

Lady Overlander: Catherine Schubert (1835–1918)

by Emily Zheng

She walked across Canada, becoming the first European woman to enter majestic B.C. over land.

When the group of Overlanders first realized that a *woman* was coming on their journey, they were outraged. Shopkeepers, craftsmen, and merchants alike — they had all left their families behind to go across Canada. Their destination? The Cariboo, in search of gold.

This was no trip for any woman — let alone a wife with three kids in tow. But Catherine Schubert was not just any woman. She was determined to accompany her husband, Augustus, no matter how far they had to go. Despite the coming hardships, Catherine had to keep her family together.

Catherine was no stranger to hard work. She was born in Ireland, the youngest of nine children. At sixteen, she sailed across the Atlantic to the United States. There, she worked as a maid until she met and married Augustus Schubert, a German carpenter, in 1855. Upon their marriage, Catherine opened a grocery store. However, an economic depression forced the family to move up north. They settled in Fort Garry (now known as Winnipeg, Manitoba). The Schuberts had three children.

In 1858, miners discovered gold in the Cariboo, British Columbia. A pack of gold-seeking men were bent on following the “overland” route to the West. And Augustus Schubert decided to join them. His wife Catherine refused to be left behind.

The initial idea that a woman was to go on this treacherous journey upset many of the men. But along the way, Catherine convinced them to accept her. Her hard work, determination, and loving nature won over many. Plus, she provided a much-needed woman's touch to the group of rough men.

Over the prairies they walked on — hundreds of men and one woman. The hardships they faced were almost unimaginable. They had to carry, on their carts or backs, months of provision as well as mining equipment. They camped out in the open air, rain or shine, and feared for their lives whenever a far-off howl could be heard. The sea of prairie seemed like it would never end.

However, the monotonous prairie was a vacation compared to what was about to cross the Overlanders' path — the Rocky Mountains. The travellers had to leave their animals at the foot of the mountain, carrying only the essentials on their backs. They had to creep over treacherous tracks and float down dangerous rivers. Some men were even lost to the elements. It's hard to picture how Catherine could have done it — holding onto two small children and carrying another.

When the team of Overlanders decided split up upon entering British Columbia, the Schuberts joined the group going down the safer Thompson River instead of the dangerous Fraser. This proved to be a wise choice, because there was a secret they concealed — Catherine was pregnant. She was already in her fourth month when they set out from Fort Garry, thinking that the baby wouldn't come until they reached the Cariboo. However, the journey had taken longer than anticipated.

Catherine went into labour while riding on a raft down the Thompson River. Ashore, she successfully delivered a baby girl, with the help of Native women. The

Schuberts called their baby Rose. Rose became the first girl of European heritage to be born within B.C.

The Schuberts eventually made it to the Gold Rush. But Augustus never struck it rich as he had hoped to. In 1881, he gave up hopes of gold. Instead, the family bought a farm in their newfound homeland and prospered there. Catherine had two more children.

Augustus died in 1908. His widow moved to Armstrong, B.C. She was an important part of the community there until her death in 1918.

Catherine Schubert had accomplished something great; her name is forever etched in the books of history. But it was not her exceptional courage or wit that got her there. It was simply determination, endurance, and the ultimate love for her family.

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