



Lady Amelia Douglas (1812-1890)

Amelia, Little Snowbird was the great, great, great grandmother of my mother in law, Anne Darlington and her siblings Antony and Pamela. At the age of 16 she married James Douglas, a fur trapper from British Guiana who rose in the ranks to become Governor of the newly formed British Columbia. Much has been written about Douglas who also kept extensive journals but less is known about his wife, Amelia whose mother was Cree and who was barely literate. They lived through the colonisation of Canada and the dissolution of the indigenous population. Theirs is a story of separations and loss, hardship and enormous wealth. Amelia came from a relatively privileged position as her father held important posts in the North Western Boundary Commission (NWC) which was a fur trading company. The Canadian fur trade which was mainly based on the European desire for animal pelts, particularly beaver, continued for 250 years and was originally conducted on equal terms with the local population.

Life in the fur trading forts was primitive for the wives and their children with little sanitation or furniture. Their existence was unequal to the men who they served, and mealtimes were segregated. Not only did they make and repair clothes, grow and cook food, raise the children and practice rudimentary medicine but they also prepared the pelts and tanned the animal skins. Inevitably children died from lack of medical knowledge.

Miyo Nipiy (1788-1858)

Amelia's mother Miyo Nipiy, also known as Beautiful Leaf was fully Cree and had married into the fur trade at the age of 15. Little is known about her early life other than that she spoke Swampy Cree and was the daughter of an influential Cree chief. During her lifetime she witnessed the building of the railway, the gold rush and the loss of Cree land. Her husband, William Connolly (1786-1849) who was of French and Irish descent adopted the custom of taking an indigenous wife. The Cree, who were some of the finest trappers, had started to migrate towards the forts and inevitably intermarried forming a new racial group called *Metis* (burnt wood). Sadly, their move away from the tribal hunting grounds heralded the end of their influence and power as the enormous financial rewards attracted foreign fur trappers who dominated the market.

Miyo Nipiy was born in Manitoba in the centre of Canada and would have originally lived in a Cree community, carrying out traditional hunting practices. In those days they sustained themselves on locally trapped food and animal skins. With their geographical knowledge they dominated the area with their trapping skills. Although William Connolly's family were based in Quebec they owned plantations in French Guiana. It is likely that the couple met at York Factory, one of the key forts serving the fur trade and were married informally in *un mariage à la facon du pays* or *Wikihtowin* in Cree. Not only was it normal for white colonials to marry local girls without too much ceremony, but it was also deemed essential for cementing alliances with the local trappers. However, Connolly's hopes of gaining influence with the local Cree were probably unrealised as Miyo Nipiy's father was not amenable and at one point had to be violently subdued.

Once married the couple moved frequently around Manitoba and Saskatchewan or wherever Connolly's job took him. It was a peripatetic life that saw Connolly rise in the ranks to become Chief Factor but for the family it was a life of continual upheaval and hard work. In 1803 their son John was born in a far-flung fort in Manitoba. At the age of nine he was sent away to school in Quebec to be near Connolly's family where he would remain for 17 years. Later when he returned, he would become an important figure in the Connolly family history when he won The Connolly Case. Journeys took much longer in those days which perhaps explains why he remained estranged from his mother for so long. It was not until she moved west in 1831 that they met again.

Amelia was also born in Manitoba in Nelson House on the Burntwood River another of the forts. There is a harrowing report of the immolation of a younger sister in Charles O Goulet's book *Little Snowbird* five years later. Nine other children were to follow including William, Alice and baby Marguerite.

