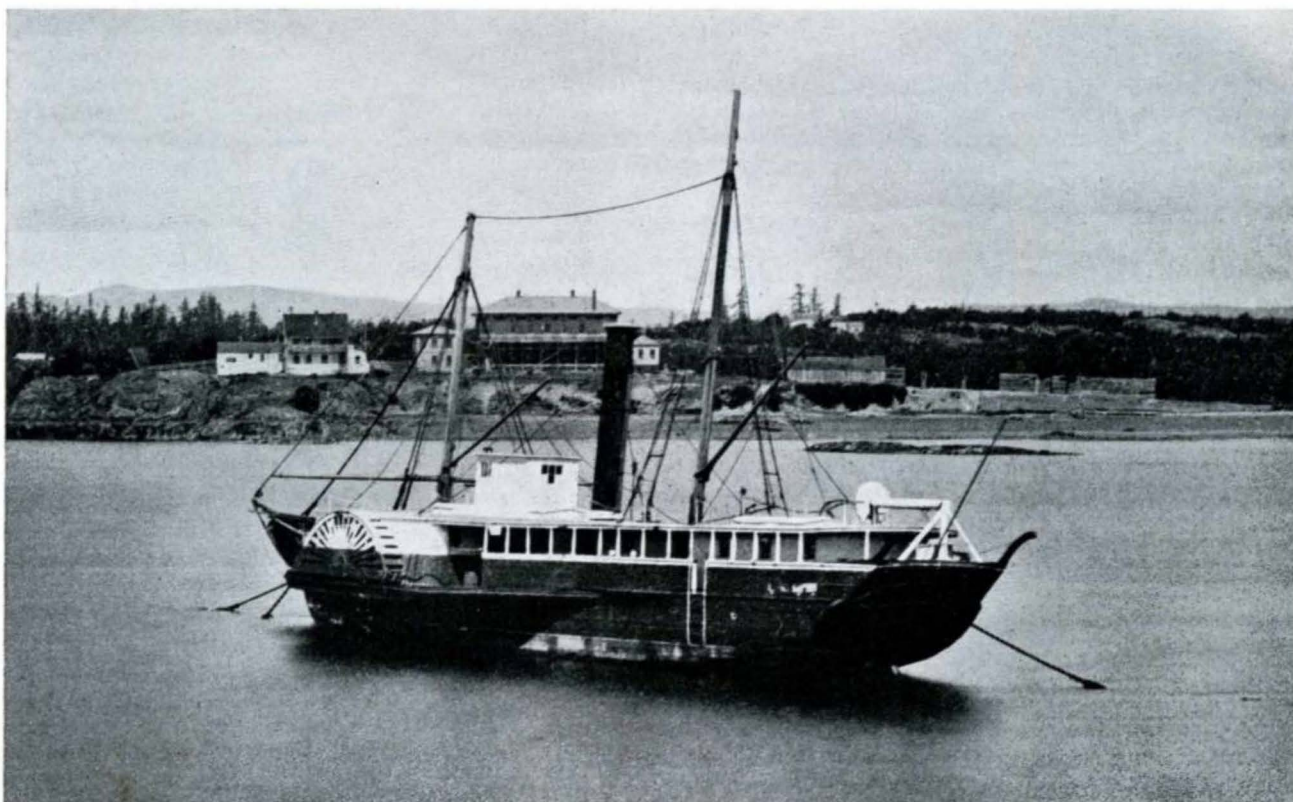
11. The next harbour about $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile, east of the former is the Port and Canal of Camosack, which is already said I think the most advantageous place for the new establishment.

From the general description here given, I fear you will not discover many traces of the level champaign country so fancifully described by other travellers who preceded me in this field; and you will also observe that there is one important objection which applies to all the places, except "Camosack," mentioned in this sketch, namely the absence of any tract of clear land sufficiently extensive for the tillage and pasture of a large agricultural establishment. It would also be difficult to find a convenient situation for an establishment on the high, rugged shores of any of the other harbours, and moreover these latter places with the exception of "Sy-yousung" and "Metshosin" are all scantily supplied with fresh water.

