

Early Vancouver

Volume Six

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1940-1945.

Supplemental to volumes one, two, three, four and five collected in 1931, 1932, 1934, 1939 and 1944.

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CONVERSATION WITH MR. THOMAS LAING, FORMERLY OF McROBERTS “RICHMOND FARM” ON SEA ISLAND, NOW OF 8809 MONTCALM STREET, VANCOUVER, WHO, TOGETHER WITH WILLIAM MACKIE, NEPHEW OF WILLIAM MACKIE, WHO PREEMPTED D.L. 472, FAIRVIEW, VANCOUVER, IN 1874, VERY KINDLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES THIS MORNING, 1 FEBRUARY 1945.

Mr. Mackie, despite his great age, 87, is quite active, though very deaf, but can hear with a speaking tube.

McROBERTS ISLAND. SEA ISLAND. McROBERTS HOUSE. “RICHMOND FARM.”

Major Matthews: (exhibiting a photo) What is this photo of?

Mr. Laing: (through a tube to Mr. Mackie) “That was the first house on Sea Island, wasn’t it?”

Mr. Mackie: “Yes.”

Mr. Laing: “Where did they get the lumber for it, Mr. Mackie?”

Mr. Mackie: “From New Westminster, I suppose; it was the only place they could get lumber from.”

Mr. Laing: “Who else was on Sea Island beside?”

Mr. Mackie: “McRoberts was first; Kilgour and Hugh Boyd were next. Boyd and Kilgour located on Sea Island at the same time as McCleery on the mainland. Boyd and McCleery came to the country at the same time.”

Mr. Laing: “Do you remember McRoberts living in that house; this one here in the photo?”

Mr. Mackie: “McRoberts lived in that house, but he got half of Sea Island for clearing a trail from Point Grey to New Westminster.”

Mr. Laing: “When you visited Sea Island in 1882, who was living McRoberts’ house?”

CARSCALLEN OF SEA ISLAND.

Mr. Mackie: “Carscallens. McRoberts had gone. I forget exactly who was there after Carscallen. I have an idea that McRae was in the house after Carscallens, but I am not sure.”

Major Matthews: Mr. Laing. When did you go there?

Mr. Laing: “As I told you the other day, I went to Lulu Island first in 1893. Then the next year, 1894, over to Sea Island. McRae had a lease on McRoberts’ old place, and I took over the lease from McRae. McRoberts sold to Wood, through Fitzgerald McCleery, who had his power of attorney. Wood was up at Greenwood, where he started the town named after him, ‘Green,’ ‘Wood.’ Bob Wood got Christopher Wood to invest in Greenwood, and” (ominously) “Christopher Wood lost everything at Greenwood.”

Mr. Laing to Mr. Mackie: “What were the Carscallens doing on the place?”

LOGGING CAMPS.

Mr. Mackie: “They were farming in the ordinary way. You must remember, in those days all the hay and crops went to the logging camps on the river; all the barns were on the river bank, North Arm, Fraser River, for that especial reason; the boats came up the river, right to the barn on the river bank; the steamers came right up the river and took the hay right out of the barn on to the logging camps.”

FALSE CREEK TRAIL. NORTH ARM ROAD.

Major Matthews to Mr. Mackie: Was there a trail from where Marpole is now right across country, over Little Mountain, to False Creek at the present Main Street?

Mr. Mackie: “The only way to get from Sea Island or McCleery’s was to go up the trail until you got to the North Arm Road—they call it Fraser Avenue now—and go up that until you came to the present Kingsway. It was the only road—unless you came through the bush. It was down at the corner of Fraser

and Marine Drive where I met the bear, right on the trail, and it was narrow, too. I picked up a rock and threw it at him, and then ran. What the bear did I don't know; that was sixty years ago."

JERRY ROGERS' LOGGING ROADS.

Mr. Laing: "How could you get through the bush?"

Mr. Mackie: "Jerry Rogers' logging road. At the junction of the logging roads there would be pieces of wood laid crossways on a stump, or something, and marked; otherwise you would get lost. Signs, pieces of stick crossed to tell you, at the junction, which logging road to take."

Mr. Laing: "But wasn't there a trail from Marpole cross-country to Gastown; or was there more than one. What Major Matthews wants to know is how could you get from Eburne's" (Marpole) "to False Creek by coming through the bush."

SPARS. CARIBOO TRACTOR.