In 1817 Connolly was posted to the prestigious Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River to take up a new post as Chief Trader. It was a promotion that involved liaising with the local fur trappers but was in such a dangerous area that the two competing companies, NWC and The Hudson Bay Company (HBC), had to fortify their outposts with wooden stockades and bastions not only against one another but against the local population. Connolly himself was often in great danger. Throughout this time the family travelled from fort to fort in primitive and perilous conditions. Although they would have been accompanied by NWC employees the journeys overland were slow, sometimes taking many weeks. Mountains were crossed on valuable pack horses, piled high with children and belongings and rivers were negotiated by large canoes or dog sled if they were frozen. Journeys were safer after the HBC and the NWC agreed to merge in 1821. Connolly who was a rising star in the new HBC was chosen to assist with the consolidation of the company and was sent to Lesser Slave Lake many miles away in Alberta. The site of many violent confrontations Lesser Slave Lake was surrounded by lakes as were most of the northern territories. Beaver, whose long soft pelts could be made into fashionable felt hats along with bear, moose and foxes of all colours were all hunted to near extinction. It became a key European trading post and many years later in 1894 just after Amelia's death the notorious St Peter's Residential School was founded there.

On New Year's Day, 1822, Amelia's 10th birthday fights broke out between some of the men when rum was issued but the family were accustomed to being with rough characters. *'In fact, a life of hunger, hardship and privation was all she and her family knew and would continue to know for many years'* (Pg. 17, *Old Square Toes*, John Adams) After only three years at Lesser Slave Lake the family were on the move again and at very short notice. This time they travelled west to Fort Fraser in British Columbia. Miyo Nipiy and the children were swiftly packed up before the bad weather to follow Connolly on a seven-week journey by canoe. The waters ran high and food was in short supply but the travellers arrived safely one day behind Connolly and the Brigade. Almost immediately Connolly had to head back across the

Rockies to York Factory on Hudson Bay leaving Miyo Nipiy to fend for herself amongst strangers. Throughout her life she would often be left behind with people whose language she didn't understand and despite Connolly's rising influence in the region, she still experienced racism from the white company wives. She tended to remain behind the scenes unless her skills in midwifery or nursing were called upon. At home, she educated her children in several languages and kept their Cree family history alive with storytelling, something that Amelia would, in turn, pass on to her children.

In 1831 the Connollys were on the move for the last time. Connolly would retire after becoming an unsuccessful Chief Factor of Caledonia. This time on a 3,000 mile journey across the country to St Eustache a quiet village in Quebec. The six children including a newborn baby were piled into an enormous canoe for most of the four month journey. In those days professional voyageurs paddled the boats at great speed, stopping only for short breaks at night. These few hours were spent underneath upturned canoes either on furs or sphagnum moss.

On arrival it became clear that Connolly intended to abandon the family and take up residence in Montreal with his cousin Julia Woolrich whom he had fallen in love with. In 1832 and without Miyo Nipiy's knowledge he remarried in the Catholic Church of L'Assomption in Montreal. This must have been a terrible time for Miyo Nipiy who was forced to take lodgings with her youngest daughter Marguerite and to relinquish the other children. The boys were sent to boarding school and the girls were placed in the care of a convent. Amelia who lived far away on the west coast knew nothing of this but John, now 26 years old, returned to Miyo Nipiy's side and later helped to turn the family's fortune round. Miyo Nipiy, who was entirely dependent on Connolly, lived in Montreal for nine years with the infant Marguerite. It was during this time that she was baptised into the Catholic church and given the Christian name Suzanne. Possibly because their proximity to Connolly was proving embarrassing and probably because she wanted to be with Amelia, Suzanne/Miyo Nipiy and 10 year old Marguerite together with two HBC officials set out for Fort Vancouver on the other side of the country. In a puzzling series of events and missed connections they were instead taken in by the Grey Nuns of the Convent of the Hospital General in St Boniface on Lake Winnipeg. The convent was run by the Sisters of Charity whose order had been founded by an aunt of Connolly's, Marguerite d'Youville. They were keen to keep the young Marguerite with them and she became the first Metis postulant. Miyo

Nipiy remained there with her until her death in 1858. During her life she had traversed almost the whole of Canada by canoe and packhorse staying in isolated and primitive forts. She had been left to fend for herself and the children in inhospitable places and had given birth eleven times. For reasons that are unclear she had been separated from most of her children and at the age of fifty six she was abandoned by her husband miles away from her family. Presumably Connolly had needed her to help transport the children to Quebec. The oldest two children John and Amelia who had already left home both went on to become important figures in Canadian history.