12. On the contrary, at Camosack there is a pleasant and convenient site for the establishment, within 50 yards of the anchorage, on the border of a large tract of clear land, which extends eastward to Point

Modern map of part of Victoria. Compare with Douglas's map opposite. The Gorge is where he proposed erecting the mills. (See his letter, paragraph 2.)





The "Beaver" in Victoria Harbour. The photo was taken between 1862 and 1872, after more cabin accommodation had been added and she had been chartered to the government as a survey ship.

Gonzalo at the south-east extremity of the Island and about 6 miles interiorly, being the most picturesque and decidedly the most valuable part of the Island that we had the good fortune to discover.

The accompanying ground plan shows pretty correctly the distribution of wood, water and prairie upon its surface, and to it I beg to refer you for information on such points.

13. More than two thirds of this section consists of Prairie land and may be converted either to the purposes of tillage or pasture, for which I have seen no part of the Indian Country better adapted; the rest of it with the exception of the ponds of water is covered with valuable oak and pine timber. I observed, generally speaking, but two marked varieties of soil on these Prairies, that of the best land is a dark vegetable mould, varying from 9 to 14 inches in depth, overlaying a substrate of grayish clayey loam which produces the rankest growth of native plants that I have seen in America. The other variety is of inferior value, and to judge from the less vigorous appearance of the vegetation upon it, naturally more unproductive.

Both kinds however produce abundance of grass, and several varieties of red clover grow on the rich moist bottoms.

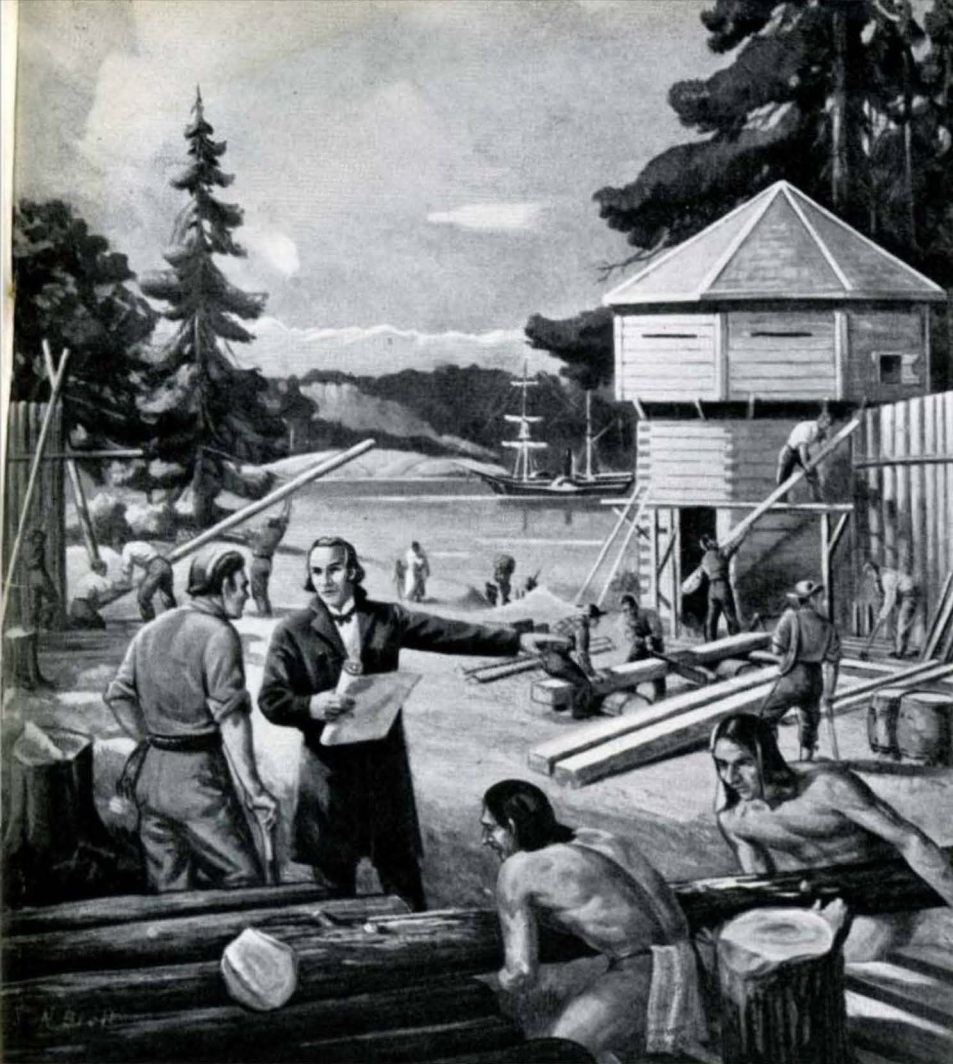
In two places particularly we saw several acres of clover, growing with a luxuriance and compactness more resembling the close sward of a well managed lea, than the produce of an uncultivated waste.

