

Nanaimo Historical Society fonds: Series 2. Sound Recordings

Tape 3

Speech delivered by Lord Amory to Premier Bennett, Victoria B.C. March 12, 1966

Transcribed by: Nancy Lee Deslauriers, Nov/Dec. 2007

An unidentified person introduces Lord Amory.

Speaker: Premier Douglas, who was then chief factor, welcomed the idea of colonial government being established where he had been able to be the supreme dictator. But the fact that British rule was going to be established because it gave the Hudson's Bay a sense of security because the ambitions of a few people from south of the border, ah, charmed the presence of British sailors here was an effective check to any of those further ambitions. But it also sounded the death knell of the monopoly, which the Hudson's Bay Company had for the trading privileges here. When the present governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Lord Amory, comes from that wonderful country of Devon in the south of England where his family has been associated for many years. Last year he was appointed governor of the Hudson's Bay Company following a line of great administrators and thus closely linking him with Sir James Douglas of old and the events, which we now celebrate today and will continue to celebrate throughout this year. Therefore, my very great pleasure to introduce to you Lord Amory, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. (Applause)

Lord Amory: My first visit to Victoria was almost 43 years ago and if there's anything any of you would like to hear about British Columbia in those early days I shall be glad of course to, ah, (laughter) tell you. But uh, I went hunting and today a mountain ram's head does testimony tribute to my prowess of those ah, days. It's getting rather dim now and I'm almost beginning to think that, in fact, on that occasion I arrived by canoe down the Fraser River. (Laughter) Give me a little more time and that is what I shall (pause for effect) (laughter) think. But I also would like to recall ah, the very happy memories I have of the (inaudible) that I had the honor of being British High Commissioner in Ottawa. During that time, I got an opportunity of visiting all parts of this great country and I met and made acquaintances with a large number of Canadians and it's been a joy to me to remember those days. I've been thinking back when I read the newspaper this morning. I just anxiously thought back to the dates I had been in Ottawa (laughter, table thumping, applause) and I was glad to find (inaudible) you see it was all over before I arrived. And anyhow, to a shy young bachelor like myself, if I had given a ring I would have remembered it vividly. (Laughter)

Now, Your Honour, Mr. Premier, our company now within four years of its tercentenary is immensely proud of its long and I think constructive association with this famous province. We feel our roots are very deep in the soil of British Columbia, and ah, I would like to show you that it is our strong desire to continue and to strengthen further our active links with the

province and to participate in the future as we have in the past in the tremendous growth that clearly lies ahead. All our policies are directed to that end. When (inaudible) your kind invitation to me before our Board of Directors, it obtained an instant and enthusiastic approval. They reflected on those mutually rewarding days when responsibility to this country was shared in a productive partnership of Crown and company. They recall too with wistful memory the great day in 1849, when the Hudson's Bay Company received a grant of the whole of Vancouver Island (laughter) and ah, they recalled with (inaudible) poignant feelings of melancholy the 3rd of April, 1867 when the island was reconveyed to the Crown. (Laughter) It occurred in a flash to my intelligent colleagues ever watchful of the welfare of humanity in general and the interests of our proprietors in particular that (inaudible) [parajuncture?] Her Majesty's present administration in British Columbia had thought that it would be a nice little gesture on this happy occasion to restore the status quo (inaudible) (applause). It is true that as part of the bargain of that occasion the company was induced to undertake as well, the management of government including responsibility for public works, law enforcement, education and welfare. The company thought, in their innocence, that as fur traders they had had experience of every kind of trouble known to the human race and accepted the terms. In the next two years, they and their Chief Factor learned what seemed incredible too. Mr. Premier and your distinguished colleagues that political government is not always just a bed of roses. (Laughter) Nevertheless, so deep is the sense of public duty of my colleagues that they have authorized me to say Your Honour Mr. Premier that uh, in the event of our company being once more entrusted with the government of Vancouver Island we should be prepared instantly to restore the Medical Officer, the School Master, the Chaplain and the police force formed from retired Hudson's Bay employees, (laughter) in fact by the whole apparatus of administration precisely as it existed in 1849. One of the happiest arrangements for the Hudson's Bay Company at any rate was the combination for some years of the functions of Governor of Vancouver Island and Chief Factor of Hudson's Bay Company. Perhaps uh, in this case Your Honour, there is a precedent worth repeating. Another excellent precedent surely was established when our Chief Factor James Douglas had the happy thought of charging every entrant to British Columbia ah, two dollars head tax which that tax was paid instantly into the kitty of the Hudson's Bay Company. (Laughter) It was in that remarkable man James Douglas that cooperation between the Crown and the Company was most dramatically personified. First as a young clerk, and then as Chief Factor, and then as Governor and Chief Factor combined and finally Governor of Vancouver Island and the Mainland united as the Colony of British Columbia, he served our own company and his country with steadfast loyalty and devotion and outstanding abilities. It is not perhaps always plain sailing as you, Your Honour, hinted just now. On one occasion, Governor Blanshard decided that Chief Factor Douglas had exceeded his authority. He hauled him into court and had him convicted. But alas, Governor Blanshard had neither constable nor jail. It was his practice on such occasions to ask Hudson's Bay Company kindly to accommodate the felon in [fort?] and to appoint one of their servants to guard him. On this occasion ah, where James Douglas was the felon, this admirably practical arrangement broke down. Chief Factor Douglas was in charge of the Fort [and]declined to provide either jail or jailer. I rather think you were right, your Honour and ah,

