

**Agnes Deans Cameron:  
Against the Current**  
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In 1912, Agnes Deans Cameron's funeral cortège was the largest the city of Victoria had witnessed to date and the *Daily Colonist* declared: "It is possible that when the history of British Columbia comes to be written the name of Agnes Deans Cameron will be inscribed therein as the most remarkable woman citizen of the province."<sup>1</sup> Despite this praise and her accomplishments as a prominent educator, author and adventurer her name has remained unknown even to residents of her native Victoria.

Agnes Deans Cameron was a determined woman who devoted her energies to two causes throughout her lifetime: the reform of education and the promotion of immigration to western and northern Canada. The underlying motivation in all her activities appears to have been an unwavering belief in equal rights. This belief can be traced throughout her life from her early support of woman suffrage to her later toppling of popular prejudices about the Inuit. Because of this recognizable theme in her life, Cameron can be identified with the first generation of Canadian feminists who have been called "equal rights feminists". These women, such as Cameron and Flora MacDonald Denison, believed in the natural equality of all human beings as opposed to the second generation, termed "maternal feminists",<sup>2</sup> who believed in woman's moral superiority and her prerogative to make public and political decisions affecting the domestic sphere. Cameron's contemporaries in Victoria, including Maria Pollard Grant, Cecelia McNaughton Spofford, and Margaret Townsend Jenkins fell into the latter category. Cameron, like Flora MacDonald Denison, was known to have occasionally incorporated fragments of maternal feminist thought into her arguments when it appeared to support her logic.

It is unclear how Cameron adopted the equal rights philosophy. Little is known of her parents except that her mother, Jessie Anderson, was born in Dalkeith, Scotland, and worked there as a schoolteacher before emigrating to California with her brother during the gold rush. There she married another Scot, Duncan Cameron, with whom she had four children: William George, Charles Napier, Margaret Helen and Barbara. The Camerons, having heard of the British Columbia gold rush, moved north, arriving in Victoria in February, 1860. They were early members of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Duncan Cameron obtained employment as a shoemaker and later as a miner and contractor. The family grew in Victoria with the birth of two more daughters: Jessie Clara, in 1861, and the youngest, Agnes Deans, in 1863. Eventually, both of Agnes's brothers married, but only one of the Cameron women, Barbara, ever married. Agnes appears to have shared an interest in politics with her eldest brother, William, who served as a Victoria alderman and in 1903 was elected as a member of the Provincial Legislature.

Agnes Deans Cameron, who was educated in the Victoria public schools, in 1876 became a member of the first class of Victoria High School.<sup>3</sup> She, like many women of her day, chose teaching as her profession and thus continued a family tradition

established by her mother and maternal grandmother. Jessie and Duncan Cameron seemed to have instilled in all their children the necessity of having a skill as Agnes explained later in her life: "Like most oversea girls, I was brought up to do something and to earn my own living."<sup>4</sup> Cameron obtained her first teaching certificate at age thirteen, but continued her education until age sixteen when she secured her first teaching position at Angela College, Victoria.<sup>5</sup> She later taught in Comox and Vancouver.

During her teaching career, she attained a number of "firsts": in 1890, she reappeared in Victoria where she became the first woman high school teacher in British Columbia and in 1894, she was appointed the first woman principal in the province.<sup>6</sup> Aside from a full-time teaching career, Cameron began establishing a part-time career as a journalist. Her earliest articles, such as those written about the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, occasionally appeared in the Victoria newspapers.<sup>7</sup>

Cameron did not receive much public recognition for her "firsts" as a woman teacher. She did not become newsworthy until May, 1890, when a controversy arose over her whipping of a student. The case concerned Herbert Burkholder whom she described as one of her oldest students who had remained in the same class for four years. She strapped him for having been unwilling to cooperate and participate in class.<sup>8</sup> A dispute between Cameron and Burkholder's parents was quickly blown out of proportion. In this instance, the school trustees wholeheartedly supported Cameron who was then First Assistant of Victoria Boys' School. The case was resolved after Burkholder admitted his guilt and promised obedience; only then would Cameron re-admit him to her class.

The Burkholder case is important because it indicates Cameron's character and determination at age twenty-six. In carrying out a disciplinary matter which most other teachers would have turned over to their male principals, she asserted an authority until then only used by men. At a time when female teachers were numerous, but female school administrators rare, Cameron usurped the power which she must have already set as her goal.

In May, 1895, the two Victoria newspapers, the *Victoria Daily Times* and *The Daily Colonist*, embarked on an unusual undertaking. The issues of May 27 and 28, respectively, were edited by the Local Council of Women. They published newspapers that contained a combination of the usual daily news plus articles about women's issues and activities, many written from a feminist point of view.<sup>9</sup> Cameron contributed articles to both editions of which the most interesting was "Suffrage for Women" in which she clearly outlined her equal rights argument. She stated three common arguments for not granting women the franchise and refuted them in a concise, logical manner. She concluded in a most forceful fashion:

It is a question of justice. Woman should have the right of suffrage because she is judged by law. If she commits a crime she is amenable to the same law as a man. Since I am man's equal 'under' the law, then surely I should be his 'equal' before the law. Men make the laws by which my property is taxed. It is the old wrong of 'taxation without representation'....

