

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.

About the 2011 Edition

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Ellis has been sick with the "flu" at the coast but is better now. I heard from him yesterday.

We have had some snow here for nearly a month, which is unusually early.

Must close now as Fred is going down town soon.

With love,

Margaret.

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. WALTER VERMILYEA, PIONEER, 1876, WHO IS ON A VISIT FROM ILLINOIS TO VANCOUVER, WHO KINDLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES IN COMPANY WITH HER DAUGHTER, MISS F. EVELYN M. VERMILYEA, ESCORTED BY MR. KENNETH A. WAITES, KING EDWARD HIGH SCHOOL, AND, AFTER CONVERSING FOR AN HOUR OR SO, PARTOOK OF A CUP OF TEA AND CAKE, 2 DECEMBER 1940.

ADA SWEET.

Mrs. Vermilyea said: "I was born at the town of Selby, Lennox and Addington County, Ontario, September 5th 1872, and the first I can remember is the whistle of a train at Toronto; it was about July or August, 1876. We were on our way to British Columbia, and—I was four years old—I did not want to go; I wanted to go back; the whistle frightened me when it blew. We reached San Francisco by train and took steamboat to Victoria; it was very rough, and I was confined to a berth in a cabin all the way; finally we reached Victoria. I don't know the name of the steamer. I was Ada Sweet then, daughter of O.D. Sweet, and Alice, née Sexsmith."

O.D. SWEET.

"Father" (Orison Davis Sweet) "had gone ahead of us about seven months before, and was teaching school at Cedar Hill, Victoria, so that the travelling party consisted of Mother, my brother Kenneth, older than I am, deceased now, and myself; one of my brothers, Clinton, was left behind in Ontario, and came out three years later with my sister, Margaret Sweet. Then after we arrived here, my sister Alice Grace was born at Cedar Hill, Victoria, about 1878, February 16th, making five children in all in the Sweet family. Mother died in Vancouver in December 1916; Father had died previously in March 1907. Both were buried in Mountain View Cemetery. As I said, I arrived in British Columbia in 1876, when I was four years old; my husband, Walter Vermilyea, came later, in 1883.

"Father's people, the first one being Robert Sweete, came from England in the ship *Neptune* in 1618. I do know that my father was born in Jefferson County, New York, and strangely, my husband's father was also born in New York state, in Hastings County. His grandfather in New York was Solomon Vermilyea.

"My father, O.D. Sweet, was a school teacher and inspector, had the post office, telegraph office, drug store, etc., and taught school besides in Ontario."

SEXSMITH.

"Mother was Miss Alice Sexsmith, daughter of Simon Sexsmith and Margaret, née Holcomb, pioneers of Ontario, where Simon Sexsmith had traded in land, etc.—a sheep for an acre. He had three farms there, and on one farm they had a sugar bush, boiled sugar and maple sugar, but I was too young to remember it. I think Mother and Father were married at Selby, Ontario. Some of my grandparents were Church of England, but our family for five generations back had been Methodists."

SEXSMITH OF LULU ISLAND.

"Alice Sexsmith, my mother, was sister of John W. Sexsmith who farmed on Lulu Island. He came out in 1878."

THE SWEET CHILDREN.

"Mother and Father had five children, in this order:

1. Margaret, born in Selby, Ontario; married the Rev. James A. Wood.

2. Kenneth, born in Selby, Ontario; married at Ladner, B.C. to Emma Denyes. Deceased.
3. Clinton, born in Selby, Ontario. He came to British Columbia after we did, married Polly Asbury, now has great-grandchildren in Vancouver. Lives 2029 West 2nd Avenue.
4. Ada Esther, that is, myself, born in Selby, Ontario, September 5th 1872, married to Walter Vermilyea, January 1st 1891 at "The Parsonage" on Lulu Island.
5. Alice Grace, born Cedar Hill, Victoria, February 16th 1878. Married Charles F. Caldwell, Kaslo mine owner, deceased.

"All have grandchildren, and Clinton, great-grandchildren."

GENEALOGY OF VERMILYEA.