Connolly, who predeceased her and had stayed in Montreal with his new wife, believed his duty had been done. As the Chief Factor of Caledonia, he had become extremely wealthy but when he died in 1849, nine years before Miyo Nipiy he omitted her and her children from the will leaving the entire fortune to his new wife, Julia Woolrich. 18 years later in 1867 after Miyo Nipiy was dead, John Connolly, Amelia's older brother, contested the will on the grounds that Miyo Nipiy's marriage took place in a location where foreign laws had not yet been imposed and won the case. It became a cause celebre that became known as The Connolly Case. The court ruled that it was Julia Woolrich's marriage which was bigamous and it paved the way for other First Nation women who had been unofficially married to HBC and NWC employees to gain their rightful inheritance.



Amelia Douglas

Amelia Connolly, Little Snowbird

Born on the Burntwood River in an isolated outpost of the NWC she experienced the hardship of fort life but would settle in the west of the country and spend the second half of her life in large colonial residences in Vancouver and Victoria. She witnessed the colonisation of Canada, its Confederacy in 1867 and the imposition of capitalist culture by French and British fur traders which made the dissolution of most indigenous groups inevitable.

Amelia and her husband James Douglas became a hugely powerful couple as Douglas rose through the ranks of the fur trade to become Governor of British Columbia in 1858. Amelia had fair skin and was a *Metis* or *Apihtawikosan* (mixed race) woman. Although she spoke Swampy Cree with her mother and French with her father, she spoke some English which stood her in good stead in the forts when she had to make her life amongst the British. Paler than most Cree women she caught the eye of the young James Douglas (1803-1877) who was coming to the end of his six year indenture with the North West Boundary Commission. They were married *a la facon du pays* in the spring of 1828, when Amelia was 16 and James was 24. Douglas who had been born in Guiana to a free coloured woman who was probably Creole, and to John Douglas a Scottish plantation owner was educated in England. It was noted at the wedding in Fort St. James in the northwest of the country that he had a dark complexion. Connolly, Amelia's father, having noticed his exceptional abilities persuaded him to stay on with the company and take over the running of the fort while he was away. He may have lured him with Amelia who had originally been promised elsewhere. Douglas was said to be tall and dark whereas Amelia was petite and only about five feet tall with delicate features. Her life was centred around her husband's job and like her mother she tended to keep in the background, preferring to eat separately with the other Cree who serviced the fort. Unlike her mother she and her husband had crucial roles to play in the creation of the new country as they witnessed the enormous changes in the land. Douglas's strength was in his organisational skills which were exceptional but he had an uncontrollable temper.

In his book *Little Snowbird* Charles O. Goulet gives an imaginative account of an incident four months into their marriage that was to change their lives and show Amelia's courage. They had been living in an atmosphere of unease after the violent death of an NWC colleague,

David Livingstone, who had probably been murdered by a local man, Zulth-nolly. When Douglas heard that the perpetrator had returned to a nearby Dakelh village he gathered a posse and to the consternation of Amelia and her brother William sought to bring the man to justice. The chief, Kwah in whose house he was hiding was away and it was here that Zulth-nolly was beaten to death. According to Charles O. Goulet another man was also killed in the commotion. This was an error on Douglas's part as he had entered the chief's house uninvited and had failed to bring the men to justice. Not long afterwards Douglas was surrounded and overpowered at the fort by Kwah and 120 Dakelh. Kwah's nephew was apparently holding a dagger against Douglas's chest. It was a tense situation that Nancy, the fort interpreter's wife, and Amelia managed to subdue by bartering for his life with clothing, tobacco and other goods. Nevertheless, there were further such incidents and Douglas had to be transferred west to Fort Vancouver the following year. In 1803, a year after the marriage, Amelia gave birth to her first child, also called Amelia with her mother Miyo Nipiy present as midwife. As the infant was ill, she was unable to accompany Douglas on the long journey to Vancouver and remained at home with her mother who, aged 42 was expecting her last baby, Marguerite. Sadly, baby Amelia didn't recover. Six months later Amelia set off for to join her husband in Vancouver with her father on the blistering 600 mile trip overland knowing that she probably wouldn't see her mother again.

