

## **Early Vancouver**

### **Volume Seven**

**By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.**

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*Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected between 1931-1956.*

### **About the 2011 Edition**

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### Richmond Farm, McRobert's Island.

The first house on Sea Island. Built in 1862 by Hugh McRoberts,  
first settler, 1861. Acquired by Thomas Laing 1894, since demolished.  
It stood just inside dyke about one and a half miles west of Eburne.  
Erected with lumber brought from New Westminster by boat or canoe.  
Had passage front to rear; two bedrooms; kitchen in lean-to. Originally  
stove pipe chimney; water from river; firewood from drifting logs.  
Extensive orchard planted, and wheat cultivated before Sep. 1862.  
In 1945, part (110 acres) of original 1300 acres, leased & occupied by  
Richard Laing, son of Thomas Laing. At one time, owned by Christopher  
& Robert Wood. First known as "Richmond" or "Richmond View" in 1862.  
Photo presented, 21 Jan, 1945, by Thomas Laing, 8809 Montcalm St.  
Hugh McRoberts died on or about 14 July 1883. City Archives.

*[photo annotation:]*

The first house on Sea Island. Built in 1862 by Hugh McRoberts, first settler, 1861. Acquired by Thomas Laing 1864, since demolished. It stood just inside dyke about one and a half miles west of Eburne. Erected with lumber brought from New Westminster by boat or Canoe. Had passage front to rear; two bedrooms; kitchen in lean-to. Originally stove pipe chimney; water from river, firewood from drifting logs. Extensive orchard planted, and wheat cultivated before Sept. 1862. In 1945, part (110 acres) of original 1300 acres, leased & occupied by Richard Laing, son of Thomas Laing. At one time, owned by Christopher & Robert Wood. First known as "Richmond" or "Richmond View" in 1862.

Photo presented, 21 Jan. 1945, by Thomas Laing, 8809 Montcalm St. Hugh McRoberts died on or about 14 July 1883. City Archives.

## **A NIGHT WITH THE BOYDS OF RICHMOND, CANADA.**

Remarks of Major J.S. Matthews, V.D., City Archivist, Vancouver, to an assemblage of the citizens of the Municipality of Richmond, British Columbia, as he presented, on behalf of Mrs. Mary A. Boyd of "Richmond," Bangor, Northern Ireland, two portraits, framed in gilt, of her late husband, Hugh Boyd, first Warden or Reeve of Richmond, 1880, and one of herself.

The ceremony took place in the gymnasium of the Richmond High School, Sea Island, and the portraits were received by Reeve R.M. Grauer on the evening of 11 June 1947, and in the presence of a large number of councillors, residents and students.

Major Matthews:

Mr. Chairman, Reeve Grauer, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am here tonight as the emissary or messenger of a very dear and very early pioneer lady of Lulu Island and Sea Island. She was here before the municipality of Richmond was named and is now very old, ninety-three years, and lives far away. At this moment, seven thousand miles away, at Bangor in Northern Ireland, she is thinking of you and I feel conscious, as my hope is you will also be, that she is standing beside me here on the platform, with her hand on my arm for support and looking at you and listening to what I say at her request. So far it is possible she will speak to you, through her letters to me, in her own words.

This is how it started.

One day in 1944, a lady was looking around the Archives of Richmond and Vancouver, preserved in the City Hall. She was a stranger so I went over and spoke. Presently I learned that she was from Winnipeg and that her husband, Alexander Boyd, was born on the North Arm, Fraser River. To my astonishment, she said her mother-in-law, Mrs. Hugh Boyd, was still hale and hearty in Northern Ireland. That started a correspondence with Mrs. Hugh Boyd.

Mrs. Boyd, once Miss Mary Ann McColl, was the daughter of Sergeant William McColl of the Royal Engineers, who came here in April 1859 on the famous ship, *Thames City*, to establish law and order and create government in what had been, since the dawn of time, an unnamed wilderness. April 1859 was a mere eight months after the good Queen Victoria had decided that the colony should be named British Columbia.

