



James Douglas: Father of British Columbia (Quest Biography)

Julie H. Ferguson

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James Douglas's story is one of high adventure in pre-Confederation Canada. It weaves through the heart of Canadian and Pacific Northwest history when British Columbia was a wild land, Vancouver didn't exist, and Victoria was a muddy village.

Part black and illegitimate, Douglas was born in British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1803 to a Scottish plantation owner and a mixed-race woman. After schooling in Scotland, the fifteen-year-old Douglas sailed to Canada in 1819 to join the fur trade. With roads non-existent, he travelled thousands of miles each year, using the rivers and lakes as his highways. He paddled canoes, drove dogsleds, and snowshoed to his destinations.

Douglas became a hard-nosed fur trader, married a part-Cree wife, and nearly provoked a war between Britain and the United States over the San Juan Islands on the West Coast. When he was in his prime, he established Victoria and secured the western region of British North America from the Russian Empire and the expansionist Americans. Eventually, Douglas became the controversial governor of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia and oversaw the frenzied Fraser and Cariboo gold rushes. Named one the the Best Books of 2010 (nonfiction - grades 7-12) by Resource Links Magazine.

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