Amelia Connolly (Douglas). (1812-1890)

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Lady Amelia Connolly Douglas, a Red River Metis, was the wife of James Douglas the Governor of Vancouver Island and the British colony of British Columbia. Amelia Connolly's father was 15 years old when he entered the service of the North West Company and was still very young when he met and married, à la façon du pays, a Cree woman, known as Suzanne "Pas de nom." during the winter of 1803-4 at Rat River House. They had six children, with Amelia, the eldest daughter, being born in 1812, either a few miles from Fort Churchill[2] or "possibly" at Fort Assiniboia.[3] She went on to marry James Douglas the founding father of British Columbia and was remembered as Lady Douglas for decades after her death.

Amelia Connolly, like so many other women of her era, could have lived her life in relative obscurity, living and dying amongst other Half-Breeds in the Red River Settlement. She no doubt would have been happy to live and socialize in a society where the majority of the residents were mixed-bloods such as herself. Although, like many of her contemporaries, she married a Hudson's Bay Company fur trader, unlike them she happened to wed James Douglas. His remarkable career would take them to North America's west coast, where they would spend the majority of their lives, and where Douglas would rise from lowly clerk to the father of a province. Eventually her husband's knighthood would bestow on Amelia the title of Lady Douglas, which is how she was remembered for decades after her death. However, the spotlight that shone on her because of her husband's professional success often burned too brightly for the shy and reserved woman. For someone who spoke English with difficulty all her life and who never forgot her Indian heritage, life surrounded by British traders and settlers, with their racial barbs, must have been hurtful and difficult at times. Despite the denigration many people made of her mixed-blood ancestry, James Douglas remained faithful to her, whereas Amelia's own father eventually "turned-off" her mother to marry a white woman. In fact, Douglas' affection for her was immortalized in a sentence, part of which, historian Sylvia Van Kirk adopted for the title for her book. "To any other being less qualified the vapid monotony of an inland trading Post, would be perfectly

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[2] N. de Bertrand Lugrin, *The Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island, 1843-1866* (Victoria, 1928), 10.

[3] Marion B. Smith, "The Lady Nobody Knows," *British Columbia: A Centennial Anthology*, Reginald Eyre Watters, ed., (Toronto, 1958), 473.

unsufferable (sic), while habit makes it familiar to us, softened as it is by the many tender ties, which find a way to the heart," he wrote.[4]

Amelia Connolly's birthplace and her early years are difficult to even conjecture about because her father, William, worked for the North West Company. Unlike the HBC the NWC's journals and records have not survived. We do know that William Connolly was born in Lachine, near Montreal, in 1786 to Irish parents.

The men at one of the forts where the family resided nicknamed Amelia "Little Snowbird" because of her fair complexion. "Her hair was dark, her eyes were gray. My mother was a very beautiful girl, so also was her sister Julia," recalled one of Amelia's daughters.[5] One of Amelia's other sisters died when she was only three years old. Disliking having to wear the warm woolen duffels, she begged to put on a flimsy, pink, cotton frock sent from London, but while she danced past the fireplace, the flammable material caught on fire.[6] The other major event in her life was when the Franklin expedition came to the fort she was currently living at when she was about seven years old.

Having been made a full partner of the NWC in 1818, William Connolly was in charge of Cumberland House—not to be confused with the nearby HBC post of the same name—when John Franklin's first expedition arrived late in 1819. Because Franklin needed the help of both companies in provisioning his overland journey, he showed no favouritism by wintering in a camp set up between the rival posts. Nevertheless, Franklin's party spent New Year's by dining with Mr. Connolly. "[We] were regaled with a beaver, which we found extremely delicate. In the evening his men were entertained with a dance, in which the Canadians exhibited some grace and much agility; and they contrived to infuse some portion of their activity and spirits into the steps of their female companions," wrote Franklin.[7] Amelia remembered how one of the expedition's young artists, Lieutenant George Back, played with her and Julia and made them pose for him.[8] The expedition's commander also made observations about the bois-brulés children of Cumberland House. Franklin remarked that their education was lacking, being left to Indian relations, and that the girls, even though taught a European language, under their Indian influence "very early give up all pretensions to chastity."[9] His ethnocentric comments were directed more at the children of the French Canadians who made up the bulk of the labourers. He further noted that these girls were often brides at the age of twelve and mothers at fourteen.[10] Amelia, perhaps because she was the daughter of a chief factor and not a Canadian, escaped this scenario and did not marry until the relatively ripe age of sixteen.

After the amalgamation of the two rival companies in 1821, Connolly became a chief trader for the H.B.C and a chief factor in 1825. A year earlier he had been put in charge of the New Caledonia district, with its headquarters at Fort St. James on Stuart Lake in northern British Columbia. He had crossed the Rocky Mountains with his family, supplies and 24 men brought from Norway House. By 1828, the sixteen year-old Amelia, who was described somewhat romantically as "shy, sweet and 'modest as a wood violet,'"[11] married James Douglas on April 27th of that year. He was nine years older than Amelia, and had come to know her over a relatively long period of time, arriving at Fort St. James two years before their marriage.

The date and place of Douglas' birth are not known precisely. His father John Douglas had interests in a sugar plantation in British Guiana, where James was likely born in 1803. His mother's name is unknown, but she was believed to be a Creole woman. Whether this meant she was a native or was simply born in a tropical place is also unknown, although James was known in fur-trading circles as a "Scotch West Indian"[12] and a "mulatto."[13] It would seem his father also married a local woman *à la façon du pays* because he fathered three children between 1801 or 1802 to 1812, two sons and a daughter. He also showed enough interest in these children to send James and his brother to a preparatory school in Lanark, Scotland. Just like William Connolly, Douglas was very young when he entered the service of the North West Company.