"My husband's family came from Holland to America in 1662 to New York. My husband found in a library in New York, an account of the Vermilyea family; they were traced back to a Peter Vermiglia, Italian spelling of the name, who was a high official of the church. The first one to come to America was Johannes Vermilje who brought his family in 1662. They came to own considerable acreage in the centre of what is now New York, and there is a Vermilyea Avenue there. My family consists of three daughters:

1. Beula Beatrice, born June 25th 1892 at Lulu Island at the time of a strawberry festival at the end of the bridge. A steamer from New Westminster brought people, and the band was playing in the grove. Dr. Tolmie was there with his three daughters and came to call. This daughter is now Mrs. Norman Johnston and they are missionaries in Bolivia. They have one daughter, Anna May, being educated in Oshweken, Ontario, near Brantford.
2. Ada Irene, born in Vermilyea Block, 925 Granville Street, April 9, 1894. She married Dr. A.M. Menzies, now one of the directors under the Metropolitan Health Board of Vancouver. They have two daughters and one son, the two eldest now attending the University of British Columbia, medical courses.
3. Frances Evelyn May, who is here beside me, born in the Vermilyea Block, January 15th, 1896. Unmarried.

CEDAR HILL, VICTORIA.

"So far so good, I hope you have that part clear. Well, when we got to Victoria, and got off the boat, we went out to Cedar Hill where Father was to teach school. Mr. S.D. Pope had given up the school. We lived in a little cottage in the yard next to the school, so, small as I was, I saw the school continuously every day. The first I remember, there were two little boys, twin brothers, who had a regular fist fight back of the school and what do you suppose it was about—about me, as to whose girl I was. You see, going into school, I tried to walk in line with the best looking twin, which was Dave.

"Then I remember they took me to Victoria and they had a sing-song in the Institute for the sailors; it was a big place, and the sailors all stood on the back benches and listened while I sang." (Interjection by Miss Vermilyea: "Mother has a lovely voice.") "Noah Shakespeare was the postmaster, and he organised Good Templar Lodges, and the sing-song was for him—he was chairman—and he organised a lodge at Cedar Hill and appointed my father Deputy. The Good Templar Lodges were very useful. There had never been a real Christmas there before. Father and Mother got up a big Christmas festival, and told everyone to bring something, and they had a nice big table set, and I'll tell you, the people did bring things; lots of beef and turkeys and geese, and we had a *grand* gathering that Christmas. James Deane of the museum or archives of Victoria was there; they had a Christmas tree and Jimmy Deane gave me a present. Father stopped at Cedar Hill about three years, and then we came to Lulu Island about 1879."

ARRIVAL, LULU ISLAND. GEORGE CARSCALLEN.

"Father and Mother decided to go farming, so we went from Victoria to New Westminster by boat, and then down the North Arm of the Fraser on a tug, I think, the *Senator*. I don't think she had paddles. We had all our furniture on board, and Uncle George—that is, George Carscallen—was on hand to help unload. There was no wharf, only the river bank away down, right on their farm. The farm was called the Smith and Robson farm. Uncle got off the little tugboat in a hurry. He fell off into the slough and the

furniture fell on top of him; there he was down in the slough with a table and rocking chair on top of him. He said, 'Well, I've come a long way to get nowhere.'

WILD CATTLE.

"Father and Mother were renting the farm from Smith and Robson and, too, they were buying a thousand head of wild cattle running wild out on the prairie of Lulu Island, all over the island; we had to pay for them, of course. My brothers used to try to round them up with horses, and tried to ship them; tried to get them on the steamer, but they were so wild, they often jumped into the river and got away; some were going to the butcher and some for milk cows; we tried to tame the wild cows. Once, one cow fell in the ditch on her back, and it took all the ropes and things we had to try and haul her back out of the ditch, and when, finally, they got her out, she made a bee line for them with her horns. Uncle rolled under the fence to get away from her. We girls would get up on a high hay mound and watch Father and the boys and the performance. They say someone let them loose on the island about fifty years before."

FIRST SCHOOL, POINT GREY. LULU ISLAND SCHOOL. WELLINGTON CARSCALLEN.

Mrs. Vermilyea, continuing: "The next thing I remember was the opening of the first school for children. It was just below what is now the Sexsmith place. It was Will Ferris' father's place before that."

"But, before that, we had a little school on the mainland, on the bank of the North Arm, up river, but below Marpole of today. It was a little shanty on the bank of the river. We had to take a row boat to cross the North Arm from Lulu Island; my brothers used to row it, and Wellington Carscallen too. It was a long row; it seems now it must have been two or three miles, so I'll tell you what we did to get rid of that. We rented Sam McCleery's house and we took our food and stayed there during the week, and walked up the trail from Mrs. McCleery's to the little school, and on our way visited the Garipee estate. It seemed deserted. Margaret Sweet, my sister, attended school at the cabin at McCleery's."

MRS. SAMUEL MCCLEERY. MISS FRANCES CARSCALLEN. FIRST SCHOOL TEACHER.

