

Early Vancouver

Volume Five

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1936-1945.

Supplemental to volumes one, two, three and four collected in 1931, 1932 and 1934.

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MRS. THOMAS FRASER YORK, HUNTINGDON, B.C.

Memo of conversation with Mrs. Thomas Fraser York, pioneer of British Columbia, 1860, and her daughter, Mrs. M. Fleming (of Suite 23, The Angus Apartments, 1531 Davie Street) at Mrs. York's home, close to the interurban railway station at Huntingdon, B.C. Yesterday, Sunday, 10 June 1945, Mrs. Matthews and myself journeyed from Vancouver by B.C. Electric Railway to Huntingdon and were very graciously met at the station by Mrs. York's daughter, Mrs. Fleming. We walked about 150 yards to their residence hidden beneath huge acacia trees looking very pretty in their white flowers and beneath a bower or two of roses red. Mrs. Fraser York, who had most kindly invited us some time ago, opened the door as soon as she heard our footsteps, and we entered and sat down in a somewhat early style home and commenced to talk at once; we did not waste any time as our return train was due in three hours.

Mrs. York is eighty-six years of age and remarkably well preserved. She is not very grey, nor have the years made many furrows in her cheeks; she wears glasses and can read very well with their aid; writes a firm hand; her memory is astonishing. She is very alert and in her conversation does not want for a word or a thought. We started in at once to converse.

Sunday afternoon, 10 June 1945.

MR. AND MRS. THOMAS FRASER YORK OF SUMAS, B.C. REVISITS PORT DOUGLAS AFTER 77 YEARS.

Mrs. York: "I came to British Columbia in March 1860; no, I do not recall the exact day; we came from San Francisco where I was born and went straight to Port Douglas at the head of Harrison Lake. I was up there last year; eighty-five years after I had first seen it and seventy years since I had seen it last, when I left. We went up in a gasoline motor launch. It was my first visit in seventy-seven years. There is no town there now; only a logging camp. We, that is my father and mother and the family, lived at Port Douglas for seven years, and then we went to Fort Yale and lived there for seven years and then we went down to Chilliwack. I was single, of course, the daughter of William Robert MacDonald and Jane, my mother. Then, at Chilliwack, I married Mr. Thomas Fraser York; the Rev. Mr. Thompson was the clergyman, that was in 1881. I am an Anglican but he was a Methodist minister. Mr. York was born at Fort Yale, 21st October 1858; Trafalgar Day." (Remarked to Mrs. York that that was the same date that I had been wounded in the Capture of Regina Trench, Somme, France.) "This is a photograph of Port Douglas in its heyday; quite a town, isn't it; I got that from Dr. Lamb of the Provincial Archives but this is a sketch of it as first I knew it; not very much in 1860.

"I was born in San Francisco and was only fifteen months old when I came to Port Douglas. Father and Mother both came from Scotland, Mother from Glasgow, Father from Aberdeen."

CHILLIWACK, B.C. STANLEY, B.C. SUMAS, FIRST SCHOOL.

"Then I left Chilliwack and went to Stanley in the Cariboo in 1877 and taught school. I taught school on Sumas Prairie from 1875 to 1877 and then went to Stanley; I had a teacher's certificate. I had about ten pupils at Sumas, ages six to fifteen, and about twenty at Stanley. I was the first teacher on the Sumas Prairie. I had a little school right on one of the ridges at Sumas; nice little school; they have a nine-room school there now. The children walked to school; there were no roads, just trails through the tall grass and bushes. Sometimes the children came down the slough in a canoe. The little house where I boarded while I was teaching, Mr. English's, when I first came to teach school, is still standing. It is away down on the prairie; a man named Chudleigh" (sic) "bought the place and is living there."

MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM ROBERT MACDONALD.

"Mother died in Chilliwack in January 1914 and Father died in Chilliwack on the 6th June 1876. Mother was a widow thirty-eight years. Father was forty-seven when he died; both are buried at Chilliwack. My husband's grave" (Thomas Fraser York) "is at Hazelmere Cemetery, below Abbotsford."

SUMAS PRAIRIE. MILLIONS OF MOSQUITOES.

"We lived on Sumas Prairie before the dyke was built and we had millions and millions of mosquitoes; he had to have smokes at our doors. We had a house and it was painted white and you could not see the white house for the mosquitoes; they covered the house so closely together you could not see the white paint. We had to keep smudges of dead leaves and brush and stuff like that, at the front and back doors."

INDIANS. LYNCHING AT SUMAS.

