

Volume 1 - Richmond Neighbourhoods Series

A BRIDGE TO THE WORLD: The Life and Times of Sea Island



By
Mary Keen
City of Richmond Archives

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Sea Island fields and farms in background.
Aeronca aircraft on final approach to Vancouver Airport.
Gilbert's Aero Service aircraft CF-BAT prepares to land. ca 1937.
Eric Rathborne photograph.
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Preface

“A Bridge to the World: The life and times of Sea Island” is the first volume in a series entitled Richmond Neighbourhoods. This series is intended to document the history of the settlement of various areas of Richmond. The selection of the neighbourhoods is loosely based on the Ward system previously used for electoral representation in Richmond. The idea for this series was implemented by former City of Richmond Archivist Ken Young and has been carried forward to this point of publication by the present City of Richmond Archivist Lynne Waller.

The success of future endeavours depends greatly upon the foundations of the past. Previous publications on the history of Richmond are still available to the community and researcher through the resources found in the City of Richmond Archives. These holdings include the valuable contributions of the following publications: “Richmond, Child of the Fraser” and its supplement by Leslie Ross; the first history of Richmond by Thomas Kidd, “History of Lulu Island”; “An Archaeological Heritage Resource Overview of Richmond” by Leonard Ham; and the Marpole Richmond Review newspaper.

This series would not have been possible without the extensive holdings of the City of Richmond Archives and the capable assistance of Lynne Waller, City of Richmond Archivist. I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Friends of the Richmond Archives. I owe a large debt of gratitude to Don Gordon for his generous donation to the City of Richmond Archives of a lifetime collection of information about Sea Island, and for his constant encouragement.

Any errors or omissions in the text are solely my responsibility and should not be attributed to the City of Richmond Archives or those who assisted in this effort to document an important part of our community history.

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A BRIDGE TO THE WORLD: The Life and Times of Sea Island

Modern day visitors to Sea Island, and there are many, are probably unaware of the rich history of the area beyond the runways and terminal buildings of Vancouver International Airport. Jet-lagged travellers perhaps would fail to realize that they were actually arriving on an island at all. The physical location of Sea Island has meant that it has always played a prominent role in the development of Richmond. The advantageous geographical position of being situated between Lulu Island and Vancouver, also being surrounded by the North and Middle Arms of the Fraser River, has created many opportunities for change and development.

The first non-native settler, Hugh McRoberts, was born in Ireland in 1815 but immigrated to Australia in 1838. He then caught “gold fever” and followed his dream first to California in 1856 and subsequently was caught up in the Cariboo gold rush of 1858. Instead of losing his money and health by prospecting, Mr. McRoberts helped to build trails for the brand new colony of British Columbia, founded in August 1858. He received Government script for his work rather than cash, which he then used to pay for land on Sea and Lulu Islands.

With the advent of Colonial government came the necessity of surveying the land and dividing it into manageable entities. Mr. Joseph Trutch and his brother John were placed in charge of a survey of the area between the International Boundary line and 12 miles to the north, running east to west. This survey divided the land holdings into 160 acre allotments in a block and range system. By the 1860 Pre-emption Act and its amendment of 1861, settlers had a pre-emptive right to 160 acres each, provided that they immediately occupy and improve the land and were prepared to pay the sum of 10 shillings per acre when their holdings were surveyed by a government appointed surveyor.

Hugh McRoberts obviously felt he would be able to finance this enterprise as he purchased a total of 1,640 acres on Sea Island as well as other parcels of land elsewhere. As he was the first settler, the island began locally to be known as McRoberts Island but it was named Sea



**Hugh McRoberts ca 1865
City of Richmond
Archives 1978 2 29.**

Island on the British Admiralty charts of the time. The name of Sea Island would have been most appropriate at the time of the first settlements. Before the extensive dyking and drainage work was undertaken by the first farmers, the island was often washed over by tides and storms and subsequently hard to distinguish from the grey surrounding waters.

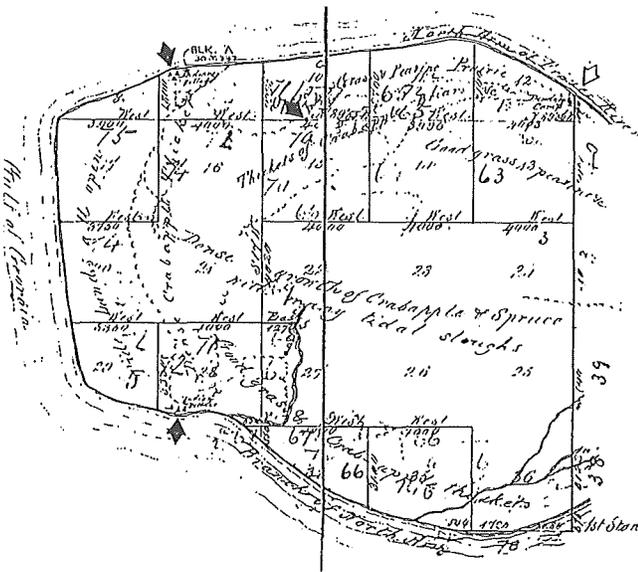
Richmond occupies the two major islands and numerous smaller islands in the Fraser River delta. Three distributary channels separate these islands. The North Arm flows the entire length of both Lulu Island and Sea Island. The Middle Arm separates Sea Island from Lulu Island, while the South Arm forms the southern boundary of Lulu Island. ①

Joseph Trutch made this sketch of the western portion of Sea Island at the time of the first legal survey in 1859. Along the middle of the drawing is written: "Dense growth of Crabapple & Spruce with many tidal sloughs." City of Richmond Archives 1989 30.