In an account in MNBC news: *Amelia and her father journeyed in bourgeois Métis fashion to Fort Vancouver by boat and horseback accompanied by "Indian boys" and a cook. It is said that Amelia was "astride a beautiful little horse, whose trappings were bright with coloured quills, beads and fringes and little bells. She wore a skirt of fine broadcloth with embroidered leggings, and moccasins stiff with the most costly beads."* (mnb.ca/news)

She arrived sunburnt and exhausted and must have had mixed emotions when she arrived in the expanding town of Vancouver on the coast. Fort Vancouver was under construction when they arrived and was larger than anything they were used to. Ships sailed directly from England with a wide variety of goods. Orchards were being planted and livestock were being raised on a huge scale together with new dwellings and roads. Luckily for Amelia the Chief Factor's wife, Marguerite McLoughlin who was 46 years old and also a *Metis* woman, took her under her wing and they immediately became companions. On her arrival James Douglas, who had been appointed accountant to Dr

McLoughlin the Chief Factor (known as the White-Headed Eagle) with the Hudson Bay Company, was posted to York Factory many miles east on Hudson Bay. This would be the pattern of Amelia's life as Douglas's job took him all over Canada. She befriended the other First Nation women and like her mother acted as nurse and midwife. In one account she assisted Mary Yates, a white woman from England, to kneel by the side of the bed in the Cree manner to ease a difficult birth. Otherwise, there was very little medical expertise available. Accommodation was more sophisticated but it was not a healthy environment for infants. The flu and smallpox epidemics inevitably took their toll on the family. Alec, her son, who was born in 1832 did not survive an accident and by 1834 four of their five children had died from disease or accident. In 1835 only Cecilia (1834-1865) who had been a twin remained to celebrate Christmas with her parents. Amelia and James had also adopted 'Princess Mary' the granddaughter of a Chinook chief but she disappeared from the history books early on.

In 1837 James Douglas and Amelia Connolly were married once again but this time in church under pressure from the newly arrived Reverend Beaver who refused to baptise their new daughter Ellen (1836-7) unless they did so. Beaver and his wife had sailed on the very first steamship from England. There were racial tensions in the fort and mutterings about Marguerite McLoughlin and Amelia's Cree ancestry, Beaver even describing Marguerite McLoughlin as a woman of loose character. Infuriated by this, McLoughlin beat him up and refused to have any further dealings with him. Beaver also sent a forty one page report critical of the running of the fort, objecting to the practice of taking native wives and the keeping of ninety slaves. This compelled Douglas to write a riposte in which he stated his belief that all races should have access to medical care and that people's private affairs should not be scrutinised. He and the HBC were anti-slavery but were unable to stop the practice in the indigenous population. (He and McLoughlin had in fact set up a small trade school for 'orphans, half breeds and the company's servants' in the camp.) After the Beaver debacle Chief Factor McLoughlin left for London, placing Douglas in charge of the Columbia department. By now the small Douglas family were living in grand style in the Chief Factor's new house which was built in two sections, one for the Douglas family and one for the McLoughlins with a central mess hall for gentlemen in the middle and a wide veranda along the front. It was here that Jane (later to become Jane Dallas 1839-1909, the direct ancestor of the Darlington) was born on March 22nd. In 1840 Douglas was on the move again, this time on a reconnoitre of

