

*Letters from Windermere 1912-1914* (Recollections of the Pioneers of British Columbia, 5), edited by R. Cole Harris and Elizabeth Phillips. Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1984. Pp. xxii, 243.

Captain John (Jack) Phillips, late of the Lincolnshire Regiment, and Daisy, his bride of a month, sailed from Liverpool for Halifax in April 1912. They were two of the 150,000 Britishers swept up in the high tide of immigrants that flooded into Canada that year. A colourful brochure distributed by the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruit Lands Company, which pictured Windermere as a smiling land of plenty, had persuaded Jack to try his luck there.

Jack had spent most of his army career in Africa; he knew nothing about farming. Daisy, accustomed to the comfort of a middle-class home in Windsor, complete with servants, knew nothing about housekeeping. Obviously the move to the wilds of British Columbia would involve major adjustments, both physical and social, the severity of which neither Jack nor his wife foresaw. These highly personal letters, written by Daisy to her mother and to her sister Freda, with a few from Jack mixed in, chronicle their reactions and tribulations during their relatively short sojourn in Canada, which was brought to an end in 1914 by the outbreak of World War I and Jack's recall to active service.

Instead of irrigated lands and flourishing orchards, which the company's brochure had led him to expect, Jack had to make do with a 28-acre wilderness lot bordering on Toby Creek, miles from the nearest settlements at Wilmer and Invermere. Yet in important respects Jack had a much easier time than Daisy. Though money was limited, he was able to hire men to clear, plough and fence an initial five-acre plot, and to plant a first crop of potatoes. By contrast, Daisy, totally inexperienced, had to get along alone as best she could. She had never cooked or washed so much as a handkerchief, and some of her first requests to those at home were for simple manuals to help her with washing, cooking, sewing, gardening and care of poultry. No wonder she would report presently that the hard work and lack of help made Canada "chiefly a land for men and a very hard one for women."

They were able to move into their house, built to their own design in a bungalow style common in India, at the end of September. Its completion was a major event in more ways than one. They were able at last to surround themselves with the furniture, china, silver and pictures that

they had brought from England. Daisy's objective was to make the interior as English as possible; when she closed the door, one senses, she wanted to feel that she had shut out Canada. Indoors, English manners and customs ruled whenever possible. Tea was served at 3:45, dinner at 7. "We breakfast and lunch in the kitchen," Daisy wrote, "but our evening meal is a great feature and we have it in style, entrée dishes and all, and we change always." It was only in the last months of her stay that she developed any affection for her new surroundings. Earlier she had written: "I admire the mountains but I shall never love them. My heart or real true love, is and will be in England."

Sorrows and disappointments came their way, but they were sustained by circumstances. A constant stream of letters from Daisy's mother and sister helped greatly with morale; Daisy confessed that they "certainly helped to pull me through what was a trying time, though perhaps Jack does not know." Jack at times was insensitive to Daisy's problems (he insisted on open windows in winter, while she suffered from the cold), but they were a devoted and happy couple. The family letters were supplemented by innumerable parcels and many periodicals. The latter included not only the *Windsor & Eton Express*, which Daisy's family owned and published, but *Punch*, the *Cornhill*, the *Overseas Mail* (which Jack devoured) and the *Lady's Pictorial*, beloved by Daisy. They made the Phillips bungalow more than ever an English enclave. The few neighbours, though living at a distance and difficult to visit in winter, also helped greatly. Almost all were English, and Daisy's descriptions of clothes and furnishings show that, like her, they were seeking to recreate England in the wilderness. Some, notably Captain Young and General Poett, had an army background. Daisy commented: "Jack likes everyone, but gets on with the Service [people] better than the others except Dr. Turnor", a physician who later left the land and resumed medical practice. (These and other neighbours figure in Winnifred Weir's *Tales of the Windermere*, though she makes no mention of the Phillipses themselves.)

The letters run along in an unbroken series until August 1913, when a break occurs, and they do not resume until February 1914. Baby Elizabeth had arrived in the interval, and one suspects a specially trying and perhaps unhappy time for Daisy. Within a few months war was on the horizon. On their wedding day Jack had told Daisy that duty would have to come first. He had added: "Never think about it any more, but understand I am a soldier." Despite this reassurance, fear of war was

always at the back of Daisy's mind. In November 1912 she mentioned the arrival of war maps on which Jack was happily plotting "advances, battles, etc." with black and white pins. Presumably the reference was to the first Balkan War. When Britain's declaration came in August 1914 Daisy knew what to expect: Jack would be called up and Windermere would have to be abandoned. They left in the last days of December, and her worst fears were soon realized: Jack died of wounds in France less than four months later.

These letters have much more than a human interest value, they are significant as a case history. Their struggle to cope with completely new conditions was one that Jack and Daisy had in common with many thousands of other middle-class English immigrants who came to Canada. For them the whole episode had one saving grace; the war called them away from Windermere before it became bleakly apparent that their fruit-farming venture was doomed to failure. When the time came to leave, Daisy discovered that she was sorry to go. She referred to "the wrench of leaving" and in her last letter added: "I know I love every possession and corner of this place and there is no knowing when we shall see it again." She and her beloved Jack had spent all but a few months of their brief married life at Windermere. As Dr. Harris remarks, in retrospect it became "the golden time of her life." Her "vision of Windermere" and the colourful pictures in the brochure that lured her and Jack to it thus "converged in the end."

The best review of this book would probably be a reprint of Dr. Harris' informative, sensitive and highly perceptive introduction. He rightly decided to keep footnotes to a minimum, but went oddly astray on two or three matters that have little to do with the text. The railway from Golden to Athalmer was completed in 1914, not 1917. (Daisy wrote happily on March 29 that she "had seen her first train after two years and felt quite giddy.") The famous spiral tunnels on the Canadian Pacific and the Connaught Tunnel are miles apart, not one and the same, and the German cruiser *Emden* was destroyed in November 1914, when Daisy noted the rumour to that effect; it was the *Dresden* that was sunk in the South Pacific in 1915.

*Vancouver, B.C.*

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