When he was sixteen he sailed from Liverpool on May 7, 1819 and began his fur-trading career a few months later at Fort William. In 1820 he was transferred to Ile-à-la-Crosse, where he fought a duel with an HBC employee, giving credence to Governor George Simpson's later assessment that Douglas was "furiously violent when roused."[14] Despite the amalgamation of the two rival companies in 1821, he was still posted there four years later. Early in his career, and quite possibly while at Ile-à-la-Crosse, Douglas wrote an exposition on the North American Indian, of which a portion reads:

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[4] G. P. de T. Glazebrook, ed., *The Hargrave Correspondence, 1821-1843* (Toronto, 1938), James Douglas to James Hargrave, March 24, 1842, 381.
[5] Walter N. Sage, *Sir James Douglas and British Columbia* (Toronto, 1930), 45.
[6] Lugrin, 11. N. de Bertrand Lugrin's information about Amelia Douglas' life came mostly from the letters and recollections of Amelia's daughter, Martha Douglas Harris.
[7] John Franklin, *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea, in the Years 1819, 20, 21, and 22* (London, 1823), 53.
[8] Lugrin, 12. The other artist on the expedition, Robert Hood, made a painting of three *bois-brulés* children, two of them were girls, but they were only identified by Cree names. It was possible that these were also Amelia, Julia and one of their brothers.
[9] Franklin, 85.
[10] *Ibid*., 86.
[11] Robert Hamilton Coats and R. E. Gosnell, *Sir James Douglas* (Toronto, 1908), 103.
[12] H.B.C.A., A.34/2, Simpson's Character Book, James Douglas.
[13] Margaret Arnett MacLeod, ed., *The Letters of Letitia Hargrave* (New York, 1969) [reprint], Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald MacTavish, December 2 to 9, 1842, 132.
[14] H.B.C.A., A.34/2.

> The North American Indians, like all other barbarous nations, profess a body of traditionary (sic) history, or perhaps, more properly speaking, a patched medley of absurd fables interwoven with real events; some of these traditions I have collected, as they exhibit the unaided workings of the human mind, and illustrate the moral and social feelings of man in the earliest stage of savage life, when the untutored reason, darkened by ignorance, is overcome by the fierce impulses of the passions, and the mere animal instincts given for the support and preservation of life hold absolute sway.[15]

His attitude towards Indians was typical of his time, and one cannot help but wonder what influence his new wife may have had because his perspective on them eventually became, although still paternalistic, more tolerant than the majority of his contemporaries. However, shortly after his marriage to Amelia, he nearly lost his life to a group of Carrier Indians.

The "Kwah Incident" of which Douglas was a central character has been told, retold and exaggerated to such a degree that several different versions now exist. The events leading up to it were relatively straightforward. The story began in 1823 at Fort George, a post on the confluence of the Fraser and Bulkley Rivers, where two Carrier men killed two HBC men while the post's master, James M. Yale, was away. One of the Carrier was eventually found and put to death, whether by some HBC men, his own people or another group of Indians is not known precisely, while the other one escaped and remained a fugitive for the next five years. Douglas, while his father-in-law was absent and he was temporarily in charge of the fort, seemingly found out that the renegade was in the nearby Nak'azdli Carrier village. "Determined that the blood of the white man should not be unavenged" Douglas proceeded to the village, accompanied by two men, "and executed justice on the murderer."[16] Another version, courtesy of A. G. Morice, has the fugitive, whom Morice wrote as being named Tzoelhnolle, being captured and brought before Douglas who had him hung while declaring, "the man he killed was eaten by the dogs; by the dogs he must be eaten."[17] Douglas never talked much about this event until forty-five years later when he reminisced about his more brazen, younger self in a letter in the Victoria Standard that was a response to another newspaper's piece on him:

> In another column you will find a letter from the 'Ottawa Free Press,' do read it, and see how it treats me, they wish to make me, who am as you know a quiet old gentleman enough, a sort of Dare devil, fearing nothing. True I seized the Indian, a noted murderer, as stated, and secured him after a desperate struggle, but I did not shoot him with my <u>own</u> hands; he was afterwards executed for his crimes. It was a desperate adventure, which nothing but a high sense of duty could have induced me to undertake.[18]

Because the murdered Carrier was his distant relation, an enraged Chief Kwah and a number of his men consequently stormed into the fort, cornered the young clerk and was about to have him put to death when an individual, or individuals, negotiated with the old chief and saved Douglas' life.

Several different accounts described how Douglas actually had his life spared. The most romantic version, again courtesy of Morice and with shades of the Pocahontas legend, has the fort's interpreter's wife, Nancy Boucher, and Amelia Douglas screaming and crying to Kwah in the hopes of sparing his life. The two women ran upstairs and began throwing tobacco, clothing, handkerchiefs and other goods into the assembled throng. "Then Kwah, who never had any real intention to kill the clerk, signified his acceptance of the gifts as a compensation for Tzeolhnolle's death, and bade his followers quietly return to their homes, as the 'incident was closed'" wrote Morice.[19] N. de Bertrand Lugrin recorded that during the incident Amelia "was caught by her long flowing hair, her head drawn back, and her throat bared to the knife" when her brother William rescued her from death.[20] Still another rendition has her other brother Henry saving the day:

> My sister Julia aged about twelve years got hold of my father's sword, which was in the bedroom. She was going into the big room to slash the Indians right and left. Fortunately my Mother met her and asked what she was going to do. She replied, "Going to Kill some of the Indians," but my Mother told her to put the sword back.… My father had left his fire bag in the bedroom with some tobacco in it, which I took and went through the crowd, I managed to reach the first Chief, Mal de Gorge, and offered him the tobacco which he accepted. He took pity on me as I was crying, and told his brother to leave off. He opened the gate and ordered the Indians to go, and then told his brother to go also, and in a very short time the fort was clear.[21]

And still another version is in the Carrier oral tradition and lives on through one of Kwah's descendants, Nick Prince, who states that Kwah clearly entered the fort to kill Douglas. However, two of Kwah's grandsons prevented him from following through on his intention. They told him that it was the duty of the warrior chief to kill him, and if he did the deed himself, then his grandsons would not be able to inherit his title someday. [22] No matter who saved him, Douglas lived to see the continuation of his career in the HBC.

