

Bastion and Old School House, Fort St. James. Sir George Simpson Entering Fort St. James (pageant 1928)

## Fort St. James

### *Sir George Simpson Centennial*

By ROBERT WATSON

**C**NE hundred years ago Sir George Simpson, governor of Rupert's Land for the Hudson's Bay Company, made a famous journey across Canada to the Pacific coast, inspecting the Company's posts on the way and cementing amity and goodwill among the traders—Nor'westers and Hudson's Bay men—who had then become one in employment and interests; his journey had also the greater purpose with it of holding the Pacific coast for the British Empire.

The description of Sir George Simpson's entry into Fort St. James, as recorded by Chief Factor Archibald McDonald, was given in last issue of *The Beaver*.

Since that issue, the centenary of this important event in the history of Fort St. James has been celebrated at the fur trade post, in the presence of His Honour R. Randolph Bruce, lieutenant-governor of British Columbia; our Governor Mr. Charles Vincent Sale; Mr. George W. Allan, K.C.; Mr. A. K. Graham, Judge F. W. Howay, and other distinguished visitors.

A pageant portraying the arrival of the Governor of Rupert's Land exactly one hundred years before was enacted. This was followed by addresses from our Governor Mr. C. V. Sale, Lieutenant-Governor R. Randolph Bruce, Judge F. W. Howay, Mr. George W. Allan, K.C., Rev. Father Coccola, O.M.I., and others. Commemoration medals were presented by our Governor to native chiefs and councillors, also to guests and Hudson's Bay Company officers attending the celebration. The afternoon was given over to Indian sports and games, native dancing, horse races, feasting, *et cetera*, finishing up with a firework display and dancing for both whites and natives.

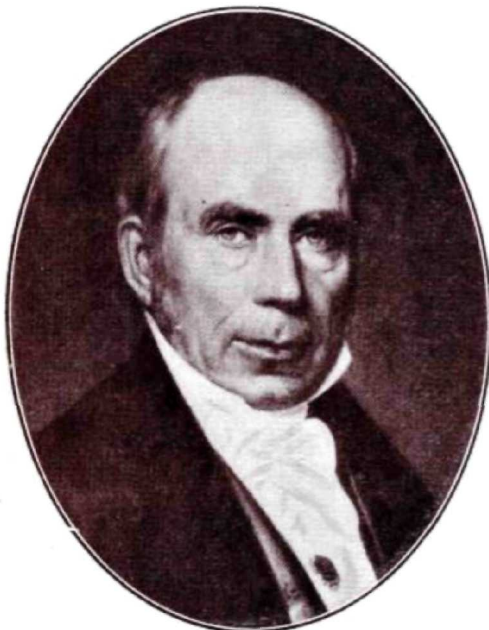
A word or two about Fort St. James itself. It is situated on one of the most picturesque spots in British Columbia—on the southeast of Stuart Lake, forty-five miles by road from the town of Vanderhoof, between Jasper Park and Prince Rupert. To many, Fort St. James is merely an

historic name, but it is still a flourishing fur trade post with Indian reservations surrounding it. It is also the centre of a considerable agricultural community.

The fort was established in 1806 by Simon Fraser, who two years later traced the Fraser river to its mouth. Accompanying Simon Fraser at the founding of Fort St. James was John Stuart, an officer of the North-West Company and later a chief factor in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. John Stuart also accompanied Simon Fraser on his voyage down the Fraser river, and it is interesting to know that he was the maternal uncle of Donald A. Smith, who later became Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal. Fort St. James was the second post built west of the Rockies, the first being Fort McLeod in 1805. The post was originally named New Caledonia, but later the name was changed to Stuart Lake post to distinguish it from the district of New Caledonia and in honour of John Stuart. In more recent times it was renamed Fort St. James.

James Douglas was a clerk at the post in 1828 when the district was in charge of Chief Factor William Connolly. James Douglas married William Connolly's daughter Amelia, and she later became Lady Douglas when her illustrious husband was knighted and became governor of British Columbia. The native name for Fort St. James is Nakraztli. The Carrier Indians, who reside in the district, give the meaning of the word as "Arrows of the dwarfs floating off," there being an old local legend of a tribe of dwarfs who lived on the hills and a conflict between them and the Carrier Indians in which the arrows floated down the river in unbelievable quantities.

While many fur trade posts are famous in themselves, Fort St. James somehow takes on the glamour of the distinguished governors, explorers, historians and fur traders who, at various periods in its history have been identified with it, the place of honour among whom must be given to its founder, Simon Fraser, who, after an illustrious career, retired in 1821 and died at St. Andrews, near Montreal, on April 19th, 1862.



*Chief Factor John Stuart*

John Stuart, who accompanied Simon Fraser on his journey and who was a tower of strength to his leader at all times, became a chief factor in the Hudson's Bay service in 1821, and was in command of New Caledonia district from 1809 to 1824. After his retirement, he settled in Forres, Scotland, where he died in 1846. During the winter of 1813 Daniel Harmon, whose journal is a

noted piece of British Columbia history, served at Stuart and Fraser lakes under John Stuart, and Harmon expresses himself very highly of his senior's ability.

The name of Peter Skene Ogden is also closely identified with Fort St. James, and

the career of this famous fur trader in New Caledonia and also on the Columbia river is part of the history of the country. He is described as having been a man of medium height, very stout, active, dignified and imperious, but patient and tactful, kind hearted and courageous and ever keen to protect and forward his Company's interests. Under the pen name of "A Fur Trader," he published a volume of reminiscences, entitled "Traits of American Indian Life and Character," in 1853. He is credited with doing much to advance farming into the New Caledonia district. He died near Oregon City on 27th September, 1854.

William Connolly, who succeeded John Stuart in command in 1824, was an Irishman who came to the New Caledonia district from Norway House. He was appointed chief factor in 1825, and is recorded as being a painstaking man. He left the district in July, 1831. It was during his regime that Sir George Simpson visited Fort St. James in 1828. James Douglas served under him at that period. Chief Factor William Connolly settled later in Montreal and became mayor of the city.

Donald Manson, who was lieutenant to Chief Trader Samuel Black on his famous journey to the source of the Finlay river and northward in 1824, succeeded Peter Skene Ogden in 1844 in command of New Caledonia district.

Chief Factor Peter Warren Dease was another famous fur trader in New Caledonia district. He succeeded William Connolly, and in 1825 to 1827 he conducted part of the Franklin expedition, for which he was rewarded in 1828 with his chief factor's commission. In 1837 to 1839, with Thomas Simpson, he explored the Arctic coast of Canada from the farthest point west reached by Sir John Franklin to the most easterly point reached by Elson in 1826 and filled the gap between points Turnagain and Ogle. He also explored parts of the west coast of Victoria Land and King William's Land.

Fort St. James was the developing ground for some of the most famous of the early fur traders of the west. The present centennial celebration should do much to re-awaken interest in the importance of this famous old New Caledonia capital which played so great a part as an outpost of empire a hundred years ago.



*Indians from Hazelton District Who Attended Pageant*