

## **SCOTS in CANADA – SIR JAMES DOUGLAS**

February is “Black History Month” in Canada, being so designated by the Government of Canada in December 1995.

In that vein, what many do not seem to know is that Sir James Douglas (1803-1877), the first Governor of the Colony of British Columbia, was up to half black (being known as a “Scotch West Indian” or a “mulatto”) and was one of the early truly multicultural leaders in BC, if not Canada. (The colony of British Columbia was established on August 2, 1858 - BC did not join Canada, as the 6<sup>th</sup> Province, until July 20, 1871).

James Douglas was born in 1803 in British Guiana (now Guyana - on the on the eastern edge of Venezuela). His father was John Douglas, a sugar plantation owner/planter from Glasgow, Scotland. His Mother was Martha Anne Tefler, a Creole (mixed black and European ancestry) or “free coloured” (now there is an awful phrase!) from Barbados.

In 1828, he married Amelia Connolly, who was half Cree or “Red River Metis”. She was the daughter of a Cree mother and of William Connolly, the Hudson Bay Company’s Chief Factor of New Caledonia, headquartered in Fort St James, BC.

Together they had 6 children who survived childhood. Those children, racially, would have been ¼ Cree, up to ¼ black and the rest white European.

James Douglas’s family was truly a precursor to the multi-cultural British Columbians we know today!

And in BC, he has been honoured with his own day – by an act of the BC Legislature, every year, November 19 is known as Douglas Day.”

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As an aside, there is another Douglas, also hailing from the Glasgow area, who is as well, or more renowned in Canada than Sir James Douglas.

Tommy Douglas (1904-1986) was born in Falkirk, Scotland (20 miles from Glasgow). Among his many accomplishments, he is known as the “Father of Canadian Medicare” (1947) and he brought in Canada’s first Bill of Rights (1947). He was also a Baptist Minister, Premier of Saskatchewan (1944-1961) and first leader of the Federal New Democratic Party (1961-1971). In 2004, following a public contest, CBC named him as Canada’s “Greatest Canadian”.

He also has his own government (in this case Saskatchewan) legislated day, October 20, known as “Tommy Douglas Day”, in the province of Saskatchewan.

He was the father-in-law of Donald Sutherland and grandfather of Kiefer Sutherland.

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As a further aside, I have three personal “it’s a small world” connections to Sir James Douglas:

FIRST, it apparently wasn’t easy having that mixed background, even with his elevated position. James Douglas led a group away from the Anglican Church in Victoria, after they either refused

to recognize, or looked down on, his “non-traditional” wedding to an Aboriginal (and perhaps mixed race background). He created the “Church of our Lord, a “Reformed Episcopal” church.

My parents met, and were married, in Trinidad and Tobago (off the Venezuela coast). When they came back to Canada, my Mom was 8 months pregnant with me. Her parents were then living in Victoria, BC. She hadn't seen them in four years and my Dad had never met them. So my parents “detoured” to Victoria (my Dad had a parish in Nova Scotia) for a couple of months while I was born. Dad could not afford not to work, so he “filled in” as guest minister at that very Church of Our Lord.

SECOND, my high school, Mount Douglas Senior Secondary, was named after Mount Douglas, which, in turn, had been named after James Douglas.

THIRD, the law building at University of Victoria was then named after Matthew Begbie, the first Chief Justice of BC, sworn in on the same day with James Douglas. When I graduated from law school, the mother of a high school friend gave me a cup and saucer set from the estate of Governor Douglas, as she thought that Chief Justice Begbie may well have sipped tea from that set.

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