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[15] Douglas' essay excerpted in Derek Pethik, *James Douglas: Servant of Two Empires* (Vancouver, 1969), 13-14.
[16] W. S. Wallace, ed., *John McLean's Notes of a Twenty-Five Years Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory* (Toronto, 1932), 162.
[17] A. G. Morice, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia* (Toronto, 1904), 138-9.
[18] W. Kaye Lamb, "Letters to Martha," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* (1943), 43-4.
[19] Morice, 140.
[20] Lugrin, 14.
[21] Henry Connolly quoted in Frieda Esau Klippenstein, "The Challenge of James Douglas and Carrier Chief Kwah," *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, eds. Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, (Peterborough, Ontario, 1996), 133.
[22] *Ibid*., 141.

Douglas' professional life had stagnated slightly in New Caledonia. Although he had been left in charge of the fort on occasion, his main duty had been to look after the fisheries that fed the fort. He had journeyed with his father-in-law to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. The fort was an important depot as all the furs on the pacific slope were funneled through there. A few months after the Kwah incident Douglas' father-in-law suggested that he be transferred there. "Douglas's life is much exposed among these Carriers, he would readily face a hundred of them, but he does not much like the idea of being assassinated, with your permission he might next year be removed to the Columbia, wherever he may be placed he can not fail of being essentially useful" wrote Connolly in February 1829.[23] Douglas, however, had to live with the possibility of being murdered for nearly another year before being transferred to the Columbia. Mrs. Douglas, however, would not accompany her husband for several more months.

She was due to give birth to the couple's first child and could not travel. According to one account when she did make her way to Fort Vancouver in the company of her father, she traveled "in state." Apparently, Amelia journeyed south "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 her moccasins were stiff with the most costly beads."[24] This story is no doubt exaggerated. Mrs. Douglas was unlikely to have participated in such an ostentatious display, because she would have been mourning the recent death of her first child, Amelia. Like Annie Bannatyne, Amelia Douglas would outlive the majority of her children. Of her first four children, Amelia, Alexander, John and Maria, none of them would live to see their fourth birthday. Only four of Amelia's thirteen children would eventually outlive her. The other twelve came close to never being born, because on the trip to the Columbia, Amelia and her horse were caught in the swift current of the Fraser River and she nearly drowned. A servant in the group, which was accompanying her and her father, managed to rescue both the future Lady Douglas and her horse and lead them to the opposite shore. Tradition has it that once Mrs. Douglas finally arrived in Fort Vancouver her husband was disappointed that his "Little Snowbird" had become tanned through her weeks of travel.[25] This slight was, nevertheless, nothing compared to the prejudice she eventually encountered while she lived in what is today the state of Washington.

Although Douglas came to Fort Vancouver to just be the post's accountant, he had come to the Shangri-La of British-held, Pacific territory. A lengthy description of the fort gives some colour to the place Amelia Douglas called home, her husband occasionally left on journeys along the Pacific to conduct the Company's business, for nearly two decades:

Daughters Agnes, Cecillia and Alice Douglas ca. 1858

The fort was not formidable in appearance. It consisted of a strong stockade about twenty feet high, without bastions, embracing an area of two hundred and fifty by one hundred and fifty yards. Within this enclosure, around three sides, were ranged the dwellings and offices of the gentlemen in the company's service. In the centre, facing the main entrance or great gate, was the residence of Doctor John McLoughlin, the governor by courtesy of the Hudson's Bay Company in Oregon, a French Canadian structure, painted white, with piazza and flower beds in front, and grape-vines trained along a rude trellis.… There were no galleries around the walls for sentries, nor loopholes for small arms, no appearances, in fact, indicating a dangerous neighbourhood. Near the

[23] E. E. Rich, ed., *Simpson's 1828 Journey to the Columbia* (London, 1947), William Connolly to George Simpson, February 27, 1829, 243-4.
[24] Lugrin, 15.
[25] *Ibid*., 16.

centre of the enclosure rose the company's flagstaff, and everything about the place was orderly, neat, and business-like.… A bell large enough for a country church was supported by three stout poles about twenty feet high, covered with a little pointed roof to keep off the rain.… Saturday's work ended at five in the afternoon, at which time the physician of the establishment served to the men their week's rations, consisting in winter of eight gallons of potatoes and eight salt salmon, and in summer of pease and tallow; no bread or meat being allowed, except occasionally. The Indian servants of the Indian wives hunted and fished for additional supplies.[26]

As suggested above, Mrs. Douglas' life must have been relatively pleasant, with servants to help with the workload, although her diet was probably similar to the labouring men because rations for Company officers would not have been significantly better. Most of the officers, including McLoughlin, had Indian or mixed-blood wives who lived within the fort. Amelia would have had many women of a similar background with which to socialize. McLoughlin's wife, for example, was an Ojibway Half-Breed, whom he showed great affection for and treated "in public and in private…as if she had been a daughter of Queen Victoria."[27] Since their husbands were two of the ranking men in Fort Vancouver, it was likely that Mrs. Douglas became a good friend with Mrs. McLoughlin. Like James and Amelia's marriage, the liaisons between white men and Indian or mixed-blood women at the fort were all country marriages and had never been solemnized in a church. This state of affairs would cause considerable trouble when a clergyman finally arrived at Fort Vancouver.