Sea Island in the pre-European settlement era had a large patch of spruce trees on the south side of the island and a small copse on the north side. There is a possibility that the existence of vegetation on Sea Island may pre-date that on Lulu Island due to the prevalence of salt tolerant spruce trees. The island may have formed while Daniel's Arm, a north west distributary channel which once split Lulu Island in two, was still active. The Musqueam Slough complex drained the northern half of Sea Island and consisted of the Musqueam, MacDonald, Grauer and Shannon sloughs flowing into the North Arm of the Fraser River. These sloughs were a natural transportation route for canoes and other craft. Most of the natural sloughs were drained and had disappeared by the end of World War I.

As the sloughs were fresh water, they would have been ideal spawning habitat for chum and pink salmon and probably coho salmon. Dyking and drainage projects by the early settlers destroyed these spawning grounds. As the island was regularly subjected to flooding especially during the late autumn and early spring storms, dyking was a necessary course of action to preserve the viable land.

Along the course of the sloughs, willows, crab apples and wild roses grew in profusion. So there was topographical evidence that the land was fertile and could sustain crops if the drainage was controlled and improved. Grassland and shrubland prevailed over the north central and western areas of the island. Along with the natural plant life there were several species of wild life. Beaver, muskrat and mink were plentiful, as were deer. There were even reports of bears being seen on the islands which now comprise Richmond. ②



The Coast Salish people had used Sea Island as a fishing and hunting preserve for centuries as well as summer camping grounds for salmon and other fishing. They had once been the largest group of natives north of California but their numbers were devastated by smallpox epidemics in the 1780s. Prior to the epidemics they had lived well on the plentiful resources found on and around the islands of the Fraser River delta.

In the spring, they would have hunted deer and beaver and harvested young shoots of thimbleberries and horsetails as well as the roots of various plants. The sea held many food resources: eucalyptus, sturgeon, sea lions, seals, and of course the huge annual salmon migrations. In the fall, the Coast Salish would harvest berries as well as crab apples from the bogs. The Musqueam nation called the western part of Sea Island xit-s'emól'sem or blueberry forest. November would find them preparing to settle into their permanent houses for the winter and their ceremonial season.

They had built permanent and temporary houses on Sea Island as evidenced by middens found later. The housing used by the Coast Salish people varied according to its underlying function. Permanent house sites consisted of cedar plank shed type houses occupied by extended families. These permanent sites would also have family burial grounds where tree burials, mortuary houses, effigy poles and raised platforms were used.

Permanent house sites were commonly used during the winter months whereas the temporary sites, usually pole frame lean-to type shelters, covered with cattail mats, were used in the spring and summer. The lean-tos were easily erected at fishing camps and shellfish sites. As the fishing year went through various species migrations these camps would move to the best locations. Some of the more wealthy families would erect a house frame and cover it with cedar planks brought from their permanent homes. These cedar plank homes were often found at traditional family salmon camps. The northwest corner of Sea Island, previously British Admiralty land was later designated as Musqueam land in 1862 by the new government in recognition of these traditional uses, according to the Trutch survey. The southwest corner of the island was set aside for Musqueam use at the same time. These lands remained in Musqueam title until 1973, at the time of the proposed runway development, when most of the Reserve on Sea Island was exchanged for property south of Canoe Pass in Ladner. The only remaining land on Sea Island in Musqueam title is approximately 5.3 ha. of land and riparian rights southwest of McDonald Slough. ®

The exploration by Europeans of the Fraser River delta from 1792 to the late 1850s was possibly made easier by the lower numbers of Native

people on the coast due to the decimation of their population by smallpox. Presumably there were groups of Coast Salish people fishing and hunting on Sea Island, after 1800, perhaps even trapping beaver for the Hudson's Bay Company, but no written records exist. There has been some physical evidence discovered over the years, particularly when the land was being cleared for farming. According to archaeological studies the early accounts by a settler on Sea Island of skeletal remains being found along with large shell-heaps would indicate a permanent house site with burial grounds. ⁴ In 1894 Richmond Council negotiated with the Indian Agent to purchase "earth" from the Indian Reserve on Sea Island. Such material came from the shell-heaps or middens and would be very valuable as road fill. Early settlers also used the discarded shell as chicken scratch or converted it into lime for agricultural use. Finally the site was completely bulldozed level and covered by an airport runway in 1953.

Another permanent house site located by the side of Musqueam slough was the subject of debate in the early Richmond Council minutes. The Council wished to build No 11 Road, later called Shannon Road, at this location and the Musqueam natives who lived on this site resisted any encroachment onto their land. This site may have been abandoned in the 1890s, which allowed the Council to build the road. However there is anecdotal evidence of Musqueam habitation in the area until the 1920s. Very little remained of the midden by the early 1900s due to the shell being used for roads, chicken scratch and lime.