Alaska. On his return, he was delighted to be appointed Chief Factor but with the promotion came more travelling which left Amelia alone for long periods of time. For her own reasons she retreated to her domestic quarters. She now had to care for her three daughters Cecilia, Jane and Agnes. In 1841 Cecilia was seven and Jane was two when a new daughter Agnes was born. Girls had to be educated at home and had a basic education from their father, who was well read despite his own inadequate schooling. Amelia too learnt to write although she could already read. She in turn taught the girls how to sew and make the intricate beadwork that she had learnt from her mother. She would continue to keep alive Cree traditions with her storytelling. After a few years at a local school in Oregon City, Douglas decided that some of his younger children should be educated in England. On 13th April another girl, Alice was born (1843-1913). Her birth coincided with Douglas's return from the strategically positioned Victoria Island where he had been supervising the building of a new fort. The Douglas family now alone in the huge house must have enjoyed the luxury that it brought. Another daughter Margaret (1847-48) was born on 31 October. On New Year's Day 1847 Amelia's 35th birthday, a splendid ball was held followed by supper in the Bachelor's Hall. The officers from the *HMS Modeste* were present as were all the ladies of the fort. Cecilia may have been present and there would have been dancing and music. Amelia may have dressed up in her black silk dress, one of the few modest garments that she ordered from England. She tended to dress practically in dark clothes usually wearing a neat straw hat or dark bonnet and a shawl.

1848 was to be a year of political and personal upheaval. While Douglas was empire building and trying to negotiate a border with the Americans, 19 month old Margaret succumbed to the flu epidemic. How much the political situation effected the fort isn't known but they would have been affected by the sinking of *The Vancouver* on the Columbia River, carrying a year's supply of goods from England for the region. Life continued and another girl, Rebecca, was born in 1849. As the general situation on the border worsened the family were abruptly uprooted to Fort Victoria on Vancouver Island. This was a demotion for Douglas, although he was appointed governor per tempore of Victoria Island, and one he took very badly. It would mean a loss of earnings and prestige. They had lived at Fort Vancouver, an important trade centre for the entire Pacific coast for 19 years and did not relish the prospect of inhabiting a primitive outpost with few amenities.

Victoria, British Columbia

The journey took place amid a typhus epidemic with Amelia cradling little Rebecca in her arms for the entire journey northwards as the infant had caught the disease. The first leg of the journey was made with very few staff, horses and five wagons. It must have felt like a demotion. They rested in Fort Nisqually for six days and later set sail on the schooner *Cadboro* which must have been quite an adventure for Amelia and the children who had never been on saltwater before.

On arrival they were assailed with difficulties and must have felt very isolated from everything they knew. There were few of the European amenities they were accustomed to. The roads were unmade and even drinking water was scarce. Foremost in their minds was the fear of raiding parties by the Quamichans who lived nearby. It was not until Chief Tzouhalem their leader was murdered that excursions outside the fort could be made. Even so there was the constant threat of wildfires in the summer. They were pioneers and empire builders in an altogether unsafe place. Five months later as Douglas dealt with labour shortages and a culture of insubordination in the north of the island baby Rebecca died. Amelia again alone with no women of equal status to turn to not for the first time buried the child on her own. Companionship came when Chief Factor Work, his wife Josette and their children arrived on the island. The women would be great friends as they were both *Metis*, both spoke French and schooled their children together. The children were fluent in several languages including the Chinook pidgin that was used everywhere by Europeans. At last, there was a social life and companionship. Amelia would gradually get to know all the women on the island and was the undoubted matriarch. There were only three white women at that time although more were to arrive bringing their racism with them. Sadly after many years of childbearing and loss Amelia's health began to suffer. Surrounded by water and often living in very basic conditions it is possible that she had consumption. Despite being unwell on 1st June 1851 she gave birth to a son, James William (1851- 1884). He too was a sickly child and needed much nursing, something Amelia may not have been able to do, but he did survive.