The Reverend Herbert Beaver and his wife Jane arrived on the Columbia on September 6, 1836. They came straight from England, and therefore, they had no introduction to the realities of a fur-trading life in what was a far-flung outpost of Empire. The Beavers epitomized pious snobbery at its worst; rigid, dogmatic and prejudicial, they were undoubtedly appalled at the "Sodom and Gomorra" and the meager living conditions they would have to endure. "No legal marriage, no regular Baptism, no accustomed rites of Burial; men, for the most part, not practicing, and women totally ignorant, of the duties of religion. But I am not without reasonable hope, that by the blessing of God, this deplorable scene of vice and ignorance will speedily assume a fairer aspect," Beaver wrote in his first report to HBC superiors in London just a few months after his arrival at the post.[28] His complaints about the lodging him and his wife had to inhabit and the lack of luxuries, especially in the rations, caused McLoughlin to reply in his report to London:

I intend doing every thing to Make Mr. Beaver as comfortable as the Circumstances of the Country will Admit, and I consider people (sic) right to satisfy themselves with such things as the country affords—and I am Adverse to the Introduction of any thing in the country which may lead to unnecessary Expense. Mr. Beaver's house is the Best in the Fort. If he is Allowed carpets and imported furniture—has not every Gentleman in the place a Right to the same Indulgence—his Expenditure of Wine and Brandy is much Greater than the Allowance and I wrote him that we had certain Limits beyond which we could not Exceed.[29]

As shall be seen, McLoughlin and Beaver would never have the pretence of a cordial relationship, but Douglas and the reverend initially conducted themselves in quite a friendly manner.

In fact, Douglas allowed Beaver to "officially" marry him and Amelia on February 28, 1837. Beaver was elated at this move and wrote to Benjamin Harrison—an influential member of the committee in London responsible for the direction of the HBC that: Douglas, "residing immediately at the Fort and in a state of Concubinage, last week consented to be married; and I performed the ceremony, I assure you with heartfelt feelings of joy at this unexpected move in the cause of religion."[30] Notwithstanding this apparent triumph, the rest of the post's couples did not feel the need to remarry their spouses, although McLoughlin did consent to a civil ceremony that Douglas performed himself. Douglas also tried to work with Beaver by translating the Anglican Liturgy into French for the fort's labouring force, even though the majority of them were Catholic. Douglas' patience with the obstinate clergyman did have its limits, especially when it came to Beaver's sectarian views and his opinion of the women in the fort.

A year and-a-half after his arrival, the reverend's intransigence showed no signs of dissipating. In a March 19, 1838, letter to Harrison, Beaver grumbled about the behaviour of the fort's chief trader—Douglas had since been promoted, making him second in command of the fort. "One Sunday, [Douglas], immediately after absenting himself from our Morning Service, at which, with the evening, he is but an inconstant attendant, read, although a Protestant Communicant, a Roman Catholic one to the Frenchmen in their own language," wrote Beaver.[31] Always the pedantic zealot, Beaver wondered if he could allow Douglas back into his congregation after this clear lapse of faith. In the same letter to Harrison, he revealed how Douglas threatened to bury an unbaptized half-breed girl himself after Beaver refused to do so. "He did not do so, but he attended the funeral with Chief Factor McLoughlin, who read the Service of England. I suppose it was intended to honor her mother, who is depraved among the depraved, having lived with several officers and others, and being a suspected murderess of infants in her capacity as midwife," he scribed.[32] As this quotation suggests, Beaver had a very ethnocentric opinion of the Indian and mixed-blood women who lived at the fort that was extreme even for the time and place he lived in. These women, "though very respectable women in their

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[26] H. H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon* (San Francisco, 1890), 7-8, reprinted in Pethick, 24-5.
[27] H. H. Bancroft, *History of British Columbia* (San Francisco, 1890), 300, reprinted in Pethick, 23-4.
[28] Thomas E. Jessett, ed., *Reports and Letters of Herbert Beaver, 1836-1838* (Portland, Oregon, 1959), November 10, 1836, 2.
[29] E. E. Rich, ed., *The Letters of John McLoughlin, First Series, 1825-1838* (Toronto, 1941), November 16, 1836 Report, 176.
[30] Jessett, Herbert Beaver to Benjamin Harrison, March 10, 1837, 35.
[31] *Ibid*., Beaver to Harrison, March 19, 1838, 74.
[32] *Ibid*.

ways, are little calculated to improve the manners of society, which will I am decidedly of opinion never assume a higher tone, until means be found for the introduction of married females in the several classes of life, and educated accordingly," he said.[33] Beaver in particular dwelled on the lack of morals these women had with the concomitant evil influence it had on their children. "Besides, it is of little use to inculcate, by day, in the school, lessons of morality, which are contradicted, in the night, at home, by diametrically contrary behaviour," he admonished.[34] He also believed that "unmarried" women should not live in public buildings, be given rations, allowed medical attention or "recognized as the wives of the men, with whom they are living."[35] Although Amelia Douglas appeared to be excluded from this blistering criticism because of her marital status, she was already deeply sensitive about her native heritage and would certainly have been hurt by the sniping of Beaver and his wife. Their zeal to bring the morality of Great Britain to Fort Vancouver had a specific target, however, and that was McLoughlin's wife. Criticism directed in this area would be a gross tactical error and eventually contribute to the premature and hasty departure of the Beavers.

Herbert Beaver saved his most outspoken vitriol for Dr. John McLoughlin, whom he believed, as the post's master should set an example for the rest of the men living in debauchery. For Beaver, Mrs. McLoughlin was no more than a slut spreading the contagion of immorality like it was a communicable disease; she was a "notoriously loose character" who was corrupting the female children of the fort. "While I see the kept mistress of the highest personage in your service at this station put forward to associate with, and entertain, respectable married and unmarried females from the United States of America, to the scandal of religion, to the retarding of morality, and to the indelible disgrace of all concerned in the transaction," he also spewed.[36] Beaver wrote these comments in a report that he assumed would only be read by administrators in London; they were also written just days before McLoughlin was to depart for a trip to England, and Beaver obviously did not think they would get back to him. When McLoughlin decided to discuss the matter in the middle of the fort's grounds by laying a beating on Beaver, he undoubtedly realized how carefully his correspondence was scrutinized before being sent to London. Fortunately, people intervened before McLoughlin administered any serious harm. He may have warned Beaver to be on his best behaviour while Mrs. McLoughlin was left alone at the fort.