Timeline – Sea Island

- 1781-1782 Smallpox epidemic decimates the Coast Salish peoples.
- 1791 Narvaez explores the Strait of Georgia.
- 1792 Captain Vancouver driven by tides and winds fails to discover the mouth of the Fraser River.
- 1792 Galliano and Valdez anchor off the mouth of the North Arm.
- 1808 Simon Fraser of the North West Company reached the mouth of the North Arm off Sea Island.
- 1814 David Thompson of the Hudson's Bay Company names the Fraser River after Simon Fraser.
- 1849 Colony of Vancouver Island established.
- 1858 Captain George Henry Richards charts the delta distributaries including Sea Island and Lulu Island.
- 1858 Crown Colony of British Columbia proclaimed at Fort Langley.
- 1859 John Trutch surveyed Sea and Lulu Islands.
- 1861 Hugh McRoberts settles on Sea Island, homestead called "RichmondView".
- 1861 Hugh McRoberts has first harvest of wheat on Sea Island.
- 1862 Colonel Moody named Lulu Island. Sea Island formally designated as such on British Admiralty charts.
- 1866 Early settlement on Sea Island by Hugh Boyd and Alexander Kilgour.
- 1879 Incorporation of the Municipality of Richmond.
- 1880 First Municipal Election held January 5th, on Sea Island at the home of Hugh Boyd.

First European Settlers

Hugh McRoberts

Sea Island was a sparsely vegetated, sea washed island when John Trutch was commissioned to survey the area known as the New Westminster District. This huge area of land encompasses all of the present-day Greater Vancouver Regional District. The relative absence of trees on the Fraser Delta Islands was advantageous to early settlers compared to the heavily forested land around New Westminster and other parts of the Fraser Valley. The grassland and shrubland could be converted into fertile land if the sea and fresh water flooding could be controlled.

Hugh McRoberts knew that if he built a dyke around his land on Sea Island he could claim the fertile delta soil and protect it from the ravages of water. He was the first settler to see the potential of the land for agricultural purposes, which soon became the reason for settlement of the area.

Hugh McRoberts, having purchased his land and having sufficient money was able to pay passage for his daughter Jennie to sail from Australia to join him. His first wife Agnes had died in Australia in 1844 shortly after the death of their infant son, William. Hugh McRoberts married Mary Prendergast in April 1845 and they immigrated to North America eventually arriving in New Caledonia (British Columbia). Jennie (Jane) had been left in the care of relatives in Australia. She began her voyage in September 1860 aboard the sailing ship "Achilles" to San Francisco, and then she transferred to the steamer "Oregon" to Victoria and finally arrived in New Westminster on the boat "Otter" in December 1860. Jennie then took passage to Yale where she met her father and her stepmother. She was the first unmarried female immigrant to land at Yale.

The McRoberts family decided to build their homestead on the northeast corner of Sea Island. All the lumber for the building was floated down from New Westminster by boat or canoe and the building was a two-bedroom house with a lean-to kitchen. Water came straight from the Fraser River, and driftwood was used for heating and the kitchen stove. The homestead was called "Richmond View," named after their home in Australia.

The main task facing Hugh McRoberts and all the first settlers on Sea and Lulu islands was to make the land viable for crops and cattle. The first dyke on Sea Island, and indeed for Richmond, was constructed by Hugh McRoberts in the winter of 1861/1862 and in that summer he



This was the first house on Sea Island, built in 1862 by Hugh McRoberts, and later acquired by Thomas Laing. The building has been demolished. City of Richmond Archives 1977 3 2.

harvested a field of wheat and planted an orchard. He had previously brought 100 head of cattle from Oregon to Sea Island. Unfortunately 75 were lost to harsh winter conditions but within a year, the McRoberts herd was at 54. A newspaper report in 1866 credited him with a fruit crop of bumper proportions from his 600 apple, pear and plum trees.

While working as a farmer, he had also returned to his earlier occupation of road building and in 1862 he, with his nephews Samuel and Fitzgerald McCleery, built the North Arm trail. This trail went from New Westminster to the

Musqueam Reserve at Point Grey, a distance of 12 miles. It was completed in 13 weeks. The McCleery boys settled on the North side of the Fraser River across from Sea Island although they purchased a Crown Grant of land on Sea Island in November 1867. In 1864, after the work on the trail was completed, the McRoberts family was in turmoil as Jennie McRoberts eloped with Charles Bunting, a Victoria councillor. Hugh and Agnes McRoberts sold part of their property on Sea Island to Robert and Christopher Wood in 1871. In 1874 they sold the homestead and the major portion of the farm to Howard DeBeck who had previously purchased 1,200 acres from McRoberts. Hugh McRoberts died in July 1883 at the age of 67, and was buried in New Westminster. His widow Agnes died a mere 48 hours later. Howard DeBeck's daughter Emma Augusta was the first child born to European settlers on Sea Island. Unfortunately her mother died while giving birth to Emma, which was not an uncommon occurrence in pioneer days.

Hugh Boyd and Alexander Kilgour

Another early settler on Sea Island, one, whose name would become linked with the founding of the Municipality of Richmond, was Hugh Boyd. He was born in County Down, Ireland in 1842 and arrived in the new colony of British Columbia in 1862. After first trying his luck at prospecting for gold in the Cariboo without success, he joined the McCleery boys and Hugh McRoberts in building the North Arm Trail. He also settled on Sea Island in 1863 to try his hand at farming along with a young man from Lower Canada, Alexander Kilgour.

