



# Victoria Historical Society Publication

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All meetings, except December, begin at 7:30, and are held at the James Bay New Horizons Centre.

25 November, 2010

*Royal Canadian Navy Centennial.* This year, 2010 we will mark the 100th anniversary of the RCN. Dave Obee, journalist at the Times Colonist, and keen local historian, will give some news stories. Adm. Bill Hughes, ret. will speak of some of his experiences and perspectives.

02 December, 2010 **6:00 for 6:30.**

Christmas Dinner meeting at the UVic University Club. John Adams will introduce us to his friend *Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken.* Dinner and admission arrangements will be made later this fall.

27 January, 2011

Settling the Salish Sea. Richard Mackie will recall the life and times of George Drabble, Vancouver Island pioneer settler and many other things. He will base his talk on his book *The Wilderness Profound: a Victorian Life on the Gulf of Georgia.*

24 February, 2011

*Victoria: Crown Jewel of British Columbia.* In this Heritage Month, Susan Mayse, herself a native daughter, will speak on her recent book, with the above title, including readings.

24 March, 2011

*Some Portraits from the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia, the Early Years.* Rev. Sel Caradus has researched this history, and will focus his talk on three people: Maria Hills, (wife of Bishop George Hills) James Raynard, and Alexander Garrett.

28 April, 2011

*Keepers of the Records.* Archivist and author Deidre Simmons will speak about the history of the Hudson

Bay Company, focusing on the Colonies of Vancouver Island and BC reflected in these records. Illustrated talk.

26 May, 2011

*Historical Stories around the Saanich Inlet.* Maureen Alexander, archivist and historian of the Bamberton area, has collected many stories of the people who lived in the area we know as "Saanich Inlet". An illustrated presentation. (Our meeting this evening will start at 7 pm, to accommodate the reporting and business of our AGM.)



## BOOK REVIEW

*Battlefront Nurses of WW I by Maureen Duffus*

In a war so horrific that it was called "the war to end all wars", how did Canadian nurses come to be working in conditions "acknowledged to be the worst of any station of the whole war"? Maureen Duffus reveals some little-known aspects of the Great War, such as the situation in Salonika ("the worst of any station") in her book *Battlefront Nurses of WW I.*

Duffus helps us see into the past into the lives of Canadian women who witnessed the Great War first hand as military nursing sisters in the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC). From the safety of England to the fly-blown and frost-bitten eastern Mediterranean theatre and later to the infamous western front, Canadian nurses cared for Allied soldiers efficiently and calmly. They risked their own health and their lives in trying to save those of the soldiers through four long years of war.

To tell this story, Duffus drew on the diaries and photo albums of her aunt, Lt. Mary Ethel Morrison,

and Lt. Elsie Dorothy Collis, another Victoria nurse. Both women were part of a British Columbia unit that left for overseas in August 1915 as Canadian General Hospital Number 5.

Today we are used to women being in the military — now even in combat roles — but at the time of the Great War and up until the early days of World War II, the only way Canadian women could enlist was as nursing sisters. (Military nurses are traditionally called nursing sisters, probably because the earliest nurses were nuns.) Canada had realized in the early 1900s that nursing sisters would be most effective if they were part of the military. Canada's nursing sisters were lieutenants in the CAMC, which ensured that they received the respect required from the enlisted men who were orderlies and clerks in the service. Other countries, such as Australia, brought their nurses officially into the military during the war because of staff interaction difficulties. British nurses moved fully into the military only in 1949. (This late adjustment has been attributed to the military's problem with Florence Nightingale, who had challenged military authority.)

Duffus's story begins with a description of the training Morrison and Collis received as professional nurses. Morrison graduated from Vancouver General Hospital in 1906, and Collis graduated from Royal Jubilee Hospital in 1911. It's important to note that nursing sisters were professionally trained nurses; they were not volunteers with little or no nursing experience, as were the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses and some of the Red Cross nurses. The CAMC nursing sisters were fiercely proud of their professional status and training.

While telling the personal stories of these two women through their words and photos, Duffus also weaves in the larger wartime context for the nursing sisters' role. She uses straight narrative descriptions as well as quotations from others who served with the nurses.