Meanwhile Douglas was shoring up his position in the HBC and was appointed Governor of Victoria. He was accused by his enemies of having a conflict of interest as it meant that the Hudson Bay Company

was in effect running the island. It also allowed him to buy up prime land and to build the largest house on the island for Amelia to spend the rest of her days in. There were some underhand dealings with indigenous people who were tricked into swapping their land for blankets. In 1852 the Douglasses moved into James Bay House, the largest house on the island, for many years. to come. Enormous sums were spent on clothing from England and entertainment. James Douglas was a major shareholder in the Hudson Bay Company where he earned \$2000 (\$80,000 today) per annum. By 1863 when he was Governor of Vancouver Island, he awarded himself \$3880 (\$150,000 today) per annum not including his other investments. He had by then been forced to give up his position in the HBC and was one of the prime movers in mapping out the border between America and Canada on the 49th Parallel above Oregon.

One of the new visitors to the island was Dr John Helmcken, an HBC physician. He noted that there was little to see in Victoria other than *'land, water, canoes and Indians. It did not seem very inspiring.'* His impression of Douglas was not entirely favourable either but his eye was caught by the eldest daughter Cecilia who was *'flitting about, active as a squirrel and one of the prettiest objects I have ever seen: rather short but with a very pretty graceful figure of dark complexion and lovely black eyes petite and nice.'* Although he was ten years her senior, he courted Cecilia whenever he was in the neighbourhood. Cecilia had been seriously ill when they first arrived in Victoria, probably with consumption but she rallied and the courtship continued with singing. Despite Amelia's fierce desire to keep her daughter at home, they were married on 27th December 1852 in deep snow amid lavish celebrations. Amelia was a possessive mother and chided Cecilia when she didn't visit enough although she lived nearby. The wedding was hastened as Douglas had two murderers to track down and feared for his life. Leaving Helmcken in charge, he set out to bestow British justice on the two criminals.

When at home Douglas reportedly ruled like a feudal lord holding court in the evenings and choosing topics for discussion in the gentlemen's mess. At mixed gatherings which the girls attended there was card playing and entertainment. In the day there was horseback riding (Amelia rode in the western style, not side saddle like the Victorians), racing and hunting parties. She hosted excursions for her children and friends and held lavish parties for them. James Jr's second birthday was one of those extravaganzas and was open to the public. There were prize

fighths, jigs and reels with bagpipes and fiddles. All of which widened their immediate circle and demonstrated their social standing. When clothes were ordered from London, Amelia who was '*...not at all bad looking, with hardly much of the Indian type of face*' modestly chose dark, practical clothes unlike her children who needed dresses for the social events where they entertained English colonial officials. They were described by a visiting colonial woman as having inherited the '*Indian type of face*' which had '*great width and flatness*' and that their bodies were '*wholly without shape*.' Elsewhere there were more flattering descriptions of them. An American naval officer stated that Cecilia '*...would compare, for beauty and accomplishments, with those of her age in any country*.' Arthur Bushby, her future husband, thought Agnes was '*larky like the devil and a stunning girl*' and two English ladies found Jane to be '*very natural, lively and nice looking*.' Alice who later eloped with Charles Good was spotted on a walk one evening looking like a '*queenly Indian woman, her two long black braids and the blanket she wore over her shoulders giving this impression*.'

Jane, the second eldest daughter also known as Gim, who had been born at Fort Vancouver, was nineteen when she married Alexander Grant Dallas (1817-1882), the Governor of the Hudson Bay Company in Victoria and later the Governor of Rupert Island. Twice her age, he was a successful Scottish businessman who had been born in British Guiana and educated in Scotland. Jane was regarded as one of the prettiest of the sisters all of whom had similar looks, with long black straight hair and dark complexions. The colouring of the children and grandchildren was apparently a source of great interest to James Douglas who was conscious of his own racial characteristics. He longed to know who they would resemble. '*Is she like papa, mama or does she take after her remoter ancestry?*' Jane herself '*bore the characteristics of the Indian more than her mother*' according to a visiting wife. Jane had many accomplishments including piano playing and was strong enough to ride cross-country to eastern Canada with her husband who, like Dr. Helmcken, wished to be away from his demanding in laws. His relationship with James Douglas was a complicated one and he probably wanted to put some physical distance between them when he moved the family to his home in Inverness in Scotland in 1864. Sadly, Jane never saw her mother Amelia again who, as a parting gift, had given her a ring which she wore on her middle finger. She did however have time to visit her grandmother Miyo Nipiy before she left.