Mr. Kilgour was born in 1838 in Fife, Scotland and had immigrated to Canada with his parents. In 1862 he left his family home and sailed on the "Sierra Nevada" around Cape Horn to reach British Columbia, the

only feasible route prior to the building of the railway or the opening of the Panama Canal. He wrote to his family in January 1863 to inform them about his situation.

I must tell you about my companions. There is first the old pair Mr. and Mrs. McRoberts and Miss McRoberts about 20 and a sister of Mr. McR, about 36 or 37, two nephews of Mr. McR – Samule and Fitzgerald McClary one 21 and the other 23 years, and one Hugh Boyd 20 years., these came from Ireland this summer and James McKay a Scotishman but has seen most of European ports, he is 33 yrs of age and is good company. Boyd is a wit he attends to my dressing on great days they are all fine fellows but none of them is religious. Samule attends the cattel and the other four of us work together and they are all Presbyterians and not profane.

The first lot is an acer(acre) and a quarter and the other surburban lot is three acre and would make a good garden, the other is a town lot in a wet place and is not more than 1/2 of an acer. The lots were bought for \$ 100 each in scrip, \$ 50 down and balance when “I get my deed.”

If you want to see where I am you can look in the map about one mile from the sea one mile from the north branch of the Fraser on the main land, this land is all unsurveyed here the main land, McRoberts house is on the north shore of the Island which forms one of the Deltas of the Fraser. ⁶

A description of Alexander Kilgour by Thomas Kidd portrays him as slightly above medium height, with light brown hair and whiskers. He had a sober demeanour but enjoyed a joke and was a naturally cheerful man. He was very fond of poetry and would often entertain a gathering with a rendition of Byron’s verse.

Alexander Kilgour went once more to the Cariboo in 1864 along with Hugh Boyd but soon returned to Sea Island. Hugh Boyd and Alexander Kilgour established a farming business partnership in 1866 with the acquisition of land on the south side of Sea Island, which they called Rosebrook Farm.

Hugh Boyd married Mary Ann McColl, aged 19, the daughter of Sergeant McColl of the Royal Engineers. Their first child, William James, was born on Sea Island September 7, 1874. The Boyds had 7 more children, for a total of 6 boys and 2 girls. Alexander Kilgour and his wife, Elizabeth Jane McDowell of Clarendon, Lower Canada, did not have any children. The Boyd and Kilgour partnership was a successful

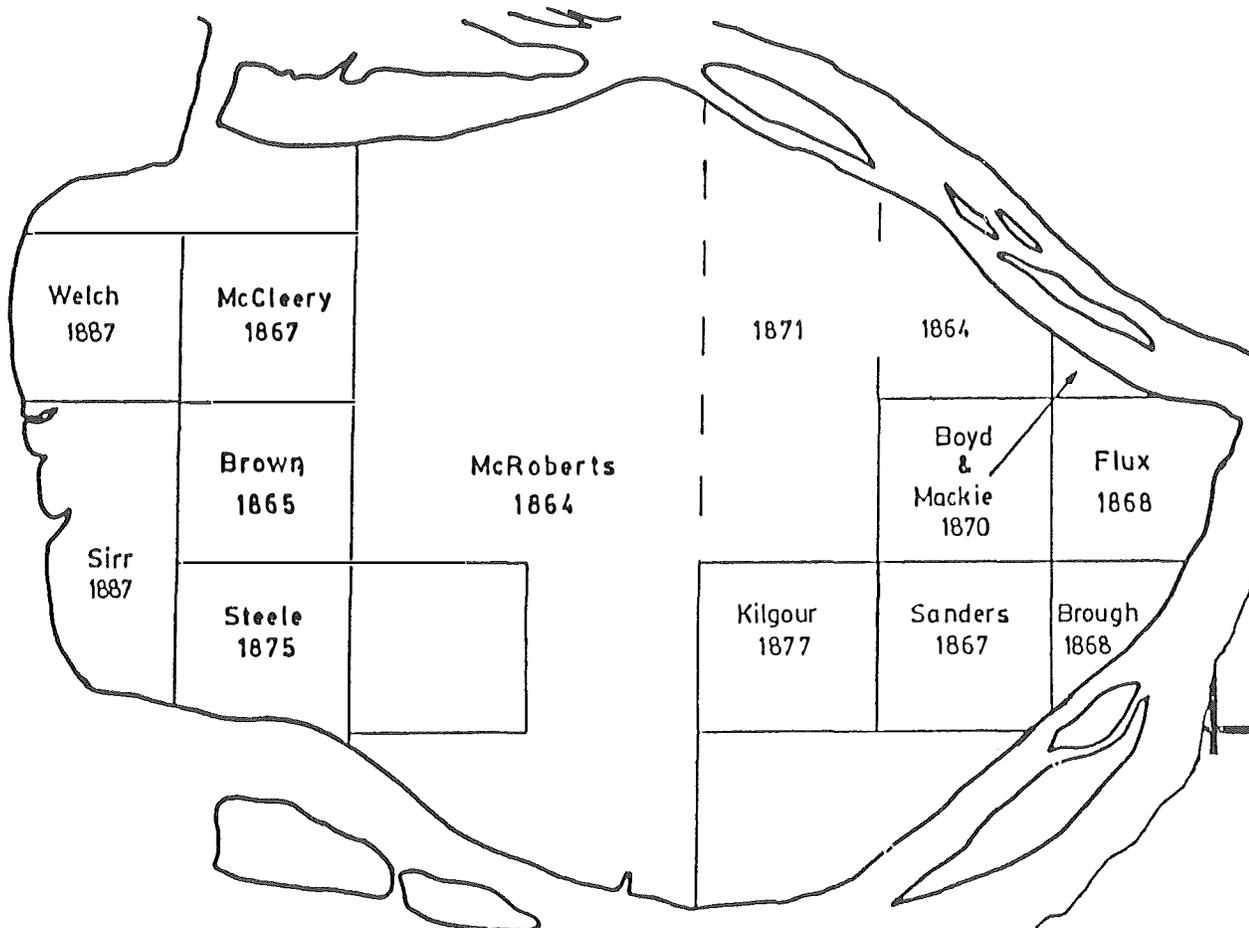
one, providing a good living for both men. The partnership was dissolved in 1886 when Alexander Kilgour decided to farm on his own. Hugh Boyd and family returned to Ireland in 1887 where he passed away November 22 1931, at Bangor. Their Irish home was named "Richmond." Prior to leaving Sea Island, Hugh Boyd received a medal at the London Exhibition for growing the best wheat in the British Empire.

