

Early Vancouver

Volume Three

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1933-1934.

Supplemental to Volumes One and Two collected in 1931-1932.

About the 2011 Edition

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH DR. A.M. ROBERTSON, 5 JULY 1934.

FIRST HOSPITAL.

"I arrived in Vancouver from Montréal in January 1887, and immediately started practice at the little old C.P.R. hospital with Dr. LeFevre; I had come from Montréal to enter partnership with Dr. LeFevre. The little hospital had nothing to do with the city, but a C.P.R. construction hospital. It was right on the corner of Powell and Campbell Avenue, or about there." (Note: Dr. Langis, Vol. 1, says "Not quite on corner, but on north side Powell Street, between Hawks and Campbell avenues.") "A little two-storey structure, or perhaps a storey and a half; a standard type building of that period, with a little verandah in front, two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. There were no tents in the surroundings, just the graded railway track without ties, and a mud road from Hastings, and plenty of stumps in the clearing nearby; it was down opposite where the old Barnard Castle Hotel used to be. The staff consisted of one man; his name was Hughes; he was nurse, cook, and everything else, and," (laughingly) "he was dirty too. It the two wards on the ground floor there were about six beds; usually we had two or three patients, sometimes as many as all the beds would hold.

"It was my duty to walk from Port Moody to Vancouver twice a week and back again; I walked down the right of way; there were no ties or rails down at that time, and I visited all the construction camps between here and Port Moody as I passed by.

"Then I became City Health Officer, and the C.P.R. and the City combined together to build the little old wooden hospital on Beatty Street, now on the lane corner, and used as a Labour Temple. Still later they built the first brick hospital on the southeast corner of Cambie and Dunsmuir, afterwards McGill college, now City Relief Office.

"Mayor MacLean, whose wife was buried today, was a very good speaker. I remember the speech he made down on the dock when the first C.P.R. train arrived; it was a fine speech."

CONVERSATION WITH MR. JAMES BROWN KAY, 1150 COMOX, 10 JULY 1934.

VANCOUVER'S FIRST HOSPITAL.

"What Dr. A.M. Robertson said to you on July 5, as you read it to me, is absolutely correct. Hughes was a Welshman who came here on a sailing ship up to Moodyville. The only other things I know about him was that he slipped off a wharf in Seattle and was drowned. He was the 'whole thing' down at the little old C.P.R. hospital. I know, because I was a patient there, with mountain fever, for about a month in September or October 1887, under Dr. Beckingsdale; Dr. LeFevre used to come up too."

Query: Was Hughes dirty?

Mr. Kay: "He most certainly was. As Dr. Robertson says, he was cook, nurse, and everything else; he slept on a bunk in the kitchen.