However, the indefatigable Beaver let loose another barrage while McLoughlin was away. He protested the fact that she continued to live in the chief factor's apartments and again disparaged her virtue in his October 2, 1838, report. This latest attack was too much for Douglas who wrote a blistering rebuttal to this latest report. "[Beaver] also usurps a sort of prescriptive right, to libel, by his discoloured statements the character of every person with whom he associates. The direful passages designed, as they report, not to reprove vice; but to blast reputations and procure expulsion from the service, are noised about throughout the settlement, they become an unsuccessful nuisance and highly prejudicial to the service," Douglas wrote in a report on the Beaver affair.[37] It has been suggested that Beaver was so fixated on this issue because his wife was unhappy associating with women who had not been wed according the rites of the Church of England.[38] Reverend Beaver soon left Fort Vancouver for England. He was defiant to the end and would continue to wail that McLoughlin was an agent of popery. His desire to see the death of country marriages and the rise in the virtuous dispositions embodied by British women was realized by Douglas a few years after his departure. "There is a strange revolution, in the manners of the country; Indian wives were at one time the vogue, the Half-Breed supplanted these, and now we have the lovely tender exotic torn from its parent bed, to pine and languish in the desert," remarked Douglas when congratulating James Hargrave on his marriage to Letitia McTavish, a white woman.[39] Still, Douglas remained devoted to Amelia as his career continued upwards.

Not long after McLoughlin's return Douglas was promoted to chief factor. A week after his arrival McLoughlin wrote his superiors in London to praise the job he had done in his absence, "which does the utmost credit to Mr. Douglas."[40] A year later McLoughlin again lavished praise on Douglas, whose "zeal to promote the interest of his employers his assiduous application to business and his study (sic) correct conduct have entitled him to my esteem and regard."[41] As the 1840s began, it became apparent to HBC officials that the flood of American pioneers into the Oregon territory meant that Fort Vancouver might find itself south of any proposed border. As a contingency plan Douglas was commissioned with the task of journeying to the southern tip of Vancouver's Island to select a new site for the Pacific headquarters.

In 1842, he sailed there to inspect several potential sites, one of which was called Camosack. A year later Douglas returned to Camosack and left this description in a letter written to James Hargrave: "The place itself appears a perfect 'Eden', in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the North west coast, and so different is its general aspect, from the wooded, rugged regions around, that one might be pardoned for supposing it had dropped from the clouds into its present position." The site also seemed perfect for farming, with the soil "more luxuriant, than in any other place, I

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[33] *Ibid*., Beaver to Harrison, March 10, 1837, 35.
[34] *Ibid*., Beaver's Third Report, March 19, 1838, 57.
[35] *Ibid*., Beaver's Fifth Report, October 2, 1838, 117-8.
[36] *Ibid*., March 19, 1838, 58.
[37] Rich, *McLoughlin Letters*, 1st series, Douglas report, October 18, 1838, 266-7.
[38] Marion Smith, 475.
[39] *Hargrave Correspondence*, James Douglas to James Hargrave, February 26, 1840.
[40] E. E. Rich, *The Letters of John McLoughlin, Second Series, 1839-1844* (Toronto, 1943), October 24, 1839, 3.
[41] *Ibid*., November 20, 1840, report, 21-2.

have seen in America," and as important, "not a musquitoe that plague of plagues did we feel."[42] The Douglas family did not transfer to Fort Victoria until the spring of 1850, where both of them would spend the rest of their days—in Amelia's case, another 40 years. By this time, James Douglas had long since taken over John McLoughlin's position: McLoughlin had retired in 1846.

A year after arriving on Vancouver Island Douglas became, in addition to his HBC duties, governor of the fledgling colony. This circumstance created a conflict of interest for the new governor; his duty to promote colonization was at odds with his role to promote the business of fur trading, because settlers and furs don't generally mix. Reverend Robert John Staines, who arrived at Fort Victoria in 1849 to become the fort's schoolmaster, pointed out this conflict, thus setting up an antagonism between the two men that undoubtedly gave the Douglas's a sense of déjà vu, reminding them of the strife with Rev. Beaver. Soon after the arrival of Rev. Staines and his wife, Douglas reported that he was "happy to inform you, [they] are attentive and give much satisfaction as Teachers."[43] However, Mrs. Douglas did not get along with Mrs. Staines, whom she found condescending no doubt because she looked down her nose at Amelia's Indian heritage. Whether this slight of his wife began to alter Douglas' opinion of Staines is highly speculative, because he wrote a year later to still praise Mrs. Staines, but called her husband "lazy" and further noted, "had I a selection to make he is not exactly the man I would choose; but it must be admitted we might find a man worse qualified for the charge of the school."[44] Staines did not, however, keep to the shadows of his classroom. Instead, he signed a petition that pointed out Douglas' conflict of interest, and he led opposition cries of nepotism when Douglas appointed his brother-in-law, David Cameron, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Civil Justice, when he had no legal training. Staines was so dissatisfied with the state of the colony that he left for England in 1853, but he lost his life when his boat, bound for San Francisco, sank with everyone perishing save for one man. One would expect some magnanimity in light of this tragedy, but Douglas' rancour was such that nine months after Staines' death he wrote that "Mr. Staines, unfortunately for himself, was a violent party man, and was prudent neither in his conduct nor associations."[45] For Amelia, the Staines affair was probably somewhat balanced by the fact that after living in fur-trading posts for her entire life, she finally had a house of her own to live in and a household to run.

The building of the Douglas house was begun in 1851. Soon after arriving in Fort Victoria, Douglas marked off a 10-acre lot near the post. With the help of three HBC servants and a party of native labourers, "who promise to become useful as rough carpenters," Douglas began work on an impressive two story building.[46] This dwelling would be where the Douglas's spent their remaining days. It was near the mud flats where the Empress Hotel would eventually be built, and B.C.'s legislative buildings would be built across Government Street, so it was a centrally located place close to the seats of government. Douglas supplied the house with furniture and other supplies that was more expensive than allowed by the HBC Governor and Committee, but he explained that someone in his position and who held his office was "required to maintain a respectable appearance."[47] It was no doubt a quantum leap from having to live in officer's quarters in the various forts the Douglas's lived in for so many years. Sophia Cracroft, the niece of John and Lady Franklin, described the house, during a visit in 1861, as "standing in a large old fashioned garden with borders of flowers enclosing squares of fruit trees & vegetables.…The house is a substantial plain building, with very fair sized comfortable rooms."[48] One daughter, Martha Douglas Harris, and her family would live in it for an additional ten years after Amelia's death in 1890, but it would soon be torn down after that. Its site is now occupied by Victoria's Royal Museum and the provincial archives.