Amelia was mostly well liked for her naturalness and lively nature but

disapproval amongst the white newcomers continued. She kept out of the public eye when she could and surprisingly had very little to do with the running of the household as her husband preferred to be in charge. This left her free to care for her children, her garden, and her precious chickens. She liked making cards with pressed flowers and bottling the fruits from her garden. Perhaps the garden was her private oasis where she could revisit her Cree memories of community and the wider connection to the natural world.

As it happens her childbearing years were not over and her thirteenth and last child Martha was born on 18th June 1854. Cecilia gave birth a year later and the two women left for the safety of Fort Nisqually to escape the threat of local war with the Haidas and the unfounded fear of Russian invasion. The following year Nisqually itself was set on fire by the Haidas who were fighting for their territory. 170 years later, in 2024, some 200 islands to the north of Victoria were returned to Haida conservatorship.



Martha Douglas

Knighthood, Retirement and England

Although Douglas ruled autocratically at home and at work, he and Amelia were extremely liberal parents. The girls were forced to leave their convent school because Douglas wanted them to attend a special dance and to be available for civic duties. He allowed them to stay out late into the night with men of all classes and later, when they grew up it was they who took Amelia's place alongside their father. Little Cecilia aged 12 was invited to christen a new boat, *HMS Modeste* in the port of Victoria; apparently causing a stir with her beauty, education and good manners. James Jr. who had been a sickly child was indulged by Amelia who understood that he was fragile. His father had great hopes for him and even encouraged his early truancy at school but the wild behaviour continued until it was thought advisable to send him to school in England. In 1872 Martha, the baby of the family who was now 18 years old, and Agnes, were also sent away to school. It was a long journey and Amelia was reportedly prostrated with grief when they left. It seems that she had no say in these decisions. Initially they were to stay with their older sister Jane in Inverness and then to travel on to a finishing school in England. This meant that Amelia who was too frail to travel was without her younger children for several years at a time. There were frequent comings and goings across the Atlantic and overland journeys were now by train but Amelia didn't see James Jr. for many years. She was a caring and possessive mother who preferred to keep her children at home particularly those like James Jr. and Cecilia who suffered from poor health. She did manage to keep five of her daughters nearby and brought up several of her grandchildren.

In 1864 Amelia became Lady Amelia Douglas when her husband was knighted. The ceremony which took place in New Westminster was an uncomfortable, formal affair for Amelia as she rarely left Victoria and was aware of public criticism surrounding her family heritage. She was probably bemused to be presented with a plaster bust of her husband. On becoming the first Lady of British Columbia she took on the role of a Victorian lady at home and she enjoyed the wealth and advantages it brought but found it difficult taking on civic duties and was usually absent from church. James Douglas was clearly a strong and determined character who dominated his household, but he was devoted to Amelia and benefitted enormously from her knowledge of Canada's indigenous people. His mixed heritage and Amelia's Cree background uniquely positioned them to understand and negotiate the

changes that were sweeping through the country. She must have had mixed feelings as she watched the Cree lose their land but she did try to assist the poorer people in her vicinity. Douglas believed that there could be a fairer way of sharing the land but the old ways of mutual present giving and kinship were long gone. Assimilation was not sought after by either party and his successors wanted to monopolise the land by whatever means possible.