Establishing a Community

The passage of 15 years from the first European settler in 1861 to 1876 brought many people eager to try their luck at farming Sea Island. Some were itinerants, just passing through on their way to dreams of easier wealth; but several persevered through the ditching, dyking, ploughing, and seeding to bring in their first harvest, build housing and put down roots.

Christopher and Robert Wood, who were cousins, purchased part of the Hugh McRoberts farm in 1871. John Brough who obtained his land from the government through Crown Grants, also purchased a part of a small island adjacent to Sea Island and this was known as Brough Island until its ownership changed and it became known as Dinsmore Island

Distribution of Crown Grants on Sea Island. City of Richmond Archives.



after the Dinsmore Cannery was built in 1894. John Brough built a small house on his island but did not dyke or drain his land. Hugh Boyd purchased the Brough holdings on Sea Island, 210 acres, which he then resold to John T. Errington. John Errington and his wife, the former Miss F. Carscallen, worked hard on their property, first extensively dyking the land, draining the fields and harvesting. Their efforts enabled them to build a large and expensive house and later to donate land to build the Sea Island Presbyterian Church. The church was built in 1886 for a cost of \$1,165 and there were 26 members in the first congregation. By 1891 there were 42 members and the minister was Reverend Jaffray. The church building was destroyed by fire on May 10 1933 and was not rebuilt. ®

Another Irish immigrant, who found Sea Island to be of interest, was William Shannon. Born in County Sligo in 1841 he arrived in British Columbia in 1863 and began a road construction company. Among his employees was Hugh Boyd, just back from the Cariboo, who worked on the construction of Mary Street in New Westminster.

The early settlers were co-operative out of inclination and necessity and William Shannon who soon owned a 3-yoke oxen team would plough recently dyked land for new settlers. As the oxen would often have to be transported over water to get to certain areas of Richmond this was not always easy. Hugh McRoberts owned a scow, a large flat bottom boat that was essential for transporting livestock and farm implements. Some efforts were for naught as high tides would often break through the dykes and flood the land. William Shannon and his partner George Martin would eventually own some of the best farmland on Sea Island, part of which was purchased from Christopher and Robert Wood.

The tragic death of Mrs. De Beck in childbirth led her husband to sell his property on Sea Island. Part was sold to George Magee and Duncan and Hugh McDonald. Hugh Fraser purchased the remainder circa

Young woman standing in the doorway of Sea Island Presbyterian Church, located on Miller Road. Vancouver Public Library Photo 17282.



1875/1876. However the McDonalds did not take up residence until 1881. Another farming partnership was formed on Sea Island when James Miller and John Ferguson purchased part of the McRoberts holdings. They had heard about the fertile lands of Sea Island from Hugh Boyd who they had met while working on the trail from Gastown to the North Arm. Their shared cabin was often a centre for hospitality towards itinerant preachers and other visitors to the island.

Local Government

As the numbers of settlers on Sea and Lulu Islands grew, there was a movement towards creating community services for education, religion and local government. All the new arrivals faced similar problems in their lives: unpredictable weather, isolation, lack of sanitation, difficult transportation, and no schools for their children or any support system other than immediate family. The pioneering impulse to strike out and make a new life was also common to all. This led to the establishment of services from the grass roots level rather than the imposing of existing systems.

The move towards some form of local government crystallized in April 1879 when a group of 25 settlers signed and submitted a petition to the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia which requested that the Township of Richmond be formally incorporated. The petition stated that all the signatories were “bona fide freeholders, householders, pre-emptors and leaseholders of the full age of twenty-one years and residents of Lulu and Sea Islands, North Arm of the Fraser River.” Twenty-five men signed out of a total of thirty eligible residents. At the time, the franchise was only available to white men, over the age of 21, who were considered to be men of property. Of these twenty-five, five lived on Sea Island and the remainder on Lulu Island. It is worth noting that the petition only included the large islands of Richmond, it was not until 1885 that the small islands in the North and South Arms of the Fraser were included within the boundaries of the Municipality.