James Douglas was a little perhaps impatient of His Honour of the day and I very much doubt whether Governor Blanshard would have offered the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company a hot bath and drinks as you did me this evening. Professor Walter Sage, speaking on the occasion of the unveiling of the tablet in Parliament Buildings in Victoria to the memory of Sir James Douglas said, "In Douglas there was a certain kind of greatness. He towered over his contemporaries. If it had not been for his firm, wise, though timeless term rule (?) (inaudible), British Columbia and Vancouver Island might never have survived the storms and stresses of their earlier years. And our company holds his memory in the highest honour. Alexander MacKenzie, Simon Fraser, David Thompson, George Simpson, James Douglas. What courage, tenacity and resolution those names stand for. We marvel today at their achievements and you and we are the heirs of their heroism. When Alexander MacKenzie arrived at Bella Coola in 1793, he was the first white man to cross the North American continent north of Mexico. He came as a representative of the ah, Northwest Company as did Fraser and Thompson a decade or so later. In 1821, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company combined. It's significant to recall that when the Board of the Hudson's Bay Company in London decided to send one of their members out to Canada to finalize this merger, they chose an individual who was described in their report as the only single man on the Board of Direction. This habit. Your Honour. of selecting a bachelor for the admission of danger seems to have persisted to the present day. (Laughter) Our Company are proud that so many of their trading posts established in British Columbia in those early days have become fine cities and that in their development our company has over all the intervening years a continuous record of service in British Columbia. In anticipation of your generous hospitality tonight, I was reading the record of dinner provided in honour of our visiting representative in British Columbia in the year [1882?]. I quote, "there was an abundance of bear and beaver meat, bear and salmon oil, berry cakes and berries of different kinds, dry cod roes and salmon roes that had been put under ground in the state in which they were taken out of the fish and they now reduced to a jelly may be called the quintessence of putrefaction." (Laughter) One of my colleagues (inaudible) will be eagerly awaiting the report I give them of the ah, (laughter) (inaudible) entertainment you have offered me this evening. I was also reading about the early days of our company's existence in British Columbia. Our commissioned Gentlemen as they were called were always referred to as Mister by superiors as well as subordinates. Our Chief Factor always wore a dark frock coat with a tartan cloak in inauspicious weather surmounted by a beaver hat with and oiled silk topper. I will do better when I come next time I come. I didn't select this bit of information quite in time. Um, I'm sure when he started or returned from a journey, he was accorded a salute from the Fort. I'm sure now that if I dropped that hint something could be laid on in future in that direction (laughter).

He presided, our Chief Factor that is, at the head of the mess table where no frivolous discussion was tolerated and it's said that the books that the Hudson's Bay Company sent out with their annual ship was selected for the informative work. There was no trash. Lady Chatterley's Lover would stand no chance of getting through in those days. This disciplined and austere spirit is strictly maintained today and explains why it is impossible for me to

address this distinguished company tonight in other than a deeply serious vein. (Laughter)

One cannot refer to those early days without paying a tribute to the gallant old paddle steamer the S.S. Beaver. Launched on the Thames in 1845, she reached the Columbia River after a passage of 163 days. She then served the Hudson's Bay Company for no less than 39 years and other employers for a further 14 before she ended her honorable career of over half a century when, I believe, she ran aground on the point of the entrance to Vancouver Harbour. There's one other thing Premier, I ought perhaps to say how glad I am that I'm speaking before you and not after you. If I had been speaking after you I sense you might have asked me a question, "When is the Hudson's Bay Company coming to Canada?" And I don't know what I should have said, it reminds me of the days in the House of Commons when I asked questions - I think I should have, given you the sort of answer I remember a Minister in the House of Commons giving once when he had a question, he wasn't sure what the answer was too. And he said the answer to the question the Honourable Gentleman asked is partly in the affirmative and partly in the negative. (Laughter) And the Honourable Gentleman leapt to his feet and said yes but is all very well for the minister to say that but which part is in the affirmative and which part is in the negative. The minister said that that is the question that I feel I can leave to the utmost confidence of the innate intelligence of the honourable gentlemen. I don't think that would have been good enough for the Premier. Mr. Premier, nearly 200 years ago one of our Chief Factors wrote gloomily home to our head office. He wrote, "Last year the Canadians, having traded four out of six canoes made for your service, William Thompson ordered your cipher to be marked on the forts (?) of the canoes built this year. I have here Mr. Premier, a canoe built by one Benjamin Smith in the year 1830. He built it of silver gilt and it doesn't bear the cipher of the Hudson's Bay Company on its forts (?) our Director's felt it would best be placed in safe hands before the Canadians had the chance of trading it. (Laughter) I ask you therefore, Mr. Premier, if you will accept this canoe as a symbol of the pride and gratitude that our company feel that it has been our privilege to have participated in the historic event we are celebrating today and to accept too our heartfelt good wishes for the challenging days that lie ahead. (Applause)

Premier Bennett: A beacon fire is used to announce events of great import. Before me is a torch which shortly I shall light. From this banquet room, it will be carried by special runner to a barge anchored in the Inner Harbour on which a bonfire has been prepared and I've lighted a few bonfires in my time. (Laughter and applause) Before me is a torch which shortly I shall light --- end of tape.

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