Woman will be yet accorded suffrage for the simple reason that she should have it.<sup>10</sup>

Cameron's brand of feminism is made clear by comparing her thoughts with another contributor to the Women's Edition, C.L. Davie, whose article on suffrage appeared in the column next to Cameron's. Her pleas are those of a maternal feminist:

Is it not of vital interest to the mothers to know what shall be the conditions of the streets where her little ones must pass? In her solicitude for her children's welfare is she not deeply concerned in the legislative enactments that regulate the paving of the streets; the granting of franchise to street railways; the location of garbage boxes, sewerage, drainage, supply of pure, wholesome water, and other sanitary conditions; the number and moral character of policemen, who are the guardians of the public highways; do these things not affect her children's welfare?<sup>11</sup>

The differences in these two women's approach to suffrage is that the former claims it as a right, the latter for the sake of protecting her children.

Linda Hale has noted Cameron as one of the early (pre-1910) suffrage leaders of Victoria.<sup>12</sup> She was undoubtedly one of the cause's strongest supporters but she did not attack the problem with the endless energy of her contemporaries such as Susan Crease, Maria Grant, and Cecelia Spofford. Due to her equal rights point of view, she may not have had the popular support to become a leader.

To be considered an early suffrage leader, each candidate had to meet at least three of the four criteria established by Hale. They were: "...held the position of head of a committee responsible for woman suffrage in a woman's organization; frequent and prominent campaigner; leader of suffrage delegations; elected to public office."<sup>13</sup> The only criterion that Cameron definitely met was that of having held public office, as she was elected a Victoria School Trustee in 1906. However, her motivation in running for public office was not linked to suffrage. Her candidacy arose as a result of public indignation over her firing from the principalship of South Park School. As for the other criteria: she did not lead a suffrage delegation; her campaigning was not done publicly; and she does not appear to have headed a committee responsible for woman suffrage. She did chair a meeting of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association at the National Council of Women Conference in Victoria in 1900. Her exact connections with this Toronto-based organization remain unclear. Hale correctly pointed out that Cameron was the only one of these early suffragist women with paid employment.<sup>14</sup>

She was never preoccupied with suffrage so the topic surfaces in very few of her numerous articles. Suffrage was merely one aspect of equal rights to Cameron. She was much more engrossed in education and believed that she could help develop active minds by introducing certain principles to her students.

In July, 1900, the National Council of Women held its annual meeting in Victoria. Concurrently, a Teachers' Conference with delegates from the Northwest and from as far east as Manitoba, was held and was chaired by Cameron. A major issue discussed by the teachers was the regulation of salaries. They concluded that wages must be awarded irrespective of sex and only on the basis of merit.<sup>15</sup> The topic may have been

raised initially by Cameron as she could have sensed that it was soon to become an issue in Victoria. The most important accomplishment of the conference was the formation of a national standing committee of teachers representing the seven provinces and the Northwest Territories, to be headed by Cameron.<sup>16</sup> The committee planned to affiliate with the National Council of Women of Canada.

Cameron presented a paper to the National Council of Women Conference on the cooperation between parents and teachers. It was so well-received that a unanimous decision was made to have a number of copies printed for immediate circulation.<sup>17</sup> The paper, "Parent and Teacher", is one of her most direct and well-written articles on education. She contrasted what she called "patriarchal times", when parents taught their children all the skills they required, to the current state of education where "the parent as an active factor in the equation educational [sic] has reduced his personal responsibility pretty nearly to zero."<sup>18</sup> She complained that teachers were not asking for more responsibility, but less in the hope that parents, church and society in general would recognize their neglected responsibilities in the raising of children. She was tired of having the school system and especially teachers used as the scapegoat for all that was wrong with children. Her lashing continued:

Today an impartial observer would think that the five hours of school was the only period of a child's mental activity, that he remained comatose for the rest of his time - for everyone with a teaching mission makes his demand of the child during these five teaching hours.<sup>19</sup>

Cameron particularly opposed the then popular idea of introducing technical programs into the school curriculum in order to provide students with a "practical" education. She believed "the enthusiasts among the crusaders would teach every boy to be a carpenter and every girl to cook."<sup>20</sup> Her opposition likely grew out of her belief in equal rights.

The move to introduce domestic science into the Victoria classrooms was wholeheartedly supported by the Local Council of Women of which Cameron was a member. In their enthusiasm, the Council arranged to purchase the necessary equipment for the schools.<sup>21</sup> Cameron, who was furious, stated her view as an "obstructionist".<sup>22</sup>

Last year this Local Council of Women were all agog for domestic science. When I, opening my eastern windows which look towards the sun, saw the procession of cooking stoves and stew pans, carpenters' benches and jack planes heading for the schoolroom door, I lifted up a feeble wail for mercy. In this whole Council of women I found no friend. I was anathema and ultra-conservative. I was unprogressive and lazy. Did I know that cooking was a good thing, a most necessary thing?<sup>23</sup>