“When we first came the Indians were quiet; we had no trouble with them. But there was one Indian, Me-sah-chie Sam; mesahchie is Chinook for ‘bad’; he was a bad Indian. You might have heard of the lynching of bad Sam’s son. They lynched a boy; he was the son of Me-sah-chie Sam. The boy or youth went over to Nootsack in the United States, and shot a man; it was on a Sunday and his little store was open. Then after he had shot the man he came back to British Columbia. He was arrested—he was ‘Louie Sam’—and they put him in old Mr. York’s store at Sumas for the night and were going to take him to New Westminster in the morning. That night about twenty or thirty men came from the United States; they were all masked and they demanded Louie Sam, the Indian, from old Mr. York who had charge of him for the night. Mr. York refused but the gang of Americans broke in the door and took Louie Sam out and went towards the United States boundary line and strung Louie Sam up to a tree; they lynched him.”

LOUIE SAM’S GUN.

“Mr. Campbell, who was Justice of the Peace and who had placed Louie Sam in Mr. York’s care went there next morning and cut the body down. The lynching was in Canada, about one hundred yards from the international boundary. This is the gun he used; rather, the barrel of the gun; the stock all rotted away. We did not find this barrel until several years after he was lynched. We were then living out at the Boundary line, where our farm was, where the lynching took place. My husband” (Thomas Fraser York) “was Customs Officer and Immigration Officer, and when he was clearing off a little spot to build the office on, he found the gun. You can have it for your City Archives.”

DR. FIFER OF YALE. APOTHECARY’S BOWL.

“There is another relic you can have; it came from Yale. It belonged to Dr. Fifer; you can read about him in Higgins’ book, the *Mystic Spring*. Dr. Fifer used it for pounding medicine. Dr. Fifer was shot by a man named Bob Wall.”

POST OFFICE AND MAIL. SUMAS. JIM YORK, INDIAN. MILLER’S LANDING. SUMAS RIVER. SUMAS LAKE. INDIAN CANOES.

“Our mail? The way, the only way, we got our mail was we had an Indian, an old Indian and he called himself ‘Jim York’ after us. Well, the nearest post office was at Miller’s Landing on the Fraser River; David Miller was postmaster. The old Indian went once a week for our mail, in an old canoe from Upper Sumas. First of all he went down the Sumas River, then across the lake, then down the Sumas River again, and then up the Fraser River about two miles to Miller’s Landing. And, queer thing, the only mail he would bring would be the Yorks’ mail and the Campbells’ mail; there was other mail there but Jim would bring ours only. Of course, he was in our employ; that is, we paid him. Jim would start off early in the morning and would be back in time for supper; all day in the canoe.”

SOCIAL GATHERINGS. CRINOLINES.

“As for social times. We did not have much entertainment. Once in a while we would have a dance at one of the private houses; there were no halls; and all our travelling was done on horseback or democrat wagon. At the dances we had music; violin and a small melodeon—a little one—and we would dance; we always danced until daylight. Eatables, of course, tea, coffee and three or four kinds of cake and the ladies did not smoke. The gentlemen came in their ordinary clothes but many of the ladies wore low neck dresses. In those days they wore crinolines; hoops. Dresses were made very, very full; sometimes as much as eight yards in a dress. They made good material too; silk, satin and velvet, and the best of prints. We made them ourselves; there was no sewing machine; everything was done by hand.”

ILLNESS. A COLD CANOE TRIP.

“In case of sickness? I had no doctor when Mabel” (Mrs. Frith) “was born and she was born in New Westminster. It was the dead of winter and when she was three weeks old I brought her home. We went from New Westminster to Miller’s Landing on the sternwheeler *Gladys* and when we got to Miller’s Landing, old Jim York, the Indian, was there with his canoe. Then we all got into the canoe; my husband, Tommy, my young son, eighteen months old and could not walk; and Mabel, three weeks old, and we went down the Fraser River, up the Sumas River, across Sumas Lake and up the Sumas River again to old Mr. York’s home and there were cakes of ice, good big ones, in the river. There were no doctors

nearer than thirty-three miles at New Westminster; there was no doctor at all in Chilliwack. Of course, the Maclures had the telegraph office at Matsqui Prairie.”

BUTTER.

“Butter? They used to put butter up in barrels of one hundred and fifty pounds. They would make it from spring to fall; they took it down to New Westminster twice a year; it was salted and kept in brine; anyway, they went twice a year down to New Westminster and we got fifty cents [a] pound for it; it was good butter. We got our provisions at the same time; twice a year, at New Westminster; enough to last six months.”