Mr. Mackie: "It was only logging roads that went from what is Marpole; it was logging roads; there were logging roads all through. Jerry Rogers was taking out spars; there was a fine patch of spars. William Mackie, my uncle, was going through up there, Little Mountain and Shaughnessy up there, and found a fine patch of spars; they were up on the summit; I came through them. I went through them and came back and told my uncle, and my uncle said, 'You be careful, or you'll get lost in there.' I did not get lost, and the spars were right on the summit. What did Jerry Rogers do with them? I could not tell you; I could not tell you how many he took out; they were shipping them all the time; they were shipping shiploads of them; whole cargoes. He hauled them down the skid road with an engine which ran on rails a foot square and were raised up, and the wheels had a flange on them. But it was all cattle when he first came."

FALSE CREEK TRAIL.

Major Matthews: Well, there must have been some sort of trail from False Creek. When you went up from the False Creek bridge to your uncle's place on D.L. 472, you went up a ...

Mr. Mackie: "Skid road, on a skid road. There was no other way. Unless you went out the Westminster Road and went down the North Arm Road" (Fraser Avenue.) "If there was any other trail, then I never knew of it."

(Note by Major Matthews: He says "he never knew of it." Here is a man whose first visit to his uncle's place on D.L. 472 [bounded by Oak, Cambie, 16th and 25th avenues] whose first movement after arrival in Granville or Gastown in 1882, was to go to his uncle's camp, now Douglas Park, and who created the first garden in Fairview on that area, and who worked in the woods for months, knows the Kilgours, Boyds, McCleerys, etc., etc., and Garrapie and his wife at Garrapie's, now Marpole, who says that, if there was a trail cross-country, "he never knew of it," which is a very fair intimation of what it was like. Undoubtedly he travelled it, but thought it was a logging road of Jerry Rogers, or part of one. I have travelled these trails, and it is hard to tell what an old trail through the forest was used for previously if it has been abandoned a year or so.)

MCRROBERTS FARM. THOMAS LAING.

Major Matthews: Mr. Laing, will you please tell me about McRoberts farm?

Mr. Laing: "When I first went there we were married; we went there right after the wedding; we were married right over at McCleery's farm on the mainland, in the house that they lived in when they first went there; afterwards they built a house further up the hill. The house we were married in was 'quite a house'; the Rev. James Buchanan, Presbyterian, married us, and then we went right over to McRoberts' place at once. My wife was Marian Mackie, sister to Bill Mackie here.

"When we got over there the place was not very well improved, and we signed a lease with McCleery, attorney for Christopher Wood, that we would bring all the unbroken country under cultivation in a workmanlike manner, that is, clean the farm right up, and we did it, too. We had to pay a rent of one thousand dollars a year to Fitzgerald McCleery, and at the time we had about one hundred and ten acres."

MCROBERTS FARM. "RICHMOND FARM."

"When we took it over from McCleery, we had five head of stock, all heifers, and that was the nucleus of our stock. There wasn't anything else; McCleery took the rest of the stuff away, but we bought the heifers. We continued along until we were able to buy the place. We worked very hard and cleared up the farm, and McCleery said we were the best tenants he ever had. We took over from McCleery in 1895, and bought the place about thirty years ago."

MCROBERTS HOUSE (INSIDE).

"The McRoberts house, inside, was very plain; there was a passage way from the front door to the back, and the lean-to at the back was the kitchen. There were two bedrooms, and the house was papered—on the walls—inside. When we went there first the kitchen was papered with newspapers. It had a brick chimney; we built the brick chimney; we put up some studs about six feet high, and built the chimney on that of brick. I suppose, but I forget, that before we built the brick chimney it was stove pipes and a tin collar where they went through the roof."

FIRST WATER ON SEA ISLAND.

"Water? I'll tell you what we did. We were carrying water from the river for household purposes, so I built a tank, six feet high, six foot wide, and six foot long, and we caught the river water for chores, and the rainwater for household drinking. Then, after a while, when we got to sending milk to the City every day, we got the man to bring us back a can of water every day in the milk can."

FIREWOOD.

"Firewood? I'll tell you. For a number of years we got it all out of the river; for quite a number of years there were quite a number of logs in the river, floating, or they would catch in the bank, so I took a saw and cut them up."

BUTTER.

"Butter? We made butter for quite awhile; we have made as much as one hundred and twenty-five pounds a week, and, in the early days, we had our own name on the packages, and sold it with our name on it, at Woodward's and Webster Bros., the grocers on Granville near Drake Street; I mean, the Woodward's now the department store. We never kept bees, we did not try ducks nor geese, but we had a few chickens for their eggs. And on Sundays, we went to church. The old church was burned down, but the manse is there yet."

MURDER OF MCRORY.

Major Matthews: Do you remember the murder of McRory?