14. Being pretty well assured of the capabilities of the soil as respects the purposes of agriculture; the climate being also mild and pleasant we ought to be able to grow every kind of grain raised in England. On this point however we cannot speak confidently, until we have tried the experiment and tested the climate as there may exist local influences, destructive of the hus-

bandmans hopes which cannot be discovered by other means. As for instance it is well known that the damp fogs which daily spread over the shores of upper California, blight the crops and greatly deteriorate the wheat, grown near the sea coast in that country. I am not aware that any such effect is ever felt in the temperate climate of Britain, nearly corresponding in its insular situation and geographical position with Vancouvers Island, and I hope the latter will also enjoy an exemption from an evil at once disastrous and irremediable. We are certain that Potatoes thrive and grow to large size, as the Indians have many small fields in cultivation, which appear to repay the labour bestowed upon them and I hope that other crops will do as well.

15. The canal of "Camosack" is nearly 6 miles long and its banks are well wooded throughout its whole length, so that it will supply the establishment with wood for many years to come, which can be conveyed in large rafts, with very little trouble, from one extreme of the Canal to the other.

I mentioned in a former part of this letter, that I proposed to erect any machinery required for the establishment at the narrows of this Canal, about 2 miles distant from the site of the Fort, where there is a boundless water power, which our two milwrights Crate & Fenton think might, at a moderate expense, be applied to that object. A fresh water river would certainly be, in many respects, more convenient, as the moving power could be made to act with greater regularity and be applied to machinery at probably less labour and expense than a tide power; besides the facilities and immense advantage of having a water communication, instead of a tedious land transport, for the conveyance of timber, from a distance, after exhausting that growing in the immediate vicinity of



The building of Fort Victoria. From the painting by Newton Brett for this year's H B C calendar. The "Beaver" lies at anchor in James Bay, close to where the Empress Hotel now stands on filled in land. In the distance rise the snow capped Olympic Mountains.

Douglas's recommendations were followed, and on March 1, 1843, he left the Columbia depot for Vancouver Island with about fifteen men. At Fort Nisqually they embarked on board the steamer Beaver, and proceeding to Camosun, anchored off Shoal (Clover) Point on March 14. In a small notebook, which is now preserved in the Provincial Archives at Victoria, the chief factor kept a few pencilled notes, extracts from which are given here:

the Mill seat. But I saw no stream that would fully answer these purposes, not even excepting the one, in the harbour of "Sy-yousung"; we must therefore of necessity have recourse to the Canal, or select a Mill seat on the continental shore, a step that I would not advise, until we have gained the confidence and respect of the Native Tribes.

16. The natural supply of fresh water will probably be found scanty enough for the Establishment in very dry seasons, but I think that between a small stream at the distance of 300 paces, and its feeder a Lake 800 Yds from the site of the Fort, we may always depend on having at least a sufficiency of this indispensable element. The labour of carting it from a distance of even 800 Yds would however be very great, and I would therefore recommend that wells should be dug within the Fort, of sufficient depth, to yield a constant and regular supply at all times: This I have no doubt will be found the cheapest plan in the end, besides the importance of having water at hand in case of fire, or in the event of any rupture with the natives.