Education meant something much more substantial than merely learning how to perform simple tasks for the home or job. Cameron expressed her unpopular belief about the purpose of education: "The age cries 'teach us how to get a living!' Let us

teachers listen rather to the still small voice calling from the deep heart of humanity itself. 'Teach us how to live!'"<sup>24</sup>

Cameron believed the bounds of education extended beyond the limits of the laws of English grammar or mathematics. Students must leave her class with a clear understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship. She believed that children exposed to the ideas of a changing society would be best equipped to participate in community decisions. In an address to the Local Council of Women, she bemoaned women's current lack of political interest:

With our own homes we must all begin, our first duties are here, and here is our influence greatest. Too many of us not only begin here, but end here. Such people are good to their own, and kind to everyone whom they in social and business circles touch. All responsibility beyond this they ignore. If you approach these people on any question of municipal reform they say loftily, "Oh, I never meddle with such things; I never did take any interest in politics.' If you persist you will be told virtually that they 'leave politics alone', and 'attend to their own business', and very likely they will politely intimate that it wouldn't be a bad plan for you to do the same."<sup>25</sup>

Cameron's transformation from a quiet hard-working teacher into an outspoken one who challenged the male authority structure and the curriculum and priorities of the schools did not go unnoticed. Through her frequent letters to the local newspapers, her actions not only gained the attention of the school board, but of the general public.

An incident which placed her in the news again occurred in 1901. Sex discrimination in teachers' salaries, which had been discussed at the Teachers' Conference the previous year, became an issue in Victoria. The school trustees proposed a salary increase for male teachers only. Cameron spoke out vigorously against the move, calling it "retrogressive and demoralizing".<sup>26</sup> Having organized the women teachers to protect themselves, she stated that they: "are one in the opinion that it is a vicious principle to establish any such basis of payment or salary as that of sex."<sup>27</sup> Cameron exhibited her forte of creating clear, concise, logical arguments in cases such as this one. She pointed out that she was capable of holding positions formerly held by men (principal and assistant principal), at the same salary as men, and saw no reason for this practice to be discontinued. She further believed that sex discrimination in salaries would not only hurt women, but could end men's participation in the profession if women could be hired for less. The two Victoria papers backed Cameron, but they were not strong enough to sway the trustees who continued with their plan.

Sex discrimination was not the only seemingly modern ill that Cameron protested. When perusing a British education journal, she was struck by the prevalence of age discrimination in teacher advertisements which specified: "No one over forty need apply". Cameron, at age thirty-eight, was shocked. She promptly drafted an article for the *Educational Journal of Western Canada* in which she asked: "What do

they do with their 'Schoolmistresses' when that fatal milestone is passed? Kill then off? One wonders."<sup>28</sup>

In June, 1901, the Victoria school trustees finally found an excuse to rid themselves of the woman who had dared to speak so authoritatively. Cameron and another woman principle, Miss Williams, were suspended for having allegedly disobeyed the school board's decision to replace written promotion exams with oral ones.<sup>29</sup> The motion against these two women was made by Mr. Belyea who openly admitted his opposition to women principals and to Cameron in particular.<sup>30</sup> Obviously, his credibility may be questioned. The superintendent of schools, Mr. Robinson, stated that he chose to make an example of these two women.<sup>31</sup> Was it mere coincidence that he chose to make an example of the only two women principals in the city? Absolutely not. Cameron was a victim of the phenomenon in the educational system which allows men to control the policy and decision making processes within the system.<sup>32</sup> Cameron was not dismissed for administering written exams, but rather because she was a woman who claimed to speak with authority. The school board's action toward her indicated that they believed her authority was male-sanctioned and that she must remain within male-defined limits. They saw themselves as possessing the ability to endorse or remove her authority. As Dorothy E. Smith has explained, "Women who have claimed the right to speak authoritatively as women have been repressed."<sup>33</sup>

Both women maintained that there was no evidence supporting Belyea's claim. Williams wrote a letter of explanation to the Board and was reinstated. Cameron also wrote a letter claiming that she obeyed the ruling and requesting the Board to investigate the matter in an open meeting at which she would be present to defend herself.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that Helen Smith Grant, Victoria's second woman school trustee and suffrage leader, was noticeably absent from the meeting at which Cameron's request for an investigation was tabled. The matter which was eventually settled privately between Superintendent Robinson and Cameron resulted in her reinstatement. The Superintendent and the School Board were likely swayed by public opinion since both teachers were highly respected and there was considerable public resentment against their suspension.

During this period, Cameron continued her journalistic career, publishing in Canadian and American magazines such as *Pacific Monthly*, *The Canadian Magazine*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Educational Journal of Western Canada* and *The Coast*. One of her favourite topics for the popular press was Victoria and Vancouver Island. She also began to publish some fiction, such as her fine short story, "The Avatar of Jack Pemberton", which appeared in the May, 1903, edition of *Pacific Monthly*. By 1905, her reputation as a writer had grown and discussions of her work appeared in Canadian newspapers including the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Since Cameron devoted more energy to her writing career after her 1901 dismissal, one wonders if she sensed that this could be repeated and was thus preparing a new career for herself.