Mr. Laing: "I'll tell you about Jim McRory. He lived in a shack, just off what is now Granville Street South; his shack was right on the Shannon farm, and he was keeping batch in it; he was working on the road" (Granville Street, then North Arm Road.) "The Indian came around begging, and Jim gave him a sort of a rebuff; I suppose told the Indian he did not want any Siwash around there, and I suppose that made the Indian angry, and he went off and found a sharp axe, and when Jim was asleep, he went in and just about severed the head from the body. I saw the body; sure I did. The axe must have been real sharp, and it is supposed the Indian cut him while he was asleep in bed, right across the back of the neck. The Indian was tried and found guilty, but he died in jail before he was executed. The shack was on the west side of the road on the Shannon property; it must have been about 1898. I was not on the jury; did not give evidence; and saw the body at Eburne as they were taking it away. We were friends of Jim, and as soon as we heard of it, we hitched up the buggy, and went right up to see if we could be of any use. Jim used to help Bill Mackie here to make hay."

WILLIAM MACKIE. PREEMPTOR, D.L. 472. MACKIE STREET.

Mr. Mackie: "I'm going to give you this photograph. It is of William Mackie, my uncle, the preemptor of D.L. 472. It was taken at Agassiz." (Note: D.L. 472 was bounded by Oak and Cambie streets, and by 16th and 25th avenues, and was preempted by William Mackie, 19 June 1874. It was an "Island" in the extensive C.P.R. Grant of 6,000 acres.)

INDIAN CUSTOMS. RABBITS.

"Uncle told me he was up in the Peace River prospecting, and had an Indian boy helping him to carry his stuff, and the ground was all covered with pea vine and full of rabbits. The Indian set fire to the pea vine, and Uncle asked him what he was doing that for, and the Indian replied it was to drive all the rabbits towards his illahie" (village.) "The photograph was taken at Agassiz by a Frenchman named Bishieu" (sic.) "Uncle was born at Dundee, Scotland, in 1928."

LAING GENEALOGY.

Mr. Laing: "We have five children, and seven grandchildren now. Three boys and two girls. One of our sons, Richard, he is on the McRoberts farm now; he has it leased from me, and he has a boy and a girl. Arthur, another son, is living in the city and works for Buckerfield, and he has one little girl, and Tommy, the eldest boy, he died when he was nineteen, and is buried in Mountain View Cemetery. And of the girls, the eldest is Rachael, Mrs. Moodie; she lives with us at 8809 Montcalm Street, Marpole, and she has two daughters; then the other daughter, also Mrs. Moodie—the two girls married two brothers—she has two boys."

At this point the two old gentlemen felt we had done enough for the morning, and after the usual courtesies, disappeared as the elevator doors closed.

As told to me, 1 February 1945

J.S. Matthews.

MCROBERTS HOUSE BUILT IN 1862.

Mr. Laing told me that "McRoberts built the house in 1862."

CONVERSATION AT THE CITY ARCHIVES, CITY HALL, VANCOUVER, 1 FEBRUARY 1945, BETWEEN THE REVEREND JOHN ANTLE, RETIRED, FORMERLY OF THE COLUMBIA COAST MISSION, AND NOW LIVING ON HIS YACHT, *REVERE*, ANCHORED AT THE ROYAL VANCOUVER YACHT CLUB FLOAT, COAL HARBOUR, VANCOUVER, WHERE HE HAS BEEN FOR SOME YEARS.

Mr. Antle is now approaching 80 years of age (exact age not available), is a very active man for his age; came by street car and returned that way after spending three hours going over a docket referring to himself and his ship in the City Archives.

COLUMBIA COAST MISSION ESTABLISHED 1904.

Question: (Major Matthews, City Archivist) Mr. Antle, will you please tell the story of the start of the Mission.

Answer: (Rev. Mr. Antle) "When I resigned from Holy Trinity Church—as rector—my intention was to start the Columbia Coast Mission; to visit, and to establish hospitals and hospital vessels along the northern British Columbia coast; the Mission now extends from Pender Harbour to Seymour Inlet, and includes three hospitals, one each at Pender Harbour, Rock Bay and Alert Bay."

REV. JOHN ANTLE, ORIGINATOR.

"I started it in 1904; I was the originator of the whole movement. I laid my plans before the two dioceses, the diocese of New Westminster and the diocese of Columbia, and, do you know, it took me two years before I could get them to acknowledge that they were in duty bound to take the matter up. The bishop of New Westminster was Bishop John Dart, and the bishop of Columbia was Bishop W.W. Perrin. The boundary of the diocese of New Westminster is not very definite, but afterwards a boundary was established in order that the Columbia Coast Mission might know which diocese they were working in. In a general way, the diocese of Columbia is Vancouver Island, and the diocese of New Westminster is the mainland, but there are a lot of islands, large and small, so that, in a general way, the boundary line between the two dioceses is the main channel north.