Douglas's knighthood coincided with his retirement which was long overdue, according to some and he decided to join his children overseas for a last grand tour. First, he visited his daughter Jane and her family in Inverness where he managed to persuade the homesick Martha to stay on with her studies for another year at Lansdowne House (possibly in Edinburgh). Then he visited James Jr at his school in Hampshire who was suffering from ill health and begged to be allowed home. His sojourn away had not been a great success as he was a spendthrift running up enormous bills and pawning expensive gifts from his family. Tragically while they were away, Cecilia their eldest daughter who had always lived near Amelia died of pneumonia after giving birth in 1865. This was a terrible shock to the family particularly Amelia who had been so close to her and nursed her through illness when they first moved to Victoria. Cecilia's three remaining children moved into James Bay House where Amelia cared for them but Douglas's return five months later with James Jr. was a sad one. Although James Jr. had tried to live up to his father's expectations he didn't have the capacity or fortitude to follow in his footsteps. His parents were delighted when he was elected as a junior member of the provincial legislature in Victoria but he was always in his father's shadow. Douglas had never understood that he was unwell and had pushed him beyond his abilities. The years in English boarding schools had been physically taxing and he never fully recovered. On his return he lived at James Bay House with Amelia and continued to do so after his marriage to a childhood friend called Mary Elliot (Amy) with whom he had two boys James and John. They would inherit the Douglas wealth when James Jr succumbed to Brights Disease, a form of kidney disease, aged 33 in 1883.

James Douglas mellowed after his retirement and took great pleasure in his family. When he died suddenly in 1877 from a heart attack, Amelia led a life of 'absolute retirement' amidst lavish surroundings and surrounded by three of her children and their families, James, Martha and Agnes. She inherited \$50,000 (\$1.25 million today) after The Connolly Case as well as her husband's enormous legacy which

made it possible for her to have a cook and a driver. She was able to indulge herself with her favourite foods, buffalo tongue, bitter root and a bulb root called camas that tasted like pear. These were all sent to her by a family friend who knew she had a taste for her childhood food. She could afford to be generous to the displaced tribal people on the island, sometimes too generous according to Martha. The Songhee Indians regularly stopped at the end of her garden selling her their meat and goods which she gave away to the poorer local people. The Songhee chief was an old friend of hers who would join in the story telling evenings. According to Martha the stories needed *'her own sweet voice'* to really bring them alive *'in the winter glooming and the bright fire as the only light.'* Martha Douglas Harris, *History and Folklore of the Comichan Indians*, (Victoria. The Colonist Printing and Publishing Co.1901)

On her 75th birthday there were great celebrations with dancing into the night. It was a lavish affair which was reported in the local paper and went on into the small hours but it was the last of those large events as her health was failing and it heralded the end of the Douglas era. Only Martha (Harris) and her family remained as company for Amelia at James Bay House now.

In 1890 Amelia died after a long illness a week after her 78th birthday. She had crossed the country from East to West with tremendous fortitude and had known hunger and hardship in her early life. Later, she experienced great wealth being one of the first people in Victoria to receive running water and a telephone. The incessant travelling in the early days often with infants took its toll on her health as did the fourteen pregnancies. Only four children outlived her, Jane Dallas, Agnes Bushby, Alice Goode and Martha Harris. Throughout her life she had kept her Cree philosophy and tried to pass it on to her children and grandchildren. Martha, her youngest, kept up the story telling tradition and after her parent's death wrote a small, illustrated book: *History and Folklore of the Comichan Indians*, (Victoria. The Colonist Printing and Publishing Co.1901). She was an influential artist and weaver in the region who continued her mother's connection with the Songhee Indians and made a collection of aboriginal basketry which is currently held in the Royal British Columbia Museum.

Epilogue

When Amelia and James Douglas died, the family dispersed and their influence waned. Three years after James's death the notorious boarding schools for First Nation children gained momentum and spread across the country. Amelia's place as first lady had been an important one.

Amelia's family had on occasion been shunned and did not speak of their Cree connection. James Douglas himself had exhorted his children not to mention their heritage. It was not until the 1970s that the great granddaughter of Amelia, Aity Dallas, (1898-1991), who was widely travelled, introduced her great nephew, Roger Phillimore to the story of Sir James Douglas. Through her he discovered the Moresby Memoirs which documented a trip to Vancouver in 1852 by Lt Moresby and his meeting with James Douglas. It is thanks to him that I have tried to unravel Amelia's life.

Miranda Argyle, 2024/25



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