17. I think your opinion cannot vary much from my own respecting the decided superiority of Camosack over the other parts of the Island, or of the continental shore known to us, as a place of settlement. 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.

I Remain, Dear Sir

Your very Obt. Sert.

JAMES DOUGLAS

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 unserviceable. On the south shore, the wood is of a better quality and I think we will have no difficulty in getting enough for our purpose. Small wood for picketing 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 intercepts 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



Victoria Harbour, from a lithograph of 1860. The fort, with its stockade and one of its bastions, can be seen beyond the shipping, below the church on buildings now stand, are seen over

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 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 ($2\frac{1}{2}$)* 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.

Bought a few salmon today at 2 charges of ammunition each. At Cape Flattery they are bought for 2 leaves tobacco each. . . . 5 Men squared $1\frac{1}{2}$ pec of 40 feet, & 1 pec of 32 feet today. 6 men digging the well.

Friday 17th. Clear warm weather. Frost last night. The 5 squares finished $\frac{1}{2}$ 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.

A few days later, Douglas continued up the coast in the Beaver to dismantle Fort Durham on Taku Inlet and Fort McLoughlin on Millbank Sound, and with the staffs of these two places, numbering about fifty in all, returned to Fort Camosun on June 1. They were housed in log huts, and the construction of the fort went on apace. Supplies were brought from time to time by the schooner Cadboro (see The Beaver, September 1942, page 25). A few extracts from her Journal are given here:

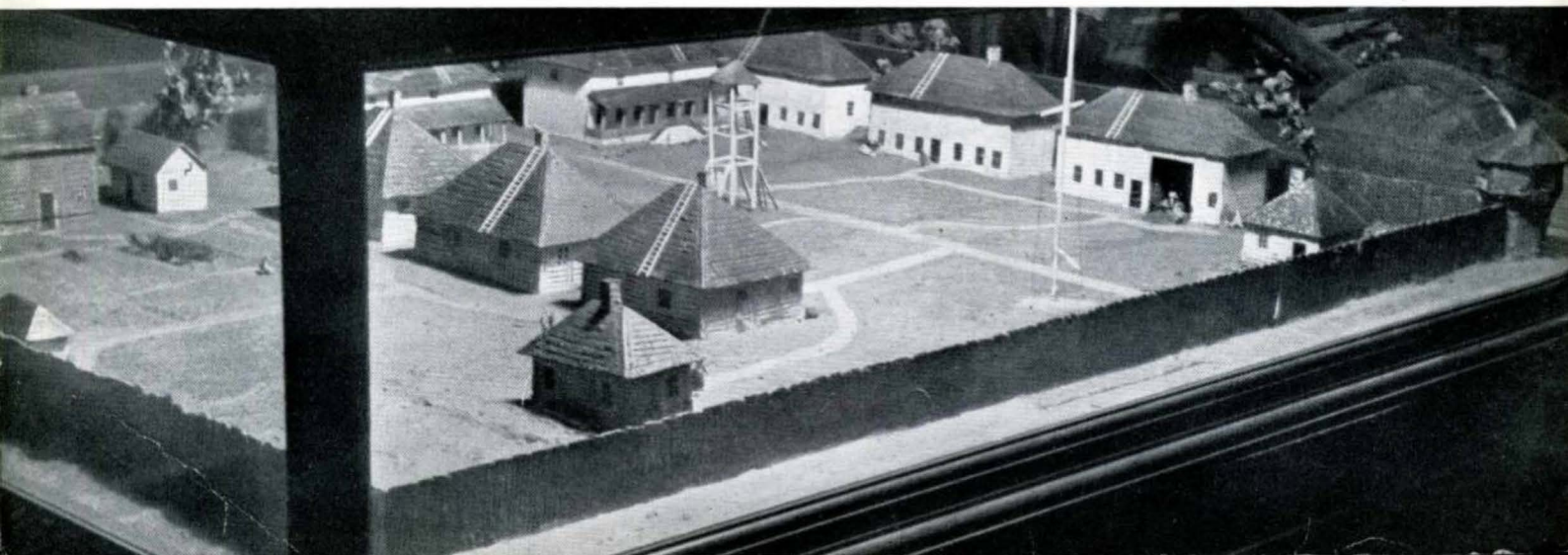
Sunday August 6th 1843

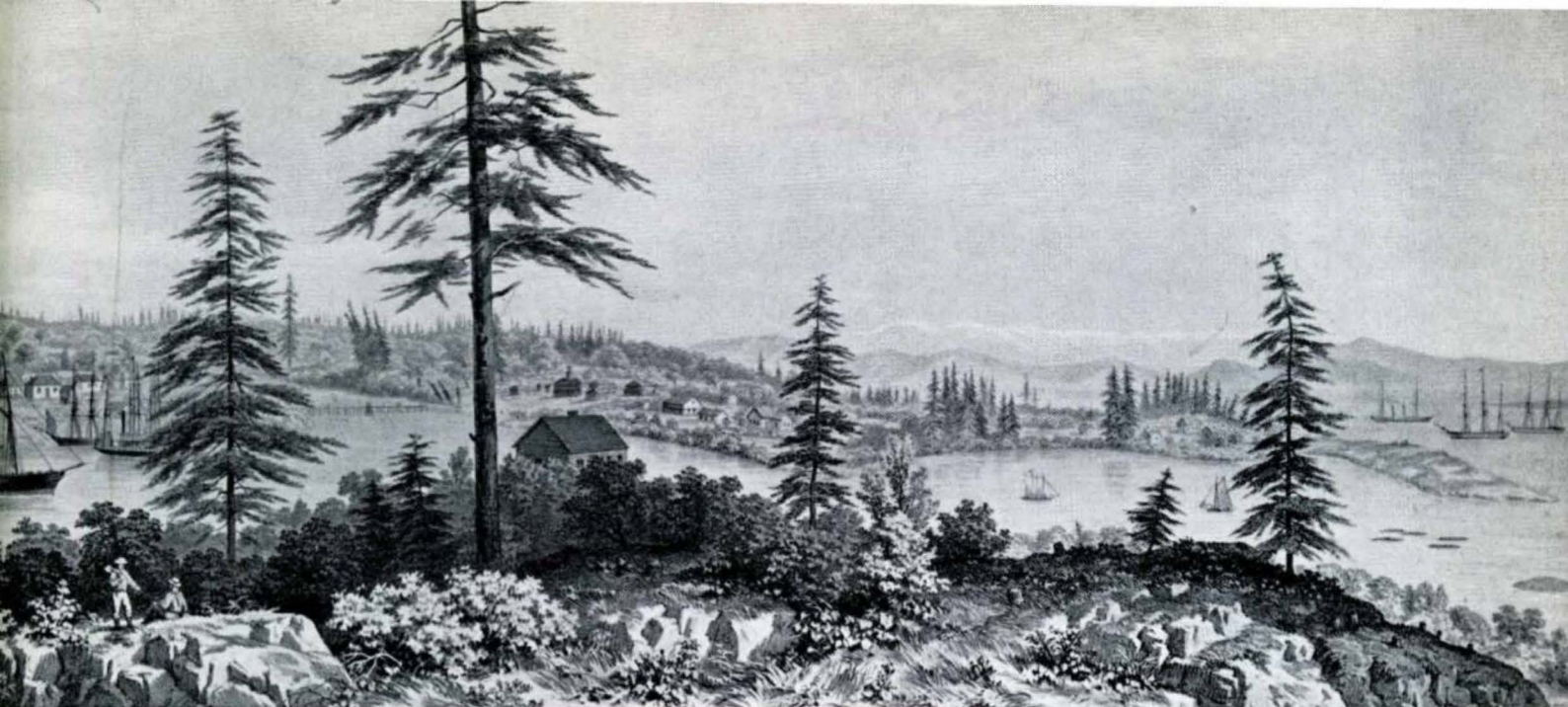
. . . at 6.30 hauld close round the Southern most Rock off Rocky Pt and run for Camosun at 8.20 Calm nearly at 10 keeping the Lead going in from 9. to 13 fms found ourselves between Hyomalth Harbour and Camosun between these two places there are two mid size Islands one with trees and the other none but a barren Rock at 11.30 A M arrived safe and Moor'd abreast of Fort "Albert" People allowed liberty on shore.