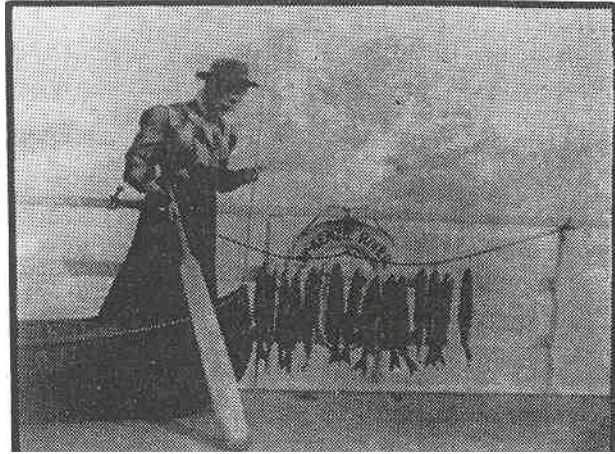


(left) Agnes Deans Cameron as a young woman



Cartoon on front page of the Victoria Times, September 1, 1909





*Photo 3 "Here and there a lusty trout and here and there a grayling - Great Slave Lake"*

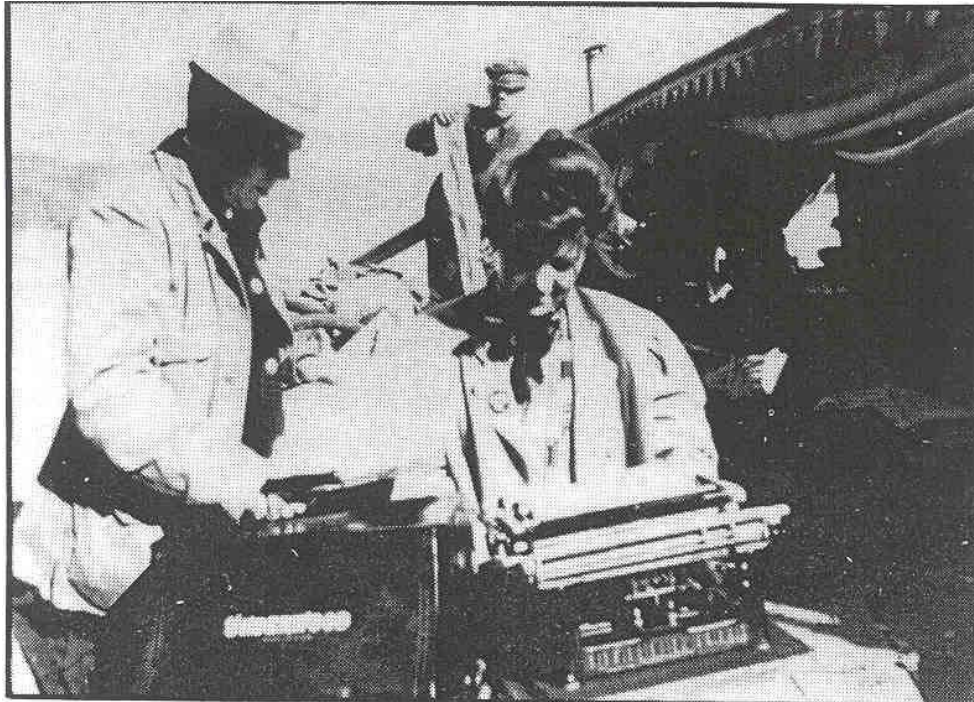


*Photo 4. "Roxi, Mr. Oo-vai-oo-ak, Baby Oo, Mrs. Oo No. 2 and Mrs. Oo No. 1"*



*Photo 5 "Luncheon on the Meewaksin"*





*Photo 6 "The Day's Work"*



*Photo 7 "Our Premier Moose"*

In 1905, Cameron was once again immersed in conflict with the Victoria School Board. Cameron, then principal of South Park School, and her art teacher, Miss Fraser, were accused of having allowed South Park students writing their high school entrance exams in June, 1905, to use rulers for their drawing tests!<sup>35</sup> Fraser simply requested to be relieved of her duties until the matter was settled. Cameron, unlike many of her contemporaries who could have been “done in” by the system, rolled up her sleeves and prepared to fight for her professional reputation. After the matter was debated at a special meeting of the School Trustees on November 14, 1905, it was concluded that as of December 15, 1905, the services of Agnes Deans Cameron would no longer be required.<sup>36</sup> At this time, the only female school trustee was Margaret Jenkins, a leading Victoria activist. She must have known Cameron from their mutual interest in education and membership in the Local Council of Women. Contrary to what one might hope, Jenkins did not support Cameron. In the newspaper reports of the debate over this issue, Jenkins never spoke out in favour of Cameron. In fact, having said very little she tacitly agreed with the men who opposed Cameron.

The action taken against Cameron was met again with a public outcry. Within days, concerned citizens, organizing a petition opposing Cameron’s dismissal, obtained the signatures of prominent citizens such as Hon. J.S. Helmcken; J.D. McNiven, M.P.P.; Charles Redfern; Lindley Crease; B. Orth, Archbishop of Victoria; and the Right Rev. Bishop Cridge.<sup>37</sup> Also, the local press was flooded with protest letters to the editor.