CAMELS AT PORT DOUGLAS.

“In 1863 there were some camels came to Port Douglas while we were living there. They got them for carrying freight up the Cariboo Road but they did not do well. I was about five years old. I stood on the side watching them put packs on the camels and a man lifted me up and perched me on top of one of the camels for a few seconds; so I’ve been on a camel’s back in British Columbia.”

SALMON.

“There were lots of salmon in those days; you could get a big one for ten cents. We used to put down about seventy-five salmon every fall. Everyone with a big family always put down a keg of salmon. Of course, it used a lot of coarse salt. There were eight in our family, six boys and two girls.”

DEER, GROUSE, DUCK. INDIANS. BERRIES. PORT DOUGLAS. PITCH STICKS.

“There were lots of deer, grouse and duck on the Sumas Prairie; we got about all we wanted when we wanted it. When we first went to Port Douglas we depended on the Indians for fresh berries; wild strawberries, wild gooseberries, wild black caps. We had to depend on the Indians for firewood, berries and fish. The Indians would come to the door with pitch sticks or gum sticks; bundles of gumstick or pitch wood; we used it for kindling the fire in the morning. The Indian women did the washing; they were good servants and generally honest; we got along very well with the Indians; we had no trouble with them. I speak Chinook.”

PORT DOUGLAS CHURCH. PORT YALE CHURCH.

“There was a little church at Port Douglas; St. Thomas, it was called, and there was a church at Yale, St. John’s, and a Sunday school. We had a resident minister, Mr. Gamage; he went back to England and Mr. Holmes was the rector at Yale; he died five or six years ago.”

CANDLES.

“I never made candles out of fat but Mother did; made them out of tallow; she had a mould, and she used a lot of brass cooking utensils.”

GENEALOGY.

“There were eight of us in our family; six boys and two girls. Mr. York, my husband, was born on the 21st October 1858 and was the first child born in the mainland colony of British Columbia; Vancouver Island was a separate colony.”

Major Matthews: Has that claim to be the first child born in British Columbia ever been disputed, Mrs. York?

Mrs. York: “I have never heard it disputed. We had four children; one son and three daughters. They are:

1. Thomas Francis York, the eldest; he lives two miles away and has one daughter, Gladys; she is in the women’s part of the army.
2. Mrs. Frith, the eldest daughter; she was fifty-nine when she died on May 2nd 1942; she has one son Hubert, in the R.C.A.F.; he has been over Germany fifty-three times; and she has a daughter, Mrs. Ralph Herrett, 2925 Kitchener Street, Vancouver.
3. Mrs. M— Fleming (Angus Apartments, 1531 Davie Street.) She has one daughter, Rena, now Mrs. Mayhew. Mrs. Fleming is a widow; her son died in 1936.

4. Mrs. George Newton of Los Angeles, California; they are without children.

Subsequently, Mrs. Fleming prepared for us a most tasty repast and, as our train was due, we bade a regretful farewell to this charming old lady, Mrs. York, and, accompanied by Mrs. Fleming, made our way, with our bundles, to the station and reached home towards 11 p.m. We also brought with us the apothecary's mixing bowl, the gun barrel and a number of Sumas prairie school photos and family photos, all of which have been marked as donated by Mrs. Fraser York.

MRS. YORK, SENIOR.

On our way to the station, Mrs. Fleming told us that Mrs. York, senior, is buried on the old farm; that there was no graveyard in those days so she was buried on the farm and a small oak tree placed to mark the spot. The oak tree has grown and, remarked Mrs. Fleming, "It is bigger than any oak in Victoria."

Typed, 11 June 1945—J.S. Matthews.

Note by Mrs. York, attached to her letter, 18 June, after reading the rough draft of this, sent her for approval: "As far as I can see, Major, your write-up is all correct."

Having sent the rough draft of notes above recorded to Mrs. York for review on 18 June 1945, she replied in a letter:

PORT DOUGLAS, 1860.

I came to British Columbia in March, 1860 with my Father, William Robert Macdonald and my Mother, Jane Macdonald. We went to Port Douglas, a town at the head of Harrison Lake; it was the route at that time to the Cariboo goldfields and was a thriving little town—at that time.

Transportation was done by stage coach, mule teams, ox-teams, pack trains. For about seven years the little town flourished. Then the Cariboo road from Yale was finished and that finished Port Douglas; when we left there it was nothing but what you would call now a "ghost town." When we left there were still two families but they left soon after. I went to school there. Mrs. Lipsett taught school. There were about ten or twelve scholars; "Government School" but we used American books. I have still my Third Reader used in the Douglas School. We had an American church and a Mr. Gamage was the vicar; he later went back to England. The reason Douglas was abandoned as a road to the Cariboo was that there were too many portages to make on that route.