On November 10, 1879 the letters patent were issued which incorporated The Corporation of The Township of Richmond. Delta and Surrey also became incorporated as Municipalities at this time. W.D Ferris, a former resident of Lulu Island, who, Thomas Kidd believed, named the new township after his birthplace Richmond, Surrey, England, drafted the original petition. However, it should not be forgotten that Hugh McRoberts called his farm Richmond View in 1862. Also, Mrs. Hugh Boyd had been born in Richmond, Yorkshire.

The first act of the new Township was to arrange an election. This took place on January 5, 1880 at the home of Hugh Boyd and Alexander Kilgour on Sea Island. A Warden (Reeve) and 6 Councillors were elected

by those eligible to vote. According to the Municipal Act of the time, there were many who were not allowed to stand for election: females, ministers of any religious denomination, sheriffs and their officers, felons, bankrupt persons, insolvent debtors, anyone on the payroll of the municipality, and aliens.

Those elected to the first Council of Richmond were:

- Warden (Reeve): Hugh Boyd
- Councillors: Alexander Kilgour
James Miller
Robert Wood
William Scratchley
Manoah Steves
Walter Lee

The Council meetings for the year 1880 were all held at the Boyd and Kilgour home, possibly due to the fact that 4 members lived in the close vicinity. The meetings were held on the first Monday of every month beginning at 2 p.m. The Councillors from Lulu Island would arrive by boat and tie up at the small dock and walk along the usually muddy path to be welcomed by Mrs. Boyd. Each man would be wearing gum boots and carrying a change of footwear. The rules of order used at the meetings would probably have been new to most of the participants but they soon settled into a manageable routine.

At the April meeting tenders were read regarding the appointment of a Town Clerk. The lowest tender was accepted from Samuel Miller, \$80 per annum. In May bylaws were passed to levy taxes and provide an assessment roll for the islands. The July meeting saw the adoption of the official Seal of Richmond, the Horn of Plenty or Cornucopia, which represented the fertility and prosperity of the delta lands.

In September 1880 a decision was made to purchase land and build a Municipal Hall. The bylaw was passed in October and five acres of land was purchased from Samuel Brighthouse at a cost of \$80 per acre. Building was to commence immediately and a tender from James Turnbull, of New Westminster was accepted. The successful bid for building the hall and supplying all materials was \$434.

The November 1880 meeting saw the first bylaw to divide the Municipality into three wards. Sea Island was in Ward A; Ward B included the northern portion of Lulu Island; and Ward C was comprised of South Arm and the southwestern areas. The ward system was introduced to give each area a fair representation on council. In 1890 the system was enlarged to 5 wards and then in 1895 the five wards were restructured to include the whole of Richmond. This system of representation remained until the 1940s.



**Mrs. Hugh Boyd,
nee Mary McColl.
City of Richmond
Archives 1987 49 1.**

The final meeting of the first Council was held on January 3 1881 at which one of the motions passed thanked Mrs. Boyd for her hospitality over the past year. Hugh Boyd was the Reeve of Richmond until 1886 and in January 1887 the new Council passed a motion praising Mr. Boyd for his service. The government of Richmond moved from Sea Island to Lulu Island with the official opening of the first Town Hall situated at River and Cambie Roads. However, even though the physical seat of local government had moved, Sea Island remained an important part of the Richmond municipal infrastructure.

Ditches, Dykes and Roads

The second Council brought in a measure which would improve the circumstances of the residents of Sea Island. Councillors Kidd and Steves requested the Lieutenant Governor to proclaim a system of roads for Richmond and publish the same in the British Columbia Gazette. All the original roads were numbered and often ran from North to South. The North/South orientation meant more settlement within the interior of the islands. The early settlers tended to use the river for their transportation system and therefore homesteaded around the banks of the islands. The roads for Sea Island were numbered 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

The proposed road system was the beginning of the initial dyking and ditching for all the islands. As the paths were cleared, homesteaders living along chartered roads were encouraged to cut ditches and grade roadbeds with the materials from the ditches. The Municipality agreed to pay 10 cents per cubic yard for earth from the ditches graded into the roads. This was a means of controlling the construction of the gravel and earth roads within the Municipal system. Floodgates were constructed to control the water from the ditches and to prevent salt water from entering the ditches at high tide. Farmers were primarily interested in the benefits of draining the land so the roadbeds were of secondary interest. No wonder that the early Council minutes seem pre-occupied with ditches, dykes and roads.

The ditches were a great source of amusement and occasional terror to the community's rapidly increasing numbers of children. Bull frogs, minnows, muskrats, etc., were there to be caught and collected. Unhappily small children could also drown in the ditches as happened to a few unfortunate families.