Monday August 7th 1843

. . . At 6 A M got the long boat out and got all clear for discharging the Cargo at 9 A M. Commenced landing the cargo with the long boat. Assisted by two men from the Fort. "Frank" the Cook being quite recovered came on board and commenced his duty Robt Allan still sick. Carpenter assisting discharge the

Model of Fort Victoria in the Company's historical collection, looking from the water side. Comparison may be made with the photos in the September 1941 "Beaver." L. Coote





the hill. In the left foreground are the Songhies Indian houses and a boat on the stocks. The first government buildings, where the present parliament the roof of the house by the big tree.

Cargo. The passenger "Martineau" Ordered on shore by Mr Chief Trader Ross. . . .

Wednesday August 9th

. . . At 11h. A M. Mr Chief Trader Ross having deliver'd his dispatches to me I went on board hove up the Anchor and commenced warping. . . . Made sail from Kedge and went between Brother's Ledge and the Shore Received 5 Small baskets of Berry's from Mr Rod'k Finlayson After getting off the Land a little and the breeze increasing shape'd a course for Nisqually. . . .

Sunday Sept 17th 1843

. . . Set the square sail and run for the Harbour of "Camosun" where we arrive'd safe and anchor'd in 3 fms at 5 P M and moor'd with a warp to the shore furl'd all sails.

Monday Sept 18th 1843

. . . At 6 A M hoisted the Long boat out and washed the decks &c at 9 AM sent three men on shore to cut fire wood Carpenter on shore looking for spars to make "buoys" one of the Buoy's having gone from the first sleeper, a dangerous Rock.

Tuesday September 19th 1843

. . . At 9 AM commenced discharging the Grain for Fort Albert with the Assistance of several Indians. Sun Set got all the Pease and barley discharge'd Mr Charles Ross tells me that the Pease are short of the measure 40 Bushels which is a great quantity.

Wednesday September 20th 1843

. . . At 6 AM commenced discharging wheat Carpenter myself and one Indian Buoying the Channel into the Harbour. at Noon fine pleasant Wr several Indians employd Thos Johnstone Cutting fire wood and getting it on board. No Water to be got all about here We shall have to get the Fort Cart to supply us. Finishd taking the wheat out 300 Bushels

Thursday Sept 21st /43

. . . Sent 8 Bushels of Potatoes on shore to Mr. Ross Employ d cleaning the hold ready for taking in Cargo Sent two Tierces of Vancouver Beef to Fort Albert. Employ d getting cargo on board with the assistance of several indians. Sent a Canoe away with three people for to get fresh water they returned but

could get no water. I myself Carpenter and one Indian employ d buoying the Channel as yesterday and at Noon finish d having laid down 4 four extra buoys

Friday September 22nd 1843

. . . Sent a quantity of Sheep Skins on shore again not having room for them. Unbent the boarding nettings and sent them on shore with all the gear belonging to them put the Carronades down below the Vessel being too light. P M. Hoisted the long boat in and clean d the Vessel outside and in

Vessels Draught of Water	
	feet inches
Aft 7.	10½
Forward 6.	9

Saturday September 23rd 1843

. . . Mr Charles Ross, Gentleman in Charge of Fort "Albert" Sent his water cart to fetch a supply of water for the vessel. Say two Puncheons, which was bad, being swamp water. we finish d taking it on board after sun down The Watering place being about two miles from the Fort to the N E.

Sunday September 24th 1843

Calm Thick foggy weather at 9.30 AM. Received three of Charles Ross Esqurs children on board Made sail weigh d and proceeded out of the Harbour, with the boat and four hands ahead towing.

It will be seen by the above that the new establishment, which had been first called Fort Camosun, was now renamed in honour of the Queen's consort. The Council of the Northern Department, however, meeting at Fort Garry on June 10, 1843, had already decided on another name:

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 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.

In October the stockades and bastions were completed, and Douglas sailed away, leaving Charles Ross in charge, with Roderick Finlayson as second in command.

* 2½ Point Blanket.