One of the most affecting parts of the story is the bombing of the hospital at Etaples, in France. Lt. Collis was there and described the events in her diary. Duffus also includes a description by Matron Edith Campbell: "Sister K. Macdonald killed instantly, Sister Lowe and Sister Wake mortally wounded ... [six other sisters] only slightly wounded... Nursing Sisters off duty in quarters calm and brave, no confusion, patiently taking what shelter there was... Sisters on duty carried on through ghastly two hours of bombing... cool and devoted to duty... Operating room soon in action...

Nursing sisters with help from some off duty sisters, got everything ready, windows and entrance covered with thick grey blankets." Nursing sister Gladys Wake was also from Victoria and a friend of Lt. Collis. Lt. Wake died a few days after the raid and was buried in France. A memorial plaque for her still exists in St. Paul's Church in Esquimalt and a mountain in BC has been named after her.

The nursing sisters met all the challenges placed in their way but it was not always a dangerous or stressful existence. What is especially enjoyable about the book is the complete picture it gives of the nurses' lives. Yes, they worked hard, often in extremely trying conditions, but they also took full advantage of the exotic locations in which they found themselves, from Egypt to Macedonia to France and England. These women were intrepid sightseers! The photos and diary entries convey a time of intense camaraderie, variety, and professional achievements.

I enjoyed everything about this book — the descriptions of the nurses' experiences, the contextual information about the CAMC and the war, the photos, and especially the voices of the two nursing sisters who lived through this war.

My only quibbles are with the quality of some of the photos and the cover. Enlarged photos that are blurry may have been clearer at a smaller size. The cover shows Florence Nightingale at work. When I first saw the book, the large type "BATTLEFRONT NURSES" and the picture of Florence Nightingale made me think it was about the origins of wartime nursing during the Crimean War. If there is another printing, a cover photo or photos of nursing sisters Collis and Morrison or their compatriots would be ideal.

A few years ago, I did a presentation about Canadian nursing sisters in the Great War for the Pacific Coast Branch of the Western Front Association, a historical society focussed on the history of the Great War. In working on my presentation, I discovered several good books and online sites about Canadian nursing sisters that are well worth reading. Duffus includes many of these in her further reading and bibliography sections. Her book is a wonderful addition to that list.

Maureen Duffus will be making a presentation based on her book at the March 2011 seminar of the Pacific Coast Branch of the Western Front Association in Victoria. For more information, visit [www.wfapacificcoast.org](http://www.wfapacificcoast.org).

As to the question of why Canadian nurses served on the Macedonian front in the eastern Mediterranean, far from where any Canadian soldiers were fighting: The British military had not planned for the huge casualties at Gallipoli and did not have the medical services available. At the request of the British, the Canadians stepped in.

*Yvonne van Ruskenveld*

*Yvonne Van Ruskenveld is a member of the Pacific Coast Branch of the Western Front Association and a member and former president of the Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria. Her special interests are women's history and the history of the Great War from the perspective of those who served on the front lines and those who supported them.*



## THE DIARY OF FREDERICK ERRINGTON

In the early spring of 1876, Frederick Errington, together with Rob Milne, and someone referred to only as G. Shore, set off from Glanworth, Ontario to travel to Victoria and Vancouver. The reason for his journey is not specified but we may conclude that he was looking into the possibilities of homesteading, either on Vancouver Island or on the mainland.

In his diary he records his train journey across the continent. First to Chicago, and there changing trains for the remainder of the trip westward. He tells of passing through the mid-western states and of the various delays caused principally by the weather in the mountains, and notes his worries about arriving in San Francisco in time to catch the steamer to Victoria. Throughout the varying landscapes he offers perceptive glimpses of the landscape and assesses them with a farmers eye. He passes through towns and settlements no longer existing, and records his reactions to an unfamiliar landscape.

For instance, on the 4th March he records "Very fine weather. We saw large droves of antelopes this morning. One drove had at least 60 or 70 in it. We heard the wolves last night. We are now at Fort Steele 11:20 a.m. We arrived at Rawlings at 10 a.m. and have been coaling and watering and changing engines. A very barren country. There is a large iron mine here. 2 p.m. We are in what they call the snow region which will continue until we get near Utah. We have passed the last stream which flows eastward, the next stream we cross will run to the Pacific. There is very little snow at present, the highest cut I have seen was not over 7 or 8 feet high.