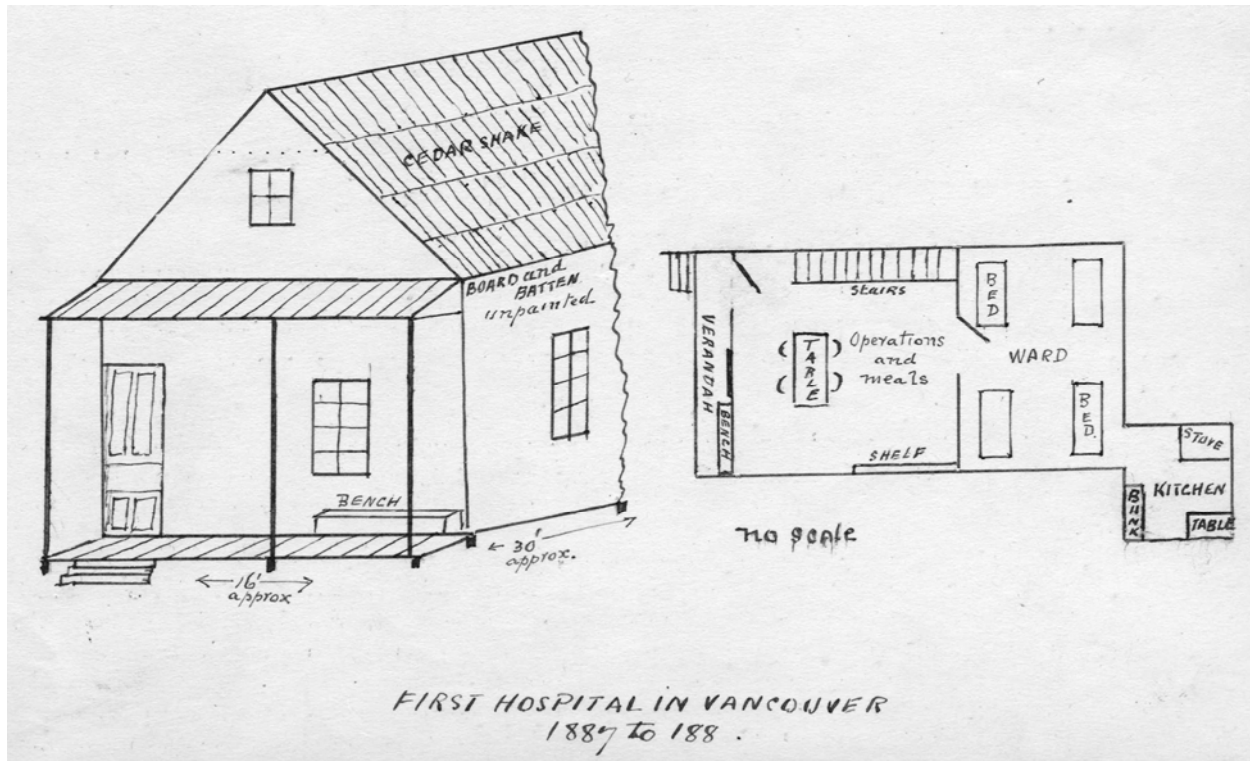
"The building was just a rough shack, no paint, and faced the water. It was just a few steps south from the mud road from Gastown to Hastings, and quite close to the C.P.R. track which was then without ties or rails; it was on the north side of what is now Powell Street; almost entirely surrounded by stumps of the clearing. A regular storey-and-a-half small building with a cedar shake roof, and a little narrow verandah along the front. There were four beds upstairs and four down. My bed was upstairs, and the ceiling was so low that I could touch it with my hand, and the sides were sloping. The verandah was narrow, with a door on the eastern corner; at the other end of the verandah, beneath the window, was a cheap board bench on which the patient used to sit and look out over the inlet. On entering the door, you passed in to the first small room where there was a table on which we had our meals, and also on which, when necessary, operations were performed; in one corner were some shelves on which doctors kept their paraphernalia and medicines; there was also a bed in the front room, which was not often used.

"Behind the front door a stair led up the wall of the building to the upstairs. No hall; you walked right in.

"The second room was behind the first" (downstairs) "and had four beds in it, and behind that was a bit of a kitchen in which there was a cook stove, a few shelves, and a bunk where Hughes used to sleep; the cook house or kitchen might have been a lean-to, but it was very small.

“Of course, it was a C.P.R. hospital, but the city also had an interest in it because, when that fireman got hurt, they sent him down there, and Mayor MacLean used to come down every day, and enquire how he was.

“The location is not easy to define, but Mouat, the bookkeeper at the Hastings Saw Mill, built two or three little cottages on the other side of the street about a block east of the hospital.”



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CONVERSATION WITH MR. JAMES BROWN KAY, 1150 COMOX STREET, 12 OCTOBER 1933.

“I came to Vancouver in June 1887 from Manchester, England, just out on adventure. Then I heard they were wanting men on the C.P.R. and came on to Vancouver. I was born on 16th July 1862, married Miss Alice Dixon of Dumfries, Scotland, August 1910, at her home on Pender Street. There are no children, and we now live at 1150 Comox Street. Cousins are Charles Victor Kay and Stanley Kay of Point Grey.”

VANCOUVER ELECTRIC COMPANY.

“I started to work for the Vancouver Electric Co. in December 1892, as fireman in their Prior Street power house, then became engineer. We got our coal the, as now, on a scow up False Creek; our machines were Thomson Houston machines. It was the Vancouver Electric Co. then, now the B.C. Electric Co., and Oppenheimer was at the head of it. They had just moved from the first little plant near Abbott Street. The reason they moved was that Abbott Street was getting too small; they had only one boiler and one generator, so they moved the plant down to Prior Street, added more, and got Tom Barnet, who died last year, in charge as Chief Engineer, Mr. Jimmy Leslie, assistant engineer, and about four others—six, in all, was the entire staff in the machinery end of the company. Fares? Oh, cash, five cents, then got tickets afterwards.