In addition to being governor of Vancouver Island, he added the additional duties of being named governor of the mainland colony of B.C. in 1858. This high profile meant that Amelia Douglas was more in the public eye, a position she was often not comfortable with, and her husband's position meant that criticism was often lobbed his way, with several critics often making hay that his choice of mates made him suspect as governor. A private letter, by Annie Deans to her brother and sister, from 1854 shows the tone of the commentary:

> For the Governor of Vanc[o]uvers Island has been in the Company out here ever since he was a Boy about 15 year[s] of age and now he is a Man upwards of 60 now—so you may say he has been all his life among the North American Indians and has got one of them for a wife so how can it be expected that he can know anything at all about Governing one of Englands (sic) last Colony's (sic) in North America, Mr Douglas Govornor (sic) has appointed a Brother in law of his to be superime (sic) Judge who is in no way qualified for the office.[49]

The former Bill Smith—he had changed his name to Amor de Cosmos (lover of the universe)—arrived on Vancouver Island in May 1858. He began printing the *British Colonist* that winter and became a noisy critic of the

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[42] *Hargrave Correspondence*, Douglas to Hargrave, February 5, 1843.
[43] Hartwell Bowsfield, ed., *Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-1851* (Winnipeg, 1979), James Douglas to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee of the Honorable H.B.C., October 27, 1849, 59.
[44] G. Hollis Slater, "Rev. Robert Staines: Pioneer Priest, Pedagogue and Political Agitator," *British Columbia History Quarterly* (1950), James Douglas to A. C. Anderson, October 28, 1850, 201.
[45] Douglas quoted in Slater, 226.
[46] *Fort Victoria Letters*, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, September 1, 1850.
[47] *Ibid*., Douglas to Barclay, November 24, 1851.
[48] Dorothy Blakey Smith, ed., *Lady Franklin Visits the Pacific Northwest: Being Extracts from the Letters of Miss Sophia Cracroft, Sir John Franklin's Niece, February to Arpil 1861 and April to July 1870* (Victoria, 1974), 24.
[49] Annie Deans to her brother and sister, February 29, 1854, letter reprinted in Slater, 223.

governor. He also mentioned Douglas' choice of mate when he really felt the need to fashion himself as a yellow journalist. "Were a good Indian agent required, over whom could be extended 'a reign triumphant', it would not be too difficult to discover a suitable incumbent, qualified by long experience and intimate association (my italics)," de Cosmos wrote in 1860.[50] What must have really hurt Mrs. Douglas is that prejudicial remarks attacked her children.

The letters of Edmund Hope Verney reveal the bigotry that must have been whispered frequently around the tables and parlours of Victoria's high society. "The Governor is a great drag on the colony…a refined English gentleman is sadly wanted at the head of affairs…for Mrs. Douglas and her daughters, the less said the better: I do not conceive that I can do any good by recounting instances of their ignorance & barbarism," he remarked.[51] Verney did try to be somewhat charitable in individual descriptions of Amelia and her daughters, but modern readers will still find his characterizations offensive because they're based on race: he called Cecilia a "fine squaw"; Alice was "always correcting her sisters for not being sufficiently lady-like, but they can hardly be worse than herself"; Agnes was a "fat squaw, but without any pretence to being anything else; very good natured and affectionate, but not affected"; and Mrs. Douglas was "a good creature, but utterly ignorant: she has no language, but jabbers French or English or Indian, as she is half Indian, half English, and a French Canadian by birth."[52] A contemporary of Verney's, Charles Wilson, also wrote cutting remarks about Mrs. Douglas' daughters:

> Most of the young ladies are half-breeds & have quite as many of the propensities of the savage as of the civilized being. Two of the Misses Douglas (Alice and Agnes), the Governor's daughters, had their heads flattened whilst they were young but it is scarcely visible. They had just had some hoops sent out to them & it was most amusing to see their attempts to appear at ease in their new costume.[53]

Not everyone who visited the Douglas's had such hurtful comments about them. Indeed, Arthur Bushby visited the Douglas residence on New Year's Day, 1859, and was immediately smitten with Agnes. "We played cards Brew Bob Miss Aggie Douglas & myself—they say she looks with no savage eye on me—& true she is a stunning girl. Black eye & hair & larky like the devil half a mind to go in for her," he wrote in his journal.[54] Nevertheless, the gossip and innuendo about her children must have reached Amelia Douglas' ears and have been especially painful.

She reacted by keeping a low public profile during most of her husband's tenure as governor, rarely going out in public and frequently turning down dinner invitations. Official portrayals of Amelia after James became governor deliberately concealed her Indian heritage.[55] Her refusal to attend dinners appeared to extend to even her own home. Although he visited the governor's house several times during his early courtship of Agnes Douglas, Bushby did not actually meet Mrs. Douglas until three weeks after first meeting her daughter. "Mrs. Douglas came to dinner. Seems a good old soul," he noted.[56] While Lady Franklin[57] and her niece, Sophia Cracroft, were touring the Pacific northwest, they stopped in Victoria and paid Mrs. Douglas a visit on February 28, 1861.[58] "We were engaged today to take luncheon with the Governor's wife M^{rs} Douglas, in place of paying her a formal visit. Have I explained that her mother was an Indian woman, & that she keeps very much (far too much) in the background; indeed it is only lately that she has been persuaded to see visitors," wrote Cracroft.[59] She noted further that, "she has a gentle, simple & kindly manner w^{h} is quite pleasing, but she takes no lead whatever in her family, & the luncheon arrangements & conduct, rested only with Agnes & M^{r} & M^{rs} Young, in the absence of the Governor."[60] Clearly, Amelia Douglas was uncomfortable playing the role of a governor's wife, and preferred the company of her family and such close friends as Josette Work, the daughter of Pierre Legace and a Nez Perce woman. Governor Douglas, instead, relied on his daughters to accompany him on public social occasions. All negative commentary, however, ceased for a while when her husband retired.