It was Sergeant McColl who made the first surveys on the shores of Vancouver Harbour in 1863. The *Thames City*, sailing ship, came around the Horn, but I have been unable to ascertain in time for this evening if Mrs. Boyd was on the ship. It is pretty certain that she was, and, if so, then with John Henry Scales, now living in Mount Pleasant, Vancouver, they together are the only living survivors of that historic voyage. As a bride in 1873, she came down the Fraser River from New Westminster by boat and canoe to her husband's pioneer homestead in the wilds, and on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1874, their son, Alexander, husband of the Winnipeg lady, was born, the second white child born on these islands. Two of Mrs. Boyd's sisters, Mrs. Appleby of Kelowna and Mrs. Grant of New Westminster, were invited to be here this evening. Mrs. Appleby answered it would be impossible. I hope Mrs. Grant is here. Pilot Officer Hugh Boyd Gilmore, son of Mr. and Mrs. S.H. Gilmore, and brother of Mrs. Thos. Wyle, both of Shell Road, was a student of this high school. This gallant airman was reported missing after his twenty-second operational flight—that is a high number of flights—August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944, and lies buried in France. So long as we have such men there is scant fear for Canada. He called on Mrs. Boyd in Ireland shortly before his death.

Hugh Boyd was the first Warden, as they were then called, or Reeve of Richmond. He was born in Northern Ireland in 1842, and as a mere lad of nineteen ventured in to the unknown, via Panama, to take part, 1862, in the Cariboo Gold rush. Disappointed, he returned, and in 1863 helped to cut a trail, now Marine Drive, from the Capital of British Columbia, New Westminster, to the sea at the Musqueam Indian Reserve. [Note: via *Isthmus of Panama*.]

In 1865 and in 1866, together with Alexander Kilgour, he homesteaded virgin land in the wilderness on the south side of Sea Island, later known as "Rosebrook Farm." In an old diary I found that in January, 1865, Mr. McKie, Mr. Kilgour and Mr. Boyd went out to hunt in the muskeg for elk; only once did he see wolves on Sea Island, and that was when four of them attacked a cow, but made off when men approached, but the animal was so injured that it had to be destroyed. Strychnine was put in the body, and the next day four dead wolves were found nearby. Mr. Boyd was inspector on a slit through the forest known as the "Road to Granville," the first road cut from these islands to what is now Kingsway, and the street we know as Fraser Street.

### **BEST GRAIN IN BRITISH EMPIRE.**

In 1887 Mr. Boyd won a medal at the great exhibition during the celebrations in London of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The medal is here tonight for you to see, and was for the best wheat grown in the British Empire for, at that time, the Canadian prairie had not begun to ship grain in quantity; the railway from Montréal to Vancouver was not finished. Remember, the best grain grown in the British Empire in 1886 was grown here in Richmond. Mr. Boyd returned to Ireland in 1887, where he died in 1931, aged eighty-nine. He was six feet tall.

The petition for the incorporation of these two islands as a municipality was signed by twenty-five farmers in 1879. The first election, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1880, was held in Mr. and Mrs. Boyd's home. The first meeting of the Council took place in the same room a week later. For one whole year Mrs. Boyd's dining room was the "municipal hall." The expenditures for the whole year were \$488.00 and the last business conducted in the Boyd home was to order chairs and a table for the new Municipal Hall, and pass a hearty vote of thanks to Mrs. Boyd for her hospitality.