The School Trustees who could not ignore public opinion decided to remove the matter from their own hands by establishing a judicial inquiry.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that during this controversy, Cameron was never allowed to appear before the Board to explain her position nor was a public meeting held as she continually requested.

The Royal Commission Inquiry into this matter was called to order on December 15, 1905, with Judge Lampman presiding, and continued for two months. The proceedings, bordering on the ridiculous, will not be recapitulated here. On February 26, 1906, Judge Lampman issued his thirty-three page report on the case in which he decided against Cameron, having found that ruling had been done in every South Park drawing book but one.<sup>39</sup>

This drawing book controversy really was yet another blatant case of discrimination against Cameron in an effort by the School Board to rid themselves of her. William McKay, a supporter of Cameron, contended that three months prior to the surfacing of the drawing controversy, he had been informed that the Trustees planned a rearrangement of the teaching staff of South Park School, the result of which would be that Cameron and two other women teachers, Spears and Macfarlane, were to be either moved or dismissed.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, the Trustees were simply looking for another excuse, as they had done in 1901, to rid themselves of an outspoken woman. Further unequivocal evidence of the unjust treatment given to Cameron was that originally students of four schools (two in Victoria and two in Vancouver) were accused of having ruled drawings in their exam books. The three principals of the other schools, *all males*, who never rose to defend their reputations as Cameron had done, and who were never called to appear before the Royal Commission, retained their positions!

While the Royal Commission Inquiry was in progress, a committee of supporters rallied around Cameron. They organized a public meeting to which Margaret Jenkins, School Trustee, was invited as a special guest. Though Jenkins declined the invitation,

the meeting was a roaring success. They adopted a plan of action: they would support Cameron, and three men, as candidates in the upcoming School Board election.<sup>41</sup>

The three previous women trustees, Maria Grant, Helen Grant and Margaret Jenkins, had all been supported by the Local Council of Women.<sup>42</sup> Cameron did not have their official support. It does not appear that she approached the Council for their endorsement, but if she had, she likely would have been refused. She differed strongly with the Council's stand on domestic science and clearly did not have the support of its prominent member, Margaret Jenkins. Lacking the Council's backing did not adversely affect the outcome of the election for Cameron: she received more votes than any other trustee candidate.<sup>43</sup>

Three of the four incumbent School Board members, including Jenkins, were also re-elected. Cameron was then placed in the uneasy position of having to work with the people who had dismissed her. This mood of tension was evident immediately after the last ballot had been counted when Jenkins attempted to congratulate the newly elected Trustee. Cameron, taken aback and half amused, said, " 'Well, I can scarcely understand your position, Mrs. Jenkins. I can't see how you can consider me worthy to fill one position and unfit to hold the other.'"<sup>44</sup> Cameron concluded, though, that she bore no animosity and intended to work with the trustees for the common good.

The final blow came in April, 1906. As a result of the decision of the Royal Commission, the government suspended Cameron's first-class teaching certificate for a period of three years effective June 1, 1906. Not only had she been the victim of public discrimination, but also she was now banned from her profession. Not surprising, Cameron immediately began making preparations to leave Victoria. That same year, her obligations in Victoria were lessened by the death of her mother, with whom she had always lived.

The removal of Cameron's teaching certificate continually resurfaced in the ensuing years. At the close of the Provincial Legislature in 1908, James Hawthornthwaite, a socialist, suggested that the government should reinstate her teaching certificate. His effort failed.<sup>45</sup>

A second appeal appeared in the *Victoria Times* when J.N. Muir, the former principal of Victoria High School, obtained several columns of advertising space to publish his "Educational Exposure".<sup>46</sup> Muir's article opened with a discussion of Cameron's certificate suspension. He pointed out that all three male principals involved in the "drawing book" incident had received no reprimands.

The suspension of her teaching certificate was not a dead issue to Agnes Cameron either. In 1911, five years after her dismissal, she was in Victoria when the famed British suffragist, Emmeline Pankhurst, addressed residents of the city. Due to her reputation as an author and journalist, Cameron was then considered to be "one of the foremost women in Canada",<sup>47</sup> and was honoured by being seated on the platform with Pankhurst. In thanking the speaker, Cameron also chose to publicly speak out against the McBride government who had "tak[en] away her only honourable means of livelihood, her certificate as a teacher."<sup>48</sup> She added that after accumulating an \$800 bill in the fight to clear her name, she was forced to find some other means of supporting herself.

Forced to contend with the loss of her job, Cameron turned to her alternate profession - journalism. In the summer of 1906, she attended the third annual

convention of the Canadian Press Association in Winnipeg, where she had been asked to be one of the speakers. Following the convention, a select party including Cameron, made a two-week journey through the northwest in a private railroad car as guests of the Western Canada Immigration Association.<sup>49</sup>

The Immigration Association, based in Chicago, later offered Cameron a position which she accepted. Making her final break with Victoria, she resigned from the School Board and moved to Chicago. Her exact duties in this position are unclear but likely consisted of lecturing and writing. She explained, "...journalism drew me as offering a wider field, a wider educational field than teaching, and I became a journalist, taking as my 'specialty' Canada's Wheat Belt."<sup>50</sup> Her articles which appeared in Canadian and American newspapers and magazines took on a new focus. She became an enthusiastic promoter of the Canadian West, writing on topics such as "Wheat - the Wizard of the North", and "Edmonton, the World's Greatest Fur-Mart". The change was a challenge. Soon she was vice-president of the Canadian Women's Press Club. She wrote authoritatively on homesteading, farming and ranching, never failing to mention the important role women were playing in the settling of the prairies. Agnes Deans Cameron, teacher, became Agnes Deans Cameron, writer.