Despite being surrounded by water, both fresh and salty, a pure water supply was a problem for many. Although the early Councils were interested in obtaining water by means of artesian wells, this process was found to be a failure in Richmond's silty soil. Residents relied on water from the Fraser River, rain water and water from the ditches. All these

solutions had drawbacks. The river water was often full of sediment, which had to be left to settle, and it was not particularly fresh tasting. Rain water caught in a barrel was frequently contaminated by insects and the odd drowned rat or two. Water from the ditches was extremely alkaline which meant boiling and filtering had to be performed which did not improve the taste.

Once the Marpole Bridge was built residents were able to take their carts over to the artesian well on the mainland and fill up buckets at 25 cents per bucket. After the British Columbia Electric tram was installed, milk cans would be transported one way from the Lulu Island dairies and on the return journey they would contain city water. Jacob Grauer built a two inch steel pipeline from his property on the North East of Sea Island to the mainland to gain access to the water system in Vancouver. In 1910 a water system was put in place for many of the residents of Richmond, the water coming through the New Westminster pipes to the boundary line.

The first dyke was around Hugh McRoberts' property and the tradition of private dyking continued for some time. Neighbours joined together to protect their properties but few of the farms went without some flooding in the winter time. Sea Island was ahead of Lulu Island in its dyking but even in the late 1880's the island would be partially flooded during high tides. The private dykes were well built and maintained but with the growth of local government infrastructure eventually they became the responsibility of the Municipality. Despite all the efforts, flooding was still a major problem especially in the years 1894 and 1905 when much of the dyking system was washed away. The Sea Island Dyking Bylaw (# 185) was passed in 1914 when the Municipality of Richmond borrowed \$40,000 to bring all the dykes, private and otherwise, up to an engineered standard. The owners of the land were then assessed annual rates according to their holdings to pay off the \$40,000 over 40 years.

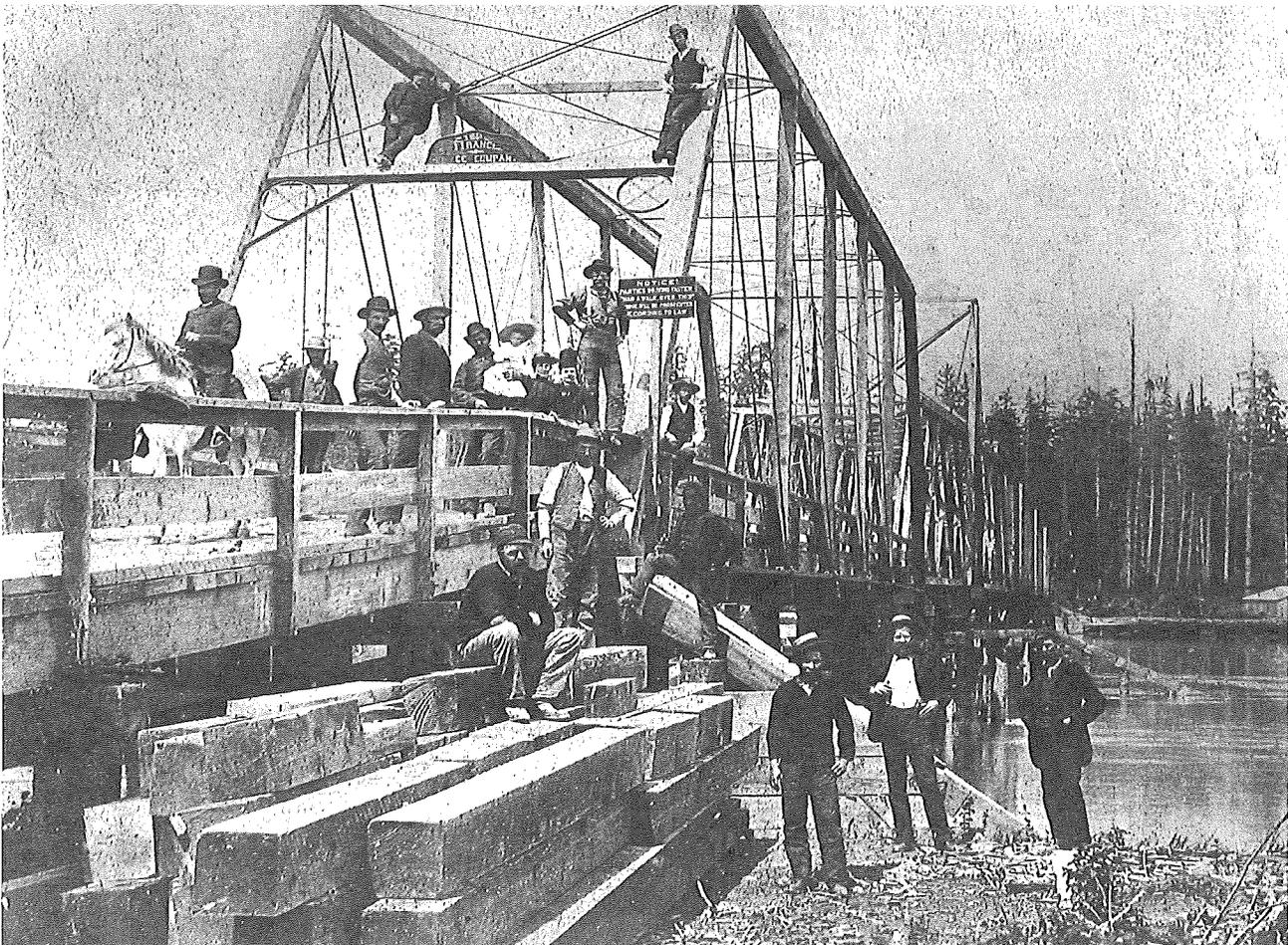
One of the advantages of the completed dykes around Sea Island and Lulu Island was the ease of movement for property owners. Before the roads were fully connected, most people used the dykes as roadways to move cattle, ride horses and generally get around Richmond. In the modern era, dykes continue to be maintained and upgraded on a regular basis.