There is always patches of bare ground to be seen. One of our passenger got left behind day before yesterday, his hat blew off while he was standing, so he jumped off the train as it was going slowly, he thought he could get on again but he missed it, it cost him ten dollars to catch up. 4 p.m. We have just stopped at Red Desert, and it is a desert indeed, although we are on the height of the Rocky Mountains. We see nothing but a great stretch of barren tableland. 6 p.m. Snow storm on the desert, it looks dreary, we have passed Table Rock and Bitter Creek Stations, but I neither saw the Rock or the Creek. I made a mistake — we are at Bitter Creek just now 6:05 p.m."

On 10th March, after travelling ten days by train, he arrived at San Francisco at 10:30 a.m. in time to catch the steamer City of Panama leaving for Victoria at 16:00 the same day. On the 14th they arrive in Esquimalt and transfer to a smaller vessel to take them to Victoria.

He remained in Victoria for two more days. It is apparent he must have brought with him letters of introduction because he visited the Seabrooks' and the Rev. Simon MacGregor, and explored what we now call the Gorge Waterway.

On 17th March he took the Enterprise to New Westminster and found accommodation in a boarding house. Here again it is clear he had letters of introduction, and he spent the next three weeks or so visiting farms in the area and exploring the river by canoe, visiting Sea Island and Lulu Island.

On the 5th April he returned by steamer to Victoria. He notes that in addition to the usual passengers and freight the steamer carried the first lot of cattle from the East Canada region.

He spent time in Victoria visiting and sightseeing, and on 17th April he took a side trip on the steamer Maud up-island to the Comox area visiting, amongst others, a Mr. Piddock, a familiar name to many of our long-term members. He returned on 28th, having taken an overnight stop at Nanaimo.

He remained on Vancouver Island until 20th May, and then boarded the steamer Dakota at Esquimalt for the return journey to San Francisco. His companions from Ontario seem to have remained on the West Coast.

From San Francisco he took a steamer upriver to Sacramento and on 26th May boarded the train for Chicago arriving there on 4th June and then

travelled on to London the following day, there to be met by his family and taken home.

This is a short commentary on Mr. Errington's dairy. The full text, with some minor editorial adjustments for clarification, together with an additional note can be found on our website.

Thanks to VHS member Lloyd Rowsell for providing the material for the transcription.

*Mike Harrison*



## **ANOTHER (THE 4TH) PROPOSAL FOR THE MOUNT ST. ANGELA SITE**

The precious Mount St. Angela site at 923 Burdett, first built as an Anglican school, later used as a hotel and residence for Sisters of St. Ann is notable for being on the short list of existing 1860s buildings. A past proposal for redevelopment was accepted by Victoria City Council (Feb. 2008). The development was controversial because it proposed moving houses, tearing down a designated part of a house, and building four storey condo towers. That plan was not used for over two years and the development permit was renewed this year. Meanwhile the buildings were rented to the Vancouver Island Health Authority, in its present residential configuration, as housing for challenged people.

This October a new plan was brought forward, the 4th version in as many years. It will go to the Advisory Design Panel (Nov. 24) and the Heritage Advisory Committee (Dec.14) and is likely to be put forward to public hearing in the New Year. This plan is very like the first version turned down in 2006, a high fortress of condos parallel to Mount St. Angela between Burdett Ave and McClure St. The latest five storey version with 2 storeys at each streetscape increases the Floor Space Ratio, ( from 1:3:1 to 1:5:1 ) and everything else, e.g., number of units, height, and ground coverage.

Some past problems were solved, for example, leaving most of the designated sections to be used and keeping the back house facing McClure St. Otherwise, many former problems remain, including those of blasting and traffic for the McClure St. neighbours. Many significant heritage concerns need to be explained in letters to the editor and contacts with Mayor and Council. These concerns include the following:

### Visual

The visual impact spoils the Gothic grandeur and the whole streetscape especially when combined with the effect of the massive Chelsea so near and the bland modern lines of the new condos.

Presently the contrast between the impressive brick with Gothic steeple, wooden houses and the green areas like frames is the authentic message. (The yellow house on the front would be lost.)

View loss occurs of mountains from the front and of cathedral buildings from the back, where Mt. St. Angela's spire can barely be seen.

Physical/Economic Factors Inherent in Plan Changing the front 1865 section from its rooms to rental suites for 9 senior ladies causes loss of original effect, materials and higher development costs.