### **"MUDFLATTERS."**

Picture in your mind's eye the scattered few of Lulu Island and Sea Island coming in their boats or canoes on a moonlight night. They couldn't spare time in the day and meeting were always held on moonlight nights so that the moon would light the way. The "Mudflatters" step ashore at the little dock, walk towards the Boyd home; have their slippers in their overcoat pocket; leave their muddy boots on the verandah and then, all twenty-five of them, gather in Mrs. Boyd's dining room around the table. Presently the question comes up of what the name of the municipality shall be. One wants Delta, but is told it cannot be as the name is already adopted by another municipality. Then someone suggests one name, another; another suggests something else and they don't know what name they want. Then Mrs. Boyd opens the door to the kitchen and comes in with the hot scones and the steaming coffee. There have been many meetings and many a time Mrs. Boyd has done the same thing.

Then, the meeting over, they each said good night, going to the end of the small wharf, untied the canoes and went back to their homes up or down the river. There were no roads at all on Lulu nor Sea Island.

May I now read to you from Mrs. Boyd's letter of September, 1944:

"I thank you for your kind letter; also the newspaper. They brought to me many happy memories as well as tragic ones. In my early life British Columbia was a wild country; especially in my father's time. People cannot imagine what early settlers came through when they look around at the beautiful houses and the easy way of travelling. But we had no roads; only used the Fraser River in open boats, and having to wait for the tide in our favour; its wonderful to me to hear people grumbling at having to walk a few yards. The name Richmond was decided on as an honor to me, and for the name of the town I was born in Yorkshire, and also for allowing my dining room as Council Chamber until a hall was built. My husband was a Justice of the Peace; many times having great difficulty deciding the neighbor's troubles. Please don't laugh at my mistakes. I do very little writing now and have forgotten how to spell."

Next, in her letter of January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945, she says:

"I thank you for sending me the 'Marpole-Richmond Review.' It gave me great pleasure sitting by my fireside to look at the beautiful houses and compare it with the little houses we had, and the trouble we had to locate our school in the best place for all the children to be able to get to it. Only one lady teacher, and the mighty Fraser River for the road to it. Had there been better facilities for schooling I would be in Richmond now, but I watched our children going out of sight in their row boat in the waves when a storm arose.

"But, for all that we had a happy life; plenty of good food and fruit; good neighbors; the more we disagreed the better friends we became. If I was only a few years younger I would visit my native land; the sight of it on the newspaper makes me homesick."

As a Christmas gift, 1945, there arrived from Mrs. Boyd two pairs of very fine grey wool socks. Please remember these were knitted by a lady well over ninety; finest of stitches and not a stitch dropped. I considered socks, knitted by the first Lady of Richmond, too precious to desecrate by putting them on my feet—so had a glass case made for them and have brought them for you to see, together with the famous grain medal in the same protection.

Her next letter reads, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1946:

"I was told you would be highly offended if I sent such things as socks to you, but I know better.

"Now, I want to tell you I have two very nice oil paintings of my husband and myself done by a Mr. Walker. I would like to send them to the Richmond Municipality. Would you kindly give me your advice. This is to be a little secret between you and me until we see if it comes off.

"Mary Boyd."

I then wrote to Admiral Lord Granville, Governor of Northern Ireland, whose countess is sister to our good Queen Elizabeth (Consort of George VI), and who lives in Government House, Belfast, not far from where Mrs. Boyd lives at Bangor, and asked him if he would accept, on behalf of the people of Richmond, the two portraits in oil. He graciously consented and wrote to me all about his visit. He said that when he drove up to her home with his staff he saw the old lady standing, straight as a ramrod, on her own doorstep waiting for him. He got out of the car and approached her, he writes, "feeling very much like a naughty school boy approaching a strict school mistress and expecting a wiggling." And, mind you, he is an admiral, a governor and an earl.

Now let us see what Mrs. Boyd has to say:

"My big day is a thing of the past. It passed off grand, and I enjoyed my little talk with the Earl very much. He is a fine, homely gentleman. The countess did not come owing to illness. The Earl came with all his official company. Just fancy! eight big policemen at my house. They walked through the rooms, I suppose to see all was right. I just wonder how anyone could want to harm such a grand man. He told me he had been to British Columbia, and that at one time Vancouver was named Granville after his father. I presented my eldest daughter and said she has taken care of me for the last sixteen years, and the earl said 'she has done her work well.'"