In 1864 Mrs. Douglas heard only plaudits as James Douglas ended his career as a colonial administrator. Before his retirement Douglas received a knighthood for his years of service, thereby the title of Lady Douglas was bestowed upon Amelia. In March 1864 a banquet was held in Victoria to honour Douglas, and a second banquet held a few days

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[50] De Cosmos quoted in Jan Gould, *Women of British Columbia* (Saanichton, B.C., 1975), 56.
[51] Allan Pritchard, ed., *Vancouver Island Letters of Edmund Hope Verney, 1862-65* (Vancouver, 1996), Edmund Hope Verney to Harry Verney, August 16, 1862, 84.
[52] *Ibid*., Edmund Hope Verney to Harry Verney, July 20, 1862, 74-5.
[53] George F. G. Stanley, ed., *Mapping the Frontier: Charles Wilson's Diary of the Survey of the 49th Parallel, 1858-1862, while Secretary of the British Boundary Commission* (Toronto, 1970), August 2, 1858, 28.
[54] Dorothy Blakey Smith, "The Journal of Arthur Thomas Bushby, 1858-1859," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* (1957-58), January 1, 1859, 122. Bushby asked for Agnes' hand in marriage in July 1859, especially after she broke off her "understanding" with John Work. James Douglas declined, saying they were too young and Bushby's income too small. After Bushby got a government job and built a house, the couple finally married on May 8, 1862.
[55] Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto, 1991), 46.
[56] "Arthur Bushby Journal," January 20, 1859, 131.
[57] Lady Franklin was the widow of Sir John Franklin, whose third voyage to find the northwest passage ended in catastrophe with the loss of the *Erebus* and *Terror* and all lives aboard. Franklin's first expedition was the same one that Amelia and her sister Julia encountered many years before at Cumberland House.
[58] This date was the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Douglas' marriage by Rev. Beaver.
[59] *Lady Franklin Visits the Pacific Northwest*, 22-3.
[60] *Ibid*., 24.

later in the mainland colony's capital of New Westminster had Lady Douglas as the honoured guest, where she was presented with a memorial medallion of her husband. As B.C. historian Margaret Ormsby pointed out the titles and Douglas' wealth commanded new respect and prestige, and a kinder attitude was shown to Lady Douglas; every act of private charity performed by her was recalled, and "every young British settler expressed his grateful thanks for the hospitality of her dinner table and the pleasure of an evening spent in her family circle."[61] This supposedly turning of a new leaf by the colonys' settlers did not cause Amelia to suddenly become a socialite. Her daughter Cecilia died suddenly in 1865. Also, a new complication a few years after her husband's retirement caused her to remain in the background, because her legitimacy, and in her mind the legitimacy of all her children, came under public scrutiny when her brother sued William Connolly's estate.

Amelia's father had left New Caledonia not long after the Douglas's moved to Fort Vancouver. That there was an estate to sue was due to Connolly's frugality. "I have been very careful of my coppers. A symptom which leads me to expect that in time I will become, if not a miser, at least a wonderful economist," he told James Hargrave in 1829.[62] He left New Caledonia to oversee the King's Posts in Lower Canada, being able to live in Montreal not far from where he was born. He retired in 1842 when he refused to be posted back to Rupert's Land at Fort Albany. At this point in his life, he clearly did not need to work for a living as he was already living "in great style" in Montreal.[63] Amelia's mother, however, was not living in great style, but was stuck in a convent in Red River, where she died in 1862, having been supported there by Connolly, and then after his death, Connolly's second wife.

The basis for the lawsuit began when Connolly returned to Lower Canada with Susanne and their children. In 1831 they came to St. Eustache, where two of Amelia's sisters were baptized, but only after Connolly assured Rev. Turcotte that Susanne was his lawful wife and the children were legitimate. After four or five months they moved to Montreal and boarded with Connolly's sister, Madame Pion. Perhaps his new wealth made him ashamed of having a full-blooded Cree Indian for a wife, someone whose background could never match the new station he now had. He evidently received advice that a country marriage was not a legally binding one; therefore, he married his second cousin, Julia Woolrich—"a lady of good social position and of high respectability"[64]—on May 16, 1832, while Susanne was still boarding with his sister. His "ex-wife" was understandably upset by this turn of events, scolding Connolly and telling him "he would regret it."[65] However, she was sent to Red River and Connolly never lived to regret it and neither did Susanne. After his death the estate went to Julia Connolly and the children from his second marriage. Amelia's brother was probably not suing just for a piece of the estate but to establish that he was a legitimate child from Connolly's marriage.

The younger Connolly won the case based on several key points. Several witnesses testified that Susanne was introduced as Mrs. Connolly and that the marriage had endured for twenty-eight years because most English fur traders followed English law, thus their children were acknowledged as "lawful issue". The defense tried to argue that country marriages were not binding, that repudiation, or "turning off" was quite common, with the former wife being left behind with her family or another fur trader. It was argued that Connolly could not "carry with him this common law of England to Rat River in his knapsack."[66] Justice Monk, however, based his decision largely on the fact that Connolly brought Susanne back to Montreal, giving the marriage legitimacy once they had left fur-trading country. Monk ruled:

> If this Cree marriage was dissolvable at pleasure, Mr. Connolly could perhaps have repudiated his Indian wife, had he done so while residing among the Crees, or where such a barbarous usage prevailed. He might have done so then if he could do so at all—but when he came to Canada, that right ceased.…The Indian woman was his wife here, and would remain so, until the marriage was dissolved by means known to the law.…The evidence shows conclusively that her status was that of a lawful wife, and not that of a harlot, till Connolly repudiated her.[67]