“At the time I joined all they had in the way of track was from the Yale Hotel near Pacific Street to Campbell Avenue, and on up Westminster Avenue across the bridge to Ninth Avenue, Mount Pleasant, but not along Broadway; there was no track along Broadway” (9th Avenue) “for some time afterwards. They had six cars, just single track cars, all closed cars” (note: not according to other accounts) “at first; they got the open cars afterwards. We used to have lots of trouble in those days.”

Query: How? Why?

Mr. Kay: "Well, getting up the hill at Mount Pleasant, the 'juice' was weak; probably some other car downtown was starting up just at the same moment, so the conductor would shut off the juice, wait a while and try again, and finally he got up the hill."

C.P.R. WATER WELL.

"That" (looking at photograph) "is the old C.P.R. wooden office at the foot of Richards Street; they had the best water well in town; everybody went there to get water; it was the best water in town."

LORD STANLEY OF PRESTON (GOVERNOR GENERAL). CHRIST CHURCH. STANLEY PARK.

"Everybody turned out the time Lord Stanley, the Governor General, drove around Stanley Park. I don't know just what they did as I stayed in town, but they finished at the Hotel Vancouver, and he made a big speech from the steps of the Hotel Vancouver. He went to Christ Church the next day, Sunday, and I sat behind him; I suppose he was the first of the many governors general who have since attended Christ Church."

CRICKET. BRITANNIA CRICKET CLUB.

"I attended St. James' Church as a rule; Father Clinton was quite a footballer and cricketer. I was secretary of the Britannia Cricket Club. It was started after the Vancouver Cricket Club, which was the first; the Britannia came after. We played at Brockton Point, and used cocoanut matting for a pitch; there was nothing else to do; you could not play without it."

CONVERSATION WITH MR. JENKINSON, IN CHARGE OF METER DEPARTMENT, B.C. ELECTRIC RAILWAY COMPANY, 11 OCTOBER 1933.

FIRST HOSPITAL ON POWELL STREET.

"J.B. Kay will tell you about the" (first) "old hospital, the one down on Powell Street; he told me more than once. There was some fellow down there with a bad foot, and the doctor said it had to be cut off, but there was only one doctor, so he said to one of the patients that he would have to get out of bed and help him administer the anaesthetic. Kay was around in the hospital, too, but was going uptown. The doctor cut the foot off while Kay was away, and, you know, they had no place to put it, so the doctor took a shovel and dug a shallow hole in the earth and covered it up. When Kay came back from uptown, the patient who had helped said to him, 'Well, we cut it off,' and just then Kay turned around, and saw a dog, who had dug up the amputated foot out of the new earth, carry it towards the entrance door, and lay it on the mat."

REMARK BY DR. F.W. ROBERTSON, MAY 1934.

"Our first hospital, down on Powell Street, was just a cheap wooden place; nothing much, a good shelter of boards."

CONVERSATION WITH MRS. (CAPT.) D.C. TUCK, 10 OCTOBER 1933.

JOHN BOULTBEE. THE GREAT FIRE, 1886.

"John Boulton, first magistrate of Vancouver, went to Rossland afterwards, and was there when I was a child. I was just a little girl and had the odd desire to examine the bald spots—he had bald spots on his head, and let me feel them, move my finger over them; they interested me. Then I would worry him to tell me the story of the Great Fire" (of 1886) "in Vancouver, which he did over and over again, and he would say, 'Well, come here, and I'll tell you again.'"

"He told me the three bald spots—there were three of them, one over his ear, and two at the back of his head, about the size of a ten-cent piece—were caused by the burns he got in the fire at Vancouver. He was one of three men trapped by the fire, and they had to lie down, and burrow their faces in the earth, and struggle for breath that way, and the burns were caused by the hot embers falling on the back of his head."

(Note: Major C. Gardner Johnson was, I think, one of the others. I think the third was burned to death. J.S.M.)