

## LUCY DAEM STORY

By Phyllis L. Batttrum

Lucy Daem was seventy-eight last December. She is a pioneer of British Columbia, born in Donald, educated in Revelstoke, and residing in Vernon at the time of writing. The Federal Government honoured her in 1967 with their Centennial Medal, and the British Columbia Government will honour her again in 1971, on the occasion of its own Centennial.

The following short account includes a few anecdotes from her full and active life. It was inspired by her granddaughter who composed an essay entitled "My Centennial Grandmother", an effort which won her acclaim from the British Commonwealth Society in 1967.

Great grandfather John arrived in New York in the year 1881. The Brooklyn Bridge was still under construction, and the Statue of Liberty was still but a promise in the minds of the people of France. Immigrants from the "Old Country" were arriving by the thousands to seek their fortunes in the vast territories of the New World.



Lucy Daem

Steel had been laid as far west as Salt Lake City, on the American side of the border. In Canada, the railway was an "on again off again" state of affairs. The line had reached Winnipeg, bogged down in debt, and then depended on the borrowing power of the Canadian Government. Travel on the southern side seemed more expedient.

John arrived in Utah during the governorship of Brigham Young who employed him as a cattle-hand. Only twenty-five years previously Utah had been part of Mexican Territory, and was still wild and unmanageable. Life here was never dull but promises for the future were uncertain. Stories of wealth and opportunity in the north reached our hero, and with the news that the construction of the CPR was on again, he found his way to Winnipeg.

Mr. Van Horne, the General Manager of the railroad, was pushing construction mightily to meet a deadline imposed by the people of the West, as a condition for joining Confederation. Work went on feverishly with record construction of twenty miles in three days across the prairies. There were jobs for all who were willing to give a day's work for a day's pay. Here, life for John became synonymous with the building of the CPR. Besides the actual construction jobs there were the accompanying tasks of feeding an army of men, and locomotives. These latter consumed mountains of cord wood, and hundreds of thousands of gallons of water. Time became so pressing, that work proceeded on a twenty-four hour basis, necessitating the use of artificial lighting. Here John found his niche and became a filler's helper. It was his responsibility to see to the cleaning and filling with fuel, of

the lamps and lanterns in the engines, cabooses and outfit cars. Later, in 1896, when the line had been completed to Vancouver 'Ocean to Ocean', John was on the first passenger train to make its triumphal entry into the flag-bedecked city — in his capacity as filler's helper.

Small towns sprang up at construction sites. Donald was one of these; a collection of dilapidated huts and log cabins, but with one redeeming feature — there was a church with a bell. To this town John took his young bride, and here the first two of their seven daughters were born. In attendance at their birth was a kind and understanding Indian woman. Of doctors and nurses there were none, and the nearest hospital was in Calgary. Winnipeg was the centre of finance, for here was located The Dominion Government Savings Bank. Here the family deposited its savings, content to suffer the lengthy delays in withdrawal and deposit procedures. Hopefully you had a trustworthy acquaintance on the trains who would be willing to carry out these transactions for you. To use banks was to think modern in a world of savers who believed in back-yard burial banking.

Revelstoke soon established itself as a hub railroad centre. Traffic from the U.S.A. via the Kootenay and Arrow Lakes lines of the CPR made Revelstoke an important divisional point. Here the railway yards and shops mushroomed, and the family moved to this new metropolis. Here the girls attended Central School, located at the distance of some two miles from their home, across town and on the other side of the busy railroad yard.

Being late for school was a punishable offence. The spanking was administered by cane to the posterior. Punctuality became a battle of wits with the long lines of switching trains and shunting box-cars. The children often climbed over the moving cars, or waited for a pause between shunts to climb under, in order to arrive at school on time. A civic-minded villager, having observed these daily perils, reported to the school principal. Thereafter the girls were told to arrive late and that no further punishment would be forthcoming, thereby saving their necks as well as their behinds.

As the years passed they grew into beauties all, a fact not unnoticed by the local beaux. A visit to a silent movie on a Saturday night, brought forth many offers to be "walked home". Lucy recalls that on one dark evening, as she and one of her sisters were walking home, through the railroad yard two young would-be swains followed them menacingly. They would not be discouraged and the girls became frightened. Lucy withdrew her eight-inch hat pin, flashed it into the headlight of an oncoming locomotive and announced that "One step nearer will see this right through you"! Last seen the two dark figures were disappearing rapidly in the opposite direction. We often laugh about this incident now in our family circle, and wonder if these men remember. One of them is number among British Columbia's millionaires, and is from a family with political aspirations.

Life was hard but the industrious pioneers toiled and the land supported them. Forests and streams yielded food in abundance. Even without firearms a few well-aimed pebbles felled many a prairie chicken. Those fortunate enough to own a twenty-two rifle could bring home a caribou or a mountain goat. Kokanee or land-locked salmon filled the streams so that they truly 'ran red', and one day's fishing would fill the salt barrels for the winter.

Lucy married her handsome Belgian husband and moved to Wigwam, a sometime mining settlement on the Arrow Lakes branch line. When the children started to arrive, the necessity of being near a school became