The small patches of restoration contrast with the large density for the developer. The added fifth new floor is presumably for keeping the 1912 designated section of the old building, although allowing its destruction in the first place was a bad decision.

The pathway from front to back, the only feature used from the Humboldt Valley Precinct Plan, is a minor element, one not wanted by the neighbours for security reasons.

Benefits for the city and site do not seem equal to that for the developer.

We are steadily "killing the goose that lays the golden eggs" i.e., tourism, by changes, so a site this prominent is even more important.

The new buildings' purpose is to pay for the work on the older parts and a continued trust for the senior rental. What happens if the condos do not sell in this economic downturn, as in Vancouver? Or if the site is left unfinished, as at St. Ann's Academy in the 1990s?

### Possible Physical Damage

Blasting could likely be a danger to adjacent properties. At the neighbourhood meeting many people expressed this concern, especially after the extensive Chelsea blasting.

First heritage rule is "Do no harm" and prevention is the best policy for this 155year old site. How strong are the random rubble foundations? Two levels of underground parking require much blasting.

The thick brick walls are complex and might become weakened over time, especially after the previous blasting nearby. Is it even possible to repair? The 1990s St. Andrew's Cathedral had cracks after the construction of a high building at the back; evidence that can yet be seen on the Cathedral wall today.

Other heritage buildings are near Mount St. Angela, like the adjacent brown and green house, and across the street, e.g. , buildings in the Anglican Cathedral complex across the road in a dignified street scape.

Why focus on the much vaunted Mt. St. Angela Conservation/Maintenance Plan when building activities might actually harm the that whole building and others on the site ?

A prepaid bond for any costs if damage happens could be asked.

If this plan breaking heritage principles passes, no heritage is safe. If you are interested, please act NOW well before the Public Hearing and at the Hearing.

Condos, condos everywhere but only one Mount St. Angela site.

*Mary Doody Jones*

## ST PAUL'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, ESQUIMALT

At our last meeting we heard an impassioned plea from Sherri Robinson concerning the above church. Because of falling congregations, a number of Anglican churches in our area are to be amalgamated and the new congregation has the responsibility of choosing a name for their church. One of the worries is that the historic name and connections of St Pauls will be overlooked. The church has a long and important history not only as a place of worship but as a repository for symbols and memorials of past glory and sacrifice. ( See for instance the review of Maureen Duffus' book above) More information concerning the history of this church can be found at: [www.stpaulsesquimalt.com](http://www.stpaulsesquimalt.com). It is important that it is understood that the church holds these items in trust, and their disposition is not to be taken lightly or without consideration of the weight of history that these items bear. Of particular note is a phrase contained in the history section of the web site which says: "Upon entering the church one becomes aware of the many flags that have been "laid up" here for safekeeping."

If you have concerns about this issue, you may address them by mail: to The Right Reverend Bishop of British Columbia, 900 Vancouver St., Victoria V8V 3V7, by telephone: 250 386 7781 ext. 250 or E-mail to: [bishop@bc.anglican.ca](mailto:bishop@bc.anglican.ca)



An item discovered by Sherri Robinson in the Perth County Herald, Stratford, dated 15 July 1863. Historical point or what?

WARNING TO THE SEX - The law against obtaining husbands under false pretenses, passed by the English Parliament in 1700 enacts: "That all women, of whatever rank, profession or degree, who shall, after this act, impose upon, seduce, and betray into matrimony any of his Majesty's subjects, by virtue of scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, iron stays, bolstered hoops, or high heeled shoes, shall incur the penalty of the law now in force against witchcraft and like misdemeanours; and the marriage under such circumstances, upon conviction of the offending parties, shall be null and void."

Aah, those were the days...[ed]

And from the British Colonist sometime in 1892...

Doggerel:  
One black and white dog, one brown dog, one black dog, and one black and tan formed the attractive collection offered for sale by auction at the city pound yesterday noon. Two of the canines found purchasers, the other two will pass out of existence without any formal ceremonies.

They couldn't brag of the little brass tag,  
On which the pound keeper swore;  
So a bag and a stone, and a dying groan, —  
And Fido is no more.

No problems with euphemisms here! [ed]



In the next newsletter look for more anecdotes from the memoirs of Kathleen Beatrice Tobin. Some of her recollections were published in the Summer 2009 Newsletter.