Her granddaughter, E.M. Buckingham, "Richmond," Bangor, wrote four months ago:

"My grandma, I am sorry to say, is no better; poor old soul; the body is just tired and worn out. She often says that if she were younger she would make a trip out to see you all.

"Grandma says she has only to close her eyes, and she can see herself standing in a room with all the men of the council and being asked what name she would choose. She chose 'Richmond' in honour of her birthplace."

It was a happy choice for it complimented her neighbour, Hugh McRoberts, the first settler on Sea island, who had for many years, used it as the name of his adjoining farm.

It seems that fate was determined that this municipality should be called "Richmond."

It is said that it would have been "Delta," from the Greek letter D, the shape of the two islands, but the municipality of Delta, that is Ladner, which was formed the same year, 1879, got ahead of them.

Then there is a Richmond, near Sydney in New South Wales, and that must have been named in honor of Richmond in Yorkshire where Mrs. Boyd was born, or after Richmond in Sussex, where Captain Vancouver died. In any case, Hugh McRoberts, who was the first settler on Sea Island, lived near Richmond, Australia, before he came to British Columbia. The name "Richmond" for his farm was used as early as 1862. So that you can not only claim kinship to Yorkshire, to Sussex and Australia, but even to Northern Ireland for Mrs. Boyd's home at Bangor is called "Richmond."

We now come to her last letter of April 28<sup>th</sup>. Here it is as I hold it in my hand.

"If I were a few years younger I would come out and see you all, and you could take me to see the wonderful improvements since we left our old farm."

At the very moment that old lady of ninety-three was penning those lines, there arose in the air from her former fields, now the Vancouver Airport, a giant airplane carrying thirty passengers. Thirty-eight and one-half hours later it descended from the skies in Auckland, New Zealand, on the other side of the world. Such are the wonders of the age through which Mrs. Boyd has lived.

(Next: Read the deed of gift.)

(Next: Read the resolution of thanks, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1947, to Mrs. Boyd for her gift, passed by the Council of Richmond.)

Reeve Grauer and Councillors and people of Richmond:

I request your permission to cable, tomorrow morning, to Mrs. Hugh Boyd informing her that her gift has been safely delivered into your hands.

Note: the two portraits are preserved in the City Archives, Vancouver. J.S.M.

## **PRESENTATION OF PORTRAITS, REEVE AND MRS. HUGH BOYD, 23 MAY 1947.**

21<sup>st</sup> June, 1947.

Dear Mrs. Boyd:

The scene was your little island in the west; Sea Island, at the mouth of the mighty Fraser River. The day was the eve of the great queen's birthday, Victoria, the Good, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, and the time exactly sixty years after your dear husband won the medal in London for the best wheat grown in the British Empire.

It was a beautiful evening at the end of a perfect day. The setting sun shone brilliantly, and the emerald green trees cast long shadows as cool summer zephyrs gently touched their verdant leaves. Off to the side a group of youths were playing football in the field; off to the left, Jersey cows were munching grass; high in the sky came a solitary airplane coming to the Vancouver Airport, once your old pasture. In the centre of the level land a great building stood alone like a pyramid of Egypt in the desert; high, massive, the gymnasium of the Richmond High School. A few motor cars came, some stopped, some passed on. And from other directions came people—fathers, mothers, sons and daughters of the community—strolling up the long straight highway without hurry or haste, just coming to the gymnasium to hear a message from the first lady of Richmond in Northern Ireland far away.

The Reeve of Richmond was there early, Reeve R.M. Grauer; so was the Municipal Clerk, Mr. R.C. Palmer, and the members of the Council. But I was first, and had to wait until someone came to open the door. Then we carried the portraits, in their boxes, inside and up to