

The Munro Family
by Daughter Alix
Martin nee Munro
English Immigrants
Empress of Canada
April 1, 1948



Munro Family

The Empress of Canada March 27 to April 1, 1948

Our cabin seemed to be full of diapers hanging up to dry and my Mum was in bed with seasickness. Our father awaited us in Canada, consequently we older Munro children were left to our own devices. Peter 8, Paddy 6, and myself, Alix 4. For amusement, we rang the elevator button to be taken up two flights. Then we dashed down the stairs and rang for the elevator again. We did this at least three times before I got tired and wasn't fast enough to catch the next ride up. My siblings did not appear again, although I waited. I was a little upset and wandered out on deck feeling pretty lost and miserable and went to the rail. I remember looking down at the water and high waves, thinking that I could easily slip through the rails into the water. The boat would continue and I would drown. On this note, I determined I'd better find our cabin.

I opened what I thought was our door and a lady in the top bunk and a man in the bottom bunk invited me to "Come in dear". I, of course, slammed the door shut and re-thought my direction. The next door which I opened had nappies hanging up to dry and I thought I had the right room, although no one was there. I stayed there very quietly until my Mum with my baby brother Robin, 6 months, came back. Only then was I certain that I had the correct room. I've been pretty conscious of direction and place ever since.

This was a very rough crossing and most passengers were seasick. Mum tells me that many of the crew were ill as well. We children were unaffected and had the dining hall pretty much to ourselves. Fruit was scarce in England where we had been living during the war. I recall an enormous platter of different kinds of fruit right at eye-level (on a table at my level, I guess) with an instruction to take what we wanted. I did - that large, bumpy, red apple! I seem to have an emotional response to red delicious apples to this day!

Hazel Munro (Mother)

My husband, Alex Munro, P. Eng., traveled to Canada by air in late 1947 under the 'Drew Scheme' which was designed to encourage young professional engineers to move from Britain to Canada. The Drew Scheme chartered a plane to take professionals to Toronto.

I would have had to wait two years to get an airplane, hence the sea voyage. I had to wait until March 1948 to get a first class passage to Halifax. The ship was the Empress of Canada (a troop ship during the war) and I had a large cabin with en suite facilities.

When aboard, I asked for my luggage. I was told that my luggage had been taken off in England. Apparently, there was another Mr. A. Munro traveling first class as well, who had cancelled his passage at the last minute and his luggage was removed. My luggage was taken off with his in error. Since I was sailing with four children under the age of 9, including a 5 month old baby, the loss of luggage was a major inconvenience. I was unable to purchase clothes on board (no shop). I became known as the 'Lady in Red' as I had to wear my stylish swallow-tail red suit at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Fortunately, the children were wearing their kilts and sweaters, as nothing else would have stood up to the wear on board.

One vivid memory is waving good-bye to my parents as we left England. As we sailed away, I wondered how anyone could suffer from seasickness. I found out the hard way. The Empress of Canada started to plunge and roll. Many of the crew were sick too. I had never felt as sick, not even when as a child I had typhoid fever. The children were not affected and ran around and ate the enormous variety of food, particularly the fruit. The baby was denied his normal food as my milk supply dried up. A kind male steward made a bottle which the baby tolerated and so survived.

In England I was told by a lady whose parents had lived in Canada that there wasn't any fog in Canada! The first sound I heard on approaching Halifax harbour was that of a powerful foghorn!

One good memory remains. When we reached Halifax and entered the hall to be processed, it was packed with people. I was resigned to wait for hours, but to my surprise and relief, a man in charge, standing on a table in the middle of the hall looked around, asked for silence, and in a very compassionate voice called out: "We will take the family with the baby first."