



Old Square Toes and His Lady

John Adams

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August 12, 2003, marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Sir James Douglas. Although he played an integral role in British Columbia's history, in many ways Douglas remains misunderstood and an enigma. He is known for his contradictory qualities—he was self-serving, racist, a military hawk, sometimes violent and arrogant. Yet he was also extremely community oriented, a humanitarian, brave and a devoted family member.

John Adam's bestseller *Old Square-Toes and His Lady: The Life of James and Amelia Douglas* serves as an important source of information regarding Douglas's public and private lives. As Adams writes, [the term] old square-toes characterizes him as an unbending, stodgy, boring individual, but nothing could be further from the truth.

At the pinnacle of his career, Douglas was knighted by order of Queen Victoria. Considering his modest, mixed-race beginnings in South America, his lofty status is, indeed, remarkable. Equally so is the life of his wife, Amelia. She was also of mixed blood, her mother being Cree and her father Irish. But unlike Douglas, who was educated in Scotland, she never left the northern forests until they married. Their ending up as a knight and lady of the British Empire was an unusual achievement.

Old Square-Toes discusses the Douglasses' diverse experiences of astonishing contrasts, from crossing North America by canoe to touring Europe by train, from Native uprisings to the frantic gold rush. Besides finding glory, they also faced grief in losing seven of their beloved children. This is a story of the adventure, heartbreak, and devotion that lies at the roots of western Canada.

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