It was a boat trip from New Westminster to Douglas. Then from Douglas to the Twenty-nine Mile House, kept by Mr. Joe Smith who ran the stage from Douglas. There was a lake to cross; what was called Tenas Lake; tenas—small, in Chinook. Then another portage, then another lake. The lakes were called Tenas Lake, Anderson Lake, Pemberton and Seaton Lake, and, of course, there had to be steamers on those lakes. I spent week-ends, when I was quite small at the Twenty-nine, Tenas Lake. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, with their son Joe, moved to Clinton and opened the Clinton Hotel which is still running. Mary Smith, his daughter, or, I should say, the older Mr. Smith's granddaughter; Joe, the younger, was his son. He has passed away several years ago but Mary is still in Clinton and maybe she could give you some information as to old timers.

Our social life was pleasant, too, in Douglas. We had no afternoon "pink teas." In summer time we had picnics on the lake and, little house dances now and then and riding parties out to the Royal Engineer camp, who were building the Cariboo Road. And, in winter time, the lake was frozen over and we had skating parties and sleds. Oh, we had happy times in those days. Then we had two celebrations a year; always the 24th May and this may seem queer to you, we always had a celebration on the 4th July. The reason? In those small towns at that time were a number of Americans, especially the business people and they gave so generously to anything and everything which came along that it was up to the Britishers to return the compliment. There was not any speeching or boasting; everything was for sport and all had a good time. Of course, some would indulge towards evening and we had lots of firecrackers. The Royal Salute was given on a blacksmith's anvil, twenty-one guns for both days. Powder was placed on the anvil; a long pole with a lighted end was put to it; then the explosion.

CAMELS, 1863.

Yes, it was in Port Douglas the camels came, 1863, and I was hoisted on the back of one, as I stood watching them being loaded with their packs.

In 1867 we bade farewell to dear old Port Douglas and I never saw it again until last September; after seventy-seven years absence. I saw no vestige of the old town, but a very very old cherry tree and it is a huge one. Nothing but a logging camp now. At the Eighteen Mile Post, on the old Douglas Road is the hot springs, St. Agnes as it was called then, kept by a man and his wife, name of Stein. Mrs. Stein's father was one of the Royal Engineers; she was a member of the Morey family who lived in Westminster.

We left Douglas in 1867 in the month of July. And I remember it quite clearly. We left in a scow; no steamers then; all were put on the Yale run. I have a picture of Port Douglas, given me by Dr. Lamb of the Provincial Archives, as I knew and saw it in 1867. It was a flourishing little town in its day. Mr. Trethewey has a logging camp there. Last September I took a trip with Mrs. Fleming, my daughter; stayed overnight and slept in a little shack on a boom of logs; you could hear the water swishing under the logs. But I enjoyed my trip. Mrs. Trethewey was very kind. We had our meals at the camp cook house. They had everything in the way of eats. There were about three or four women at the camp when I was there last summer; also two or three children.

Another thing about those old There were not very many white single women. Consequently men took Indian wives and breed children were plentiful. But in Douglas, I only remember one half-breed boy. But in Yale the school was full of breeds.

This concludes all about Douglas but I know I have missed a lot.

YALE, B.C., 1867.

Now my life in Yale, or Fort Yale as we called it then, was almost like in Douglas. The school was larger and they were using British school books.

Yale was the head of navigation. Steamers from New Westminster plied twice a week, Sunday and Thursday; departed Friday and Monday. Transportation of freight and passengers was the same; passengers to Cariboo and way points, stage coach; by ox-teams, mule teams, pack trains. Mr. J.F. Barnard was the stage-coachman; "Barnard's Express." The stage left Yale on Monday Morning, returning on Thursday. It met the Barkerville stage down at Clinton. It was supposed to be about four hundred miles, so the Yale stage and the Barkerville stage met at Clinton; four hundred miles from Yale to Cariboo—Barkerville, as Douglas.

THE ROAD ENGINES. FIRST TRACTION ENGINES.