Road building was a difficult process on swampy land. Corduroy, plank or gravel roads were constructed according to the plan published in the British Columbia Gazette. Corduroy roads were constructed by laying split cedar boards, 11 feet in length and 3 to 4 inches in thickness, on top of a sand base which was 12 inches deep at the centre and 8 feet wide.

Plank roads were built from fir planks, 9 feet long and 2 inches wide, which were laid on stringers embedded in the ground with 5 inch spikes. Gravel roads consisted of a road base of larger stones and rocks, which was then covered by smaller and smaller stones. The whole was then pressed down by a horse-drawn roller.

On Sea Island, Roads No.12 and 13 were amongst the first to be surveyed by George Turner in June 1881 and then constructed beginning in October 1881. They were the typical corduroy roads constructed of cedar slabs; these had to be replaced frequently due to rot and swampy conditions. By 1909 it appears that, as gravel was now more readily available, hundreds of yards of rock were used on the roads. By the 1920s the roads were regularly oiled and cold patched where necessary.

North Arm Bridge, 1889.
City of Richmond
Archives 1977 2 1.



The Bridges

The road construction meant that it was easier to move around Sea Island but in order to travel easily to Lulu Island and the mainland, bridges had to be built. The first bridges connected Marpole with Sea Island and Sea Island with Lulu Island. So once more Sea Island was in the forefront of the development of Richmond and its infrastructure. Bridges are expensive to build and the fledgling Municipality had very little money in 1883 when the first surveys were undertaken. It took 6 years of meetings, discussions and arguments between Richmond, the City of Vancouver, Provincial and Federal Governments and the Canadian Pacific Railway before the bridges were completed.

After completion in November 1889 the bridges were not opened as the Municipal officials felt that they looked unsafe and were unsure as to their reliability in winter river conditions. The officials were proved right as on the morning of January 3 1890, *“a large sheet of ice...floated up the river on a strong rising tide which carried away the swing span between Sea and Lulu Islands and left the span to the south of it hanging in a dangerous position.”* ②

It took several months for the bridge to be repaired but unfortunately shortly after the bridge was opened, the same span fell into the river without any obvious reason. Even when the bridge was apparently sound, there were many problems of damage caused by tugs running into the bridge, ice, driftwood, and spring floods. In March 1901 the Municipality of Richmond came to an agreement with the Provincial Government that the province would take responsibility for the bridges if Richmond would pay an annual amount of \$1,400. This arrangement lasted until 1921 when Richmond successfully argued that as the bridges were used by residents of Ladner, Surrey and others, travelling to Vancouver it was no longer fair for Richmond to have to provide maintenance money. The bridges became more and more inadequate over the years but this fragile early link from Sea Island lasted until 1957 when the Oak Street Bridge was completed.

Eburne

The Marpole Bridge brought increased traffic and ease of movement to Sea Island as well as an enviable position of being equally close to Vancouver and Lulu Island. The bridge spans over the North and Middle Arms of the Fraser River met in the area of Sea Island which was included in Eburne.

Eburne was named after Harry Eburne who arrived in British Columbia in January 1875 with his foster parents Mr. and Mrs. Charles

Cridland. They had arranged to stay with Christopher Wood, whom they had known previously in Ontario. Wood lived on Sea Island. At this time the Fraser River was closed to transport due to ice so the steam boat passengers had to land in Burrard Inlet instead of upriver at New Westminster. The Cridlands and Harry Eburne left the steamboat at Gastown, staying the night at the Deighton (Gassy Jack's) Hotel. The following day they hired a boat, as there were no roads to the North Arm then, and proceeded to make their way to Sea Island. Their journey took a total of 18 hours as two somewhat inebriated boatmen impeded them.

Harry Eburne, like so many others, undertook work clearing trails and working in the woods before taking up a pre-emption of land on the North shore of the Fraser River. After two attempts at farming he then opened a store on the North Arm opposite the east end of Sea Island. This store eventually became the North Arm Post Office, after the Post Office location was moved from the house of J.W. Sexsmith on Lulu Island. In 1891 Harry Eburne moved his store to the central location of Sea Island between the bridge spans and in 1894 the post office in his store was officially known as the Eburne Post Office.

The small steamboat "Alice" on a daily run from Eburne to New Westminster carried the various agricultural goods and the mail. Originally started by J. W. Sexsmith in 1882 the "Alice" was operated by Captain Stewart after 1884. This service was a great convenience for the residents of the North Arm area and meant that the commercial development was advanced in comparison to the residents of the South Arm who had no boat service to New Westminster and therefore no daily mail service. The area known as Eburne comprised the east end of Sea Island, the slopes of South Vancouver and the area across the Fraser River around the