

## *Preface*

**T**HE THOUGHT CAME to me that I would travel across British Columbia staying at retreat centers. It was a ridiculous idea—an absurd mix of consumerism and spirituality. St. Benedict used the word “vagabond” for those who “spend all their lives wandering about through different provinces, dwelling three or four days now in one monastery, then in another.” What finally persuaded me to go was reading Samuel Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. He went simply because it was something he wanted to do.

As a Scot, I wanted to discover along the way the Britishness of British Columbia, a Britishness that suddenly appears out of nowhere in the nineteenth century. Who were these early explorers, traders, and colonists who came to this distant land? And what about

the missionaries, many of them French-Canadian, who established the Church here?

Almost all the retreat centers on my route were Catholic: Queenswood in Victoria; Bethlehem in Nanaimo; Westminster Abbey in Mission; Immaculate Heart of Mary in Cache Creek; and Marywood in Cranbrook. Emmanuella House of Prayer in Kelowna is Episcopalian, and Johnson's Landing Retreat Center, where I took a workshop with Dorothy Maclean, is not identified with any tradition. Like most things in British Columbia, all these retreat centers are modern. The oldest is Westminster Abbey, which dates only from the 1950s.

My journey was not really a pilgrimage, but like *The Canterbury Tales*, the present volume contains an element of fiction. The journey described here as a continuous narrative is a composite of several, shorter trips.

Eileen Stephens and Gerald Formosa provided suggestions at an early stage of the project. I am also indebted to the many local history authors whose books provided background information.

The journey began in Victoria.

## *Queenswood*

**R**ACKLOADS OF BROCHURES on the ferry alerted the visitor to the many attractions on offer in Victoria. Absent from them was any mention of afternoon tea at the Empress Hotel. This was a ritual too well-known to need any advertising. Indeed, a glance at the brochures, with their Royal London this and Ye Olde English that, gave the impression that Victoria had forever been a city of tea-drinkers from the motherland. In fact, in its early history, the city was a whole lot rougher than its genteel image suggests.

Victoria's reason for being was an influx of Americans several hundred miles to the south. After the Treaty of 1818, the region the British called the Columbia Department and the Americans called the Oregon Country was jointly administered by both the British and the

Americans. The chief British presence was the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Fort Vancouver on the mouth of the Columbia River.

Sir George Simpson, regional governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, predicted that this odd arrangement could not possibly last. He identified three problems. First, the Columbia River was not the best place for a port, since ocean-going vessels would flounder in its shallow waters. Second, he doubted that London would be willing to defend its claims in this remote region. And third, Americans were now pouring into the Oregon Territory by the wagon load, tempted by cheap land grants from their federal government.

On one of his supervisory voyages up the Pacific coast on the *Beaver*, Governor Simpson noticed the southern tip of Vancouver Island. He thought this unexplored place attractive and referred to it as an "Elysium." Given that he wanted to establish a position north of Fort Vancouver, he sent his Chief Factor, James Douglas, to build a new fort. In spring 1843, Douglas arrived to construct the fort on Vancouver Island, securely inside wholly British territory. James Douglas, too, liked the look of the place, and he wrote that it was a "perfect Eden."

## QUEENSWOOD

The summer of 1843 was a good one. Though Douglas's work party was poorly equipped, construction went well. By the end of the year the new fort was complete. It was named after the young Queen Victoria.

Sir George Simpson's prediction proved prescient. Three years later, in the Oregon Treaty of 1846, the British surrendered the territory south of the 49th parallel to exclusive American control.

Fort Victoria rapidly became a center for trade. At first, the principal merchandise was fur. But beaver hats were going out of fashion in England. Salmon, potatoes, cranberries, and timber became the goods traded. Visiting Royal Navy ships needed supplies, and enterprising traders began to fish and farm to provision them. A sawmill exported finished lumber to San Francisco as early as 1849.

The British settlement of Fort Victoria developed into a self-conscious effort to form a colony. Farm land was sold for a pound an acre. For every hundred acres, the purchaser was required to bring with him five men, or three married couples, to work the land. Small and affordable city lots were laid out for laborers, with larger and pricier suburban lots for the middle classes.

To be a colonist at that time required a serious