Monk awarded Connolly one-twelfth of his father's estate, but more importantly his birth was now legitimized before the law. The decision was appealed before the Committee of the Privy Council, but the case was settled out of court before a judgment was reached. The Connolly case did not set any legal precedents. In 1886, Jones vs. Fraser declared that a country marriage did not constitute a legal marriage, which reflected the trend against mixed marriages.[68]

Once the case was finally finished in 1869, Amelia Douglas' spirits picked up considerably. She became much more sociable, her health improved and she now believed her children could now move more easily about society.[69] The change in her disposition and her willingness to play the hostess was noticeable when Lady Franklin and her niece paid a second visit to Mrs. Douglas on April 30, 1870:

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[61] Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto, 1958), 197-8.
[62] *Hargrave Correspondence*, William Connolly to James Hargrave, February 28, 1829, 28.
[63] *Ibid*., Murdock McPherson to James Hargrave, March 15, 1842, 376.
[64] "Connolly bs. Woolrich, Superior Court, Montreal, 9 July 1867", *Lower Canada Jurist*, XI, 200.
[65] *Ibid*., 238.
[66] *Ibid*., 215.
[67] *Ibid*, 255-6.
[68] Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, 1980), 242.
[69] Marion Smith, 479; Gould, 58; Valerie Green, *Above Stairs: Social Life in Upper Class Victoria 1843-1918* (Victoria, 1995), 30.

Lady Douglas only, was at home, & surprised our companions, (Cap[tn] Hankin & Mr Musgrove [Musgrave]) by admitting us, as she very rarely sees anyone. I dare say you may not remember that she was a half caste Indian very shy, awkward, & retiring as much into the background as she can possibly do. Mr Musgrave had never before seen her! She was very cordial, & I am sure much pleased to see my Aunt, & vexed that Sir James was out.[70]

What must have pleased Amelia just as much was Sir James' renewed interest, since his retirement, in his children. His youngest daughter, Martha, became the object of his affection, no doubt due to her only being 10-years-old when he retired. When she was eighteen, Douglas sent her to England to continue her education. This close relationship continued until his death in 1877.

After her husband's death, Amelia found satisfaction in her children and grandchildren, and a renewed pride in her Indian heritage. Martha and her family moved into the Douglas home after Sir James' death. Her grandson, 'Ches' Harris, later reminisced about his grandmother during his time living there:

She wasn't at all frail—in fact very lively; she went out driving three or four afternoons a week. We always went to say good-night to Granny before we went to bed—we looked forward to it; she told such wonderful stories, mostly Indian legends. There was an old chief of the Songhees who used to visit and tell stories to us, too.

Granny was very kind, especially to poor people and Indians. They used to come in big canoes with venison or fish or ducks or berries to sell and lnad at the bottom of the garden. She always bought everything they had and gave it to the poor; then she would bring out gunny sacks for the Indians to load up with fruit and vegetables.[71]

Martha Douglas Harris would pay tribute to her mother by including a half dozen of her stories in a book of Cowichan legends she compiled in 1901. "As a little girl I used to listen to these legends with the greatest delight, and in order not to lose them, I have written down what I can remember of them. When written they lose their charm which was in the telling. They need the quaint songs and the sweet voice that told them, the winter glooming and the bright fire as the only light—then were these legends beautiful," she wrote in the short introduction to the Cree stories included in the History and Folklore of the Cowichan Indians.[72] None of these stories is short enough to be included here. However, Martha did tell the author, N. de Bertrand Lugrin, a shorter one about the refusal of a wife to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre, which was included in the 1928 book, The Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island: Lady Douglas used to tell a story of one poor woman who was quite young and attractive, and who rebelled at this treatment.

Her husband had been old and unkind, and she did not mourn him. She gathered together what food she could get and hid it away until she felt that she had enough to start on a long journey. In the meantime she had made friends with the dogs and knew they would not give the alarm. In the middle of the night she stole out of the hut, threw her husband's bones away, and ran to the river. Here she waded along until morning, so that they could not trace her. Then she hid under the bank. She heard the thunder of ponies' feet, and the shouting of the Indians as they searched the woods and the trails for her. The hunt lasted for many days. But she was not discovered. She traveled by night always along the rivers. She wanted to reach a Hudson's Bay fort, where she knew she would be given shelter. Eventually she did so, but not till after weeks of travel, when she was almost worn out from hunger and fatigue.…the Hudson's Bay returned her to her own people, who welcomed her back with the greatest joy. [73]

Lady Douglas' storytelling came to an end when she died in 1890 and was buried beside her husband in Victoria's Ross Bay Cemetery.

A writer once tied the progress of the province of British Columbia to Lady Douglas; both had advanced "from primitive wilderness to prosperous civilization."[74] The title and the wealth were only superficial trappings, as the "primitive wilderness" still beat in Amelia's heart whenever she told her grandchildren a story she had undoubtedly heard from her Cree mother. Although her heritage often caused her pain throughout her long life, she had enough of an indomitable spirit to not forget her past.

Yet should she be included with the other Metis biographies? She certainly identified with her Cree heritage and had no conscious belief that she belonged to a "new nation". Amelia's early history is similar to many mixed-blood women and their children who ended up in Red River, where a Half-Breed culture indeed took root. If her husband had not pursued a career on the west coast, she certainly would have been a contemporary of John Bunn, Elzéar Goulet and Annie Bannatyne. Her inclusion does, however, provide many contrasts and similarities to the other lives looked at, the major similarity being how whites constantly reminded her she was just a Half-Breed.

Additional Reference:

Adams, John. *Old Square-Toes and His Lady: The Life of James and Amelia Douglas*. Victoria: Horsdal & Schubart Publishers Ltd., 2001.

[70] *Lady Franklin Visits the Pacific Northwest*, 118.
[71] 'Ches' Harris quoted in Marion Smith, 481.
[72] Martha Douglas Harris, *History and Folklore of the Cowichan Indians* (Victoria, 1901), 57.
[73] Lugrin, 19-20.
[74] Marion Smith, 473.