At approximately the time Cameron left Victoria, she began planning and saving for the biggest adventure of her life: a trip up the Mackenzie river to the Arctic Circle. When she made the trip in 1908 at age forty-four, she was accompanied by her niece, Jessie Cameron Brown, whom she fondly referred to as "The Kid". Brown acted as a travelling companion and personal secretary to her aunt.

The reasons for the trip were many. Cameron claimed in her account of the journey, *The New North*,<sup>51</sup> that the trip was simply made for fun.<sup>52</sup> To accept this reason alone would be to grossly underestimate Cameron. Undoubtedly, the trip was fun. It was marked by adventuresome incidents such as Cameron's shooting of her "premier moose" on the Peace River (Photo 7) and fishing for enormous trout in Great Slave Lake (Photo 3).

However, the women packed a typewriter, so that after the "fun" had ended, they would be left with material on which to base future publications (Photo 6). Furthermore, they hauled their photographic gear with them and subsequently illustrated *The New North*.

The adventure began in Chicago in May, 1908, and ended six months later. Their journey to Winnipeg by train would appear luxurious when compared with the later modes of transport they were to employ (Photo 5). They made their way to the arctic via the Athabasca River, Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River and returned through Peace River country and Lesser Slave Lake, totalling about 10,000 miles.

They travelled under the aegis of the Hudson's Bay Company who Cameron referred to as "Cook's Tourist Company of the North".<sup>53</sup> The H.B. Co. supplied them with rations during the journey and helped to outfit them in Winnipeg. Here was their list of supplies: "Tent, tent-poles, typewriter, two cameras, two small steamer trunks, bedding (a thin mattress with waterproof bottom and waterproof extension flaps and with this our two blankets), a flour bag or 'Hudson's Bay suitcase' (containing tentpegs, hatchet, and tin washbasin), two raincoats, a tiny bag with brush and comb and soap - and last, but yet first, the kodak films wrapped in oilcloth and packed in biscuit tins."<sup>54</sup>

Throughout this journey, Cameron was quick to discover and publicize the accomplishments of women of the North. She met with two women in Athabasca who, on a manual printing press, produced hymns translated into Cree; visited Christine Gordon, a young single free-trader in Fort McMurray; and told of the Grey Nuns at Fort Chipewyan who produced prize-winning wheat.<sup>55</sup>

Cameron's comments were not confined to white women of the North. Avidly interested in the artifacts made by highly skilled native women, she collected and photographed examples of their embroidery, moccasins, beadwork, and quillwork.<sup>56</sup> Many of Cameron's most perceptive observations are of Native women of the North, especially of the Chipewyans and Inuit. She commented on the difficulties faced by these women:

Sad is the lot of the Indian woman of the North. Fated always to play a secondary part in the family drama, it is hard to see what of pleasure life holds for her. The birth of a baby girl is not attended with joy or thankfulness. From the beginning the little one is pushed into the background. The boy babies, even the dogs, have the choicer bed at night, and to them are given the best pieces of meat. The little girl is made to feel that she has come into a world that has no welcome for her and her whole life seems to be an apology.<sup>57</sup>

She did find a glimmer of hope, though, among the Chipewyan women whom she designated as the "New Red Woman". She explained,

We see in her the essential head of the household. No fur is sold to the trader, no yard or pound of goods bought, without her expressed consent. Indeed, the traders refuse to make a bargain of any kind with a Chipewyan man without the active approbation of the wife.<sup>58</sup>

Cameron, who was particularly fascinated by Inuit culture, devoted a large section of *The New North* to a discussion of their lifestyle. When discussing the Native Indians, Cameron did allow fallacies common in her day to creep into her comments. But, in the case of the Inuit, whom she only knew from her textbook description as "a short, squat, dirty man who lives on blubber",<sup>59</sup> she made a conscious effort to be as objective as possible in her study.

Many of her observations about the Inuit were based on a ten-day visit with the Oo-vai-oo-ak family whom she photographed at their home at the mouth of the Mackenzie River (Photo 4). Cameron was fascinated by the Inuit marital relationships. Her comments, though somewhat romanticized, are unusual for their day.

Examining polygamy from a woman's point of view, she decided it was a practical arrangement. She observed that in the Oo-vai-oo-ak family the two wives shared the strenuous workload and provided companionship for each other. Cameron was quick to point out that in this case the first wife, when she felt the combination of her age and work were too much for her, requested her husband take a second wife. Cameron realized that in the bands where women outnumbered men, polygamy was



really a matter of sheer survival. She said there are "...no seductive 'Wanted Columns' in the daily press here to offer a niche whereby unappropriated spinsters may become self-supporting wage-earners as chaste typewriters, school teachers, Marcel wavers, or manicurists."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it was essentially practical for a woman to have a man hunt for her, even if it meant sharing a husband.