Major Matthews: How big was it; as big as a bathroom?

Mrs. Vermilyea: "Oh, bigger than that; about 12 feet square, perhaps 14 feet square, and the teacher was Miss Frances Carscallen. She had not more than a dozen pupils, all ages, boys and girls; she is still living at Sexsmith Station on Lulu Island. I was over there last week to see her. Play? We didn't play; there was no place to play. There was a stove and cordwood; lots of cordwood all around; no buying cordwood in those days. And the school? It was almost over the river bank. How we got ashore from the boat, I do not know, but we got ashore some way. That was the first school on the mainland, I believe."

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL. MCCLEERY CABIN, 1862. MCCLEERY SCHOOL.

(Note by J.S. Matthews: Enquiry of Mrs. Logan, née McCleery, and her sister, Miss Elizabeth McCleery, lends every credence to the suggestion that the school house was McCleery's old cabin, no longer in use, as they had built the house on the high land; Mrs. Logan says, positively, it was the old cabin. Miss McCleery is not sure, but she is younger.)

METHODIST CHURCH, EBURNE.

"Then, there was a little church down at Eburne" (north side) "where the end of the bridge is now, a little white building, very small; it was built by the Methodists, but everyone used it, all denominations, and you reached it by boat. But to go back to the school. It would be a mile and a half, I should think, below the church, now Marpole. That was the first school, except the one at Hastings Sawmill, or perhaps the Cridland School."

CRIDLAND SCHOOL. MCCLEERY SCHOOL.

"I think I was seven when I attended the little school on the mainland, because next year, when I was eight, I went to the New Westminster school, and when I was nine, I went to the school at Moodyville. The way I remember is that I visited Moodyville for seven months and went to school there, and we had a spelling match; there were four grades; I was in the second, and I won the prize. It was Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, and Ben Springer, the manager of the mill, handed me the book. I remember I was nine then. But you must see my old teacher Frances Carscallen. She is Mrs. Errington now."

FIRST SCHOOL, LULU ISLAND. FIRST TEACHER, MISS MARGARET SWEET.

"The first school on Lulu Island was on the river bank in the town hall. The front part was the Council Chamber, and the back part was the school. My sister, Margaret Sweet, who is Mrs. J.A. Wood, as I have told you, was eight years older than I am; she was the first, and at first the only teacher. To get to the school we either walked through mud and water very often, or if we had a boat, we rowed up the river to the school. Later we moved up the river and had a ranch—it was so marshy the horses would not walk on it—right where the bridge crosses to Lulu Island, and my brothers dug ditches and built dykes, but the water came over the dykes. Then when the water came over the dykes, we had to get a boat to get from the house to the river, and the chickens would be hopping on the roofs of the houses, and the pigs squealing. That happened when the moon was right and the tides were high. I have a photograph of the first school on Lulu Island and the boys all playing out in front."

FIRST HIGH SCHOOL.

"Then the schoolmaster, Mr. Kinney, gave us high school subjects, and I went to Victoria and tried the examinations with Emma Hay, now wife of Dr. Alexander Robinson, the superintendent of schools. She and I were roommates in Victoria; there were three hundred that year who were 'plucked.' The reason? There were so few schools and they did not want any more teachers."

CRIDLAND SCHOOL. MISS MAGGIE HARDING.

"Then I taught school and substituted at the Cridland School" (i.e., North Arm School, River Road and North Arm Road) "and boarded with Mrs. Cridland; that school had been opened for some time. Maggie Harding, the teacher, was ill. That would be 1888. Then I returned to school on Lulu Island for one year and took some more high school subjects."

O.D. SWEET, MUNICIPAL CLERK, NEW WESTMINSTER AND LULU ISLAND.

"You see, Father took the office for a short time of City Clerk at New Westminster and after this time he was Municipal Clerk on Lulu Island. He was also assessor, collector, clerk of the Council, newspaper reporter, and took 15 newspapers."

At this point the conversation ended as tea and cake had arrived.

VERMILYEA. SWEET.

Subsequently: John C. Vermilyea, see *B.C. Directory, 1889*, father of Walter Vermilyea, was a farmer of Lulu Island, six hundred acres, and the Vermilyea and Sweet farms adjoined. The late Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Vermilyea are buried both in Mountain View Cemetery. Walter Vermilyea died in Chicago, 24 July 1940. His brother, Herbert, a builder in Marpole, is deceased. A sister, Lydia May, now Mrs. Denison, her husband an American of Honolulu where she now lives.