We had two celebrations in Yale; 24th May and 4th July. Sports only; no speeches or boasting. It was in Yale I first saw road engines. J.F. Barnard brought, I think it was, six engines and six engineers. These road engines were to be used in place of oxen and mules for drawing the heavy loaded covered wagons. So, one morning all Yale was up bright and early (as the saying is, all hands and the cook) to see them start. Well, as long as the way was even and not hilly it, or they worked all right. But when they began, or tried, when they came to the steep grades, then of course, they didn't, so they had to go back to mules and ox-trains again. Mr. Barnard, I believe, disposed of the six engines to some mills in Vancouver at Moodyville or Hastings. All the engineers but one went back to Scotland. The one who stayed behind, a Mr. Jim McArthur, died in Vancouver a few years ago. So, like the camels, they were a failure.

TINGLEY OF YALE. BARNARD'S EXPRESS.

There was a family who lived in Yale by the name of Tingley. Mr. Tingley was driver for Barnard's Express Company; later on he became a partner. Then it became Barnard, Tingley and Hamilton or "B-X" it was called. His son, Fred C. Tingley was born in Yale in 1873. He was only five months old when I saw him last; if you should come in contact with him—he lives in Vancouver—remember me to him.

Social affairs in Yale were the same as in Douglas. We didn't say dances in those days; we called them balls. Picnics and sometimes a concert with lantern slides. And, in Yale, the young men went around about twelve o'clock New Year's Even, singing "All's Well." New Year's Day they called at all the homes and had refreshments. Our refreshments, when anyone called on anybody, the hostess served wine and rich fruit or pound cake. Nowadays it is tea, coffee and some very poor cake or a stale doughnut and, in some cases, very poor tea.

This concludes all about Yale. All I have told just includes Douglas and Yale. But I think I could fill a book.

We left Yale in December 1874 and came to Chilliwack. In the year 1875 I came to Upper Sumas to teach school. I was the first teacher at Upper Sumas School. I taught until 1877, when I went back to Chilliwack.

CHILLIWACK. PORT DOUGLAS. FORT YALE.

My life in Chilliwack was not very long. I disliked Chilliwack; their mode of living was altogether different to Port Douglas and Fort Yale. For one thing, they were so religious. Mostly all were Wesleyan Methodist. I went to school there for awhile and in 1875 I came to Upper Sumas to teach and taught until 1877. Then, in July of that year I went up to the Cariboo and taught school at Stanley. Left there in autumn of 1878 and came home to Chilliwack.

In the year 1880, on the 9th November, I married my husband, Thomas Fraser York. Then went back to Yale to live. Left Yale again in 1881 and came with my husband to make my home at Upper Sumas and have lived here ever since, with the exception of two years when I lived in Bellingham, U.S.A., called Whatcom at that time.

Doctors were scarce and far between in all three places. Chilliwack did have one for awhile.

THOMAS FRASER YORK.

My husband, Thomas Fraser York was born in Fort Yale, October 21st, Trafalgar Day, 1858. He lived there until 1865. Then the family moved to Upper Sumas, B.C. The old people remained there until they passed away. Mrs. York September 14th, 1886 and Mr. T. York, 23rd December 1893.

Note: the manuscript is unsigned. J.S. Matthews.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. GLENDOWER K. ALLEN, 5501 MACKENZIE STREET, PRESIDENT, VANCOUVER GLADIOLUS SOCIETY (SEE THAT DOCKET.) MR. ALLEN VERY KINDLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES THIS MORNING, 25 JULY 1945.

GROWING PLANTS WITHOUT SOIL.

Note: in 1944, Mr. Allen published, in pamphlet form, a treatise entitled "Growing Plants Without Soil." \$1.00.

Mr. Allen: "I first started growing plants without soil in 1918 in Calgary while I was in the employ of the Alberta Government telephone, as a hobby. In 1924 I came to Vancouver and experimented until 1933; then I opened up large greenhouses on a commercial basis, situated at 6559 Argyle Street, South Vancouver. There I commercialised the growing of tomatoes in torpedo gravel. Torpedo gravel is a cracked pea gravel. My fruit from 1933 to 1940 has been analysed at the Experimental Farm, Ottawa, and each year the fruit has been higher in nutrition value, plus all vitamin, at least twenty-five percent, compared with the Ontario and Utah greenhouse tomatoes. For three years running I have sent five crates of greenhouse tomatoes, grown without soil, to the Vancouver General Hospital and the authorities, the dieticians, say that the patients prefer them to any other kind of grown tomatoes."

Major Matthews: Has anyone else in Vancouver preceded you in the growth of vegetables without soil?

Mr. Allen: "No, no one. Not any one; I was the first. In Calgary, in 1918, I had read small articles on it and on one of my visits to Edmonton, I met on the train a celebrated German by the name of Dr. J.S.