Agnes Deans Cameron returned from the North laden with information and photographs for potential articles, but more importantly, she returned with a renewed belief in equal rights expressed in the following statement:

We are better able to understand, to appreciate, to help, and be helped by our brothers, red, brown and parti-coloured, when we begin to recognize the truth that basically and in the last analysis, we are all very much alike.<sup>61</sup>

Cameron and Brown were soon on the road again, but this time on a lecture tour of major Canadian centres where Cameron spoke about their journey. It ended in the east where the Toronto Suffrage Association sponsored a banquet to honour Cameron. The meeting, presided over by Dr. Augusta Stowe-Gullen, was attended by many of the leading Toronto activists. Flora MacDonald Denison, having heard Cameron lecture in Toronto, said, "It is such a woman as Miss Cameron who will do much to create a sex consciousness and sex pride in her sisters which lead to their emancipation."<sup>62</sup>

After her triumphant return from the North, Cameron was once again based in Chicago. *The Chicago Record-Herald* noted that "Rev. Agnes Deans Cameron" addressed the Iroquois Memorial Association. Perhaps it assumed that only missionaries would make the trek to the desolate wasteland of the North. It added that "creatures of the suffragette persuasion" were to be found in the audience.<sup>63</sup>

At the end of 1909, Cameron departed for Britain accompanied by Jessie Brown. She also took a second niece, Gladys Cameron, to act as secretary and to manage the lantern and slides for lectures.<sup>64</sup> Cameron had two assignments: a four-month contract from the *London Daily Mail* to write a daily column on Canadian affairs and a contract with the Canadian government to travel through Britain lecturing about Canada in order to encourage emigration to the west and north.

Cameron returned from Britain in 1911 after having given more than two hundred lectures to such prestigious audiences as the Royal Geographical Society, Oxford, Cambridge, and St. Andrew's University, Scotland. She returned full of enthusiasm and with ideas for several more books. Her plans included a novel about western mining camps for which she hoped to do research in Stewart, B.C.<sup>65</sup>

When Cameron returned to Victoria, she was no longer the trouble-causing school teacher, but a celebrity (Photo 2). City Council planned a reception in her honour. They called her "a most worthy citizen" who was possibly "better known for her work as author and lecturer than any other man or woman in Canada today."<sup>66</sup> It was indeed an ironic situation: those who had driven her away were now willing to honour her.

Shortly after Cameron's last public appearance in Victoria in May 2, 1912, she fell ill with appendicitis. After having undergone surgery, she contracted pneumonia and died May 13, 1912, at age forty-eight. Her wish to be cremated, like other Canadian

feminist Dr. Emily Stowe and Flora MacDonald Denison, was carried out. The body was taken to Seattle for cremation where the ashes were scattered to the winds.

Agnes Deans Cameron believed in equality and lived her philosophy. She proved that women were capable of establishing themselves in the professions and could be as adventuresome as they chose to be. Her life must have provided a badly needed role model for others. Her maxim, which she followed all her life was, "The greatest hindrance to success is self-distrust, and lack of originality."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, May 14, 1912, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> For a complete discussion of the two classifications of early feminist thought, equal rights vs. maternal feminism, see Linda Kealey (ed.), *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880's - 1920's*. (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 7 - 9; and Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement: 1890 - 1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 44 - 45.

<sup>3</sup> Peter L. Smith, *Come Give a Cheer! One Hundred Years of Victoria High School (18876 - 1976)* (Victoria, B.C.: Victoria High School Celebrations Committee, 1976), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, February 27, 1919, p. 6 (supplement).

<sup>5</sup> An undated photograph of Cameron (Photo 1) appears to have been taken at approximately this time and may possibly commemorate her commencement of teaching. Her extremely short hair, highly unusual for her day, indicates an interest in the dress reform movement in which she always believed. Later evidence of this is found in a description of her which appeared in the *Toronto Mail and Empire* in 1909. "Miss Cameron is of most modest appearance, paying not attention at all to feminine fashions and always dressing very plainly, but with great neatness." (as quoted in the *Victoria Daily Times*, April 13, 1909, p. 9).

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Come Give a Cheer!*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Cameron's profile career as a journalist is of vital importance to the modern researcher. Her articles provide the best source for the discovery of her idea as none of her personal papers, letters, or diaries have been located.

<sup>8</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, May 23, 1890, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron also contributed to a later women's edition of *The Daily Colonist*, November 6, 1909, which was again edited by the Local Council of Women

<sup>10</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, May 28, 1890, p. 6

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cameron was only involved in the early stage of the fight for suffrage in British Columbia. She was not involved in the post-1910 era, which Hale has identified as the major thrust of the struggle. She was in Britain during 1909 - 1911, and died in 1912.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Louise Hale, "The British Columbia Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890 - 1917", unpublished thesis, University of British Columbia, 1977, p. 48, note 52.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, July 24, 1900, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> This teachers' conference was likely a meeting of the Dominion Educational Association. In an article that appeared in the *Victoria Daily Times*, January 17, 1906, p. 1, Cameron referred to this organization and mentioned that she was one of the directors on their board which represented every woman teacher in Canada.

<sup>17</sup> The paper, "Parent and Teacher", was published in the National Council of Women of Canada *Report* (1900) and in the *Educational Journal of Western Canada*, vol. 2, no. 5 (August - September, 1900) pp. 454-456 and vol. 2, no. 6 (October 1900), pp. 485-487. This journal is available at the University of Manitoba (1899-1903) and at the Manitoba Legislative Library (1899 - 1902). In 1899, Cameron was appointed B.C. associate editor for the *Educational Journal of Western Canada*, and was a frequent contributor to it from 1899 to 1902.

<sup>18</sup> Agnes Deans Cameron, "Parent and Teacher", Part 1, *Educational Journal of Western Canada*, vol. 2, no. 5, (August - September, 1900), p. 454

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- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Agnes Deans Cameron, "The Idea of True Citizenship - How Shall We develop It?", *Educational Journal of Western Canada*, vol. 1, no. 8 (December, 1899), p. 233. This paper was also delivered to the Local Council of Women. See *The Daily Colonist*, December 17, 1898, p. 7.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, February 10, 1903, p. 5
- <sup>22</sup> The term "obstructionist" is Cameron's own. She referred to herself as such in "Parent and Teacher", Part 1, p. 456.
- <sup>23</sup> Cameron, "Parent and Teacher", Part 1, p. 455.
- <sup>24</sup> Cameron, "The Idea of True Citizenship", p. 233.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, April 20, 1901, p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> Agnes Deans Cameron, "In the Mother-Land", *Educational Journal of Western Canada.*, vol. 3, no. 9 (January, 1902), p. 261. Comments such as this one frequently surfaced in her writing, indicating her sense of humour. She used another amusing comment to open her article, "The Broughton Street School": "I met a theosophist the other day, one of those supersensitives who can't eat their dinner if the person who prepared it hadn't sweet thoughts". (*Educational Journal of Western Canada*, vol. 4, no. 5, August - September, 1902, p. 136). Reviewers of her lectures often commented on how entertaining and witty she was,
- <sup>29</sup> When this issue erupted, Cameron had the longest service record in the Victoria school system. See *The Daily Colonist*, April 20, 1901, p. 3.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Vancouver Province*, June 21, 1901, p. 1
- <sup>31</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, June 22, 1901, p. 6
- <sup>32</sup> Dorothy E. Smith, "An Analysis of Ideological Structures and How Women are Excluded: Considerations for Academic Women", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 12, no. 4, part 1, November, 1975, p. 359.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, June 23, 1901, p. 3.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, September 14, 1905, p. 2.
- <sup>36</sup> Hale (p. 145) mistakenly states that Cameron resigned over this dispute. In her later life, Cameron actually tried to give the impression that she had resigned through she was, in fact, fired.
- <sup>37</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, November 17, 1905, p. 5.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, November 21, 1905, p. 1.
- <sup>39</sup> *The Victoria Times*, February 26, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, January 17, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, January 12, 1906, p. 3.
- <sup>42</sup> Hale, *Ibid.*, pp. 46 - 47, note 36.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, January 19, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>44</sup> From Cameron's letter to the editor, *The Daily Colonist*, January 21, 1906, p. 4.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, March 8, 1908, p. 15.
- <sup>46</sup> *The Victoria Times*, April 3, 1901, p. 18.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, December 21, 1911, p. 20.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *The Daily Colonist*, August 10, 1906, p. 5
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, February 27, 1910, p. 6 (supplement).
- <sup>51</sup> Linda Hale (p. 145) and Henry J. Morgan (ed.), *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912). p. 184, mention the publication of a second book by Cameron, *The Outer Trail* (1910). These are the only two references I have found to this book and have been unable to verify its existence.
- <sup>52</sup> Agnes Deans Cameron, *The New North: Being Some Account of a Woman's Journey Through Canada to the Arctic*, (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1910), p. 26
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24 - 25.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38 - 39, 84, 100 - 101.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106 - 107, 338.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>61</sup> Agnes Deans Cameron, "Beyond the Athabasca", *Westward Ho! Magazine*, 1909, p. 743. The reader is urged to place Cameron's comments within their time frame. Though her use of "brother" and "man" is jarring to the modern feminist, one must remember that she used these terms in their generic sense as was the practice in her day.

<sup>62</sup> As quoted in *The Victoria Times*, May 5, 1909, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *The Victoria Times*, January 14, 1909, p. 4

<sup>64</sup> Cameron was very devoted to her family, especially to her nieces, and had promised that she would take each one in turn with her to Britain. Her plan was halted by her death. From an interview with Mrs. Grace Darling, niece of Agnes Deans Cameron, May 27, 1980.

<sup>65</sup> *The Vancouver Province*, June 1, 1910, p. 21. Her choice of Stewart was likely influenced by the fact that she held substantial stocks in both the Stewart Land Company and the Stewart Mining and Development Company.

<sup>66</sup> *The Victoria Times*, December 2, 1911, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Agnes Deans Cameron, "To Success - Walk Your Own Road", *Educational Journal of Western Canada*, vol. 4, no. 1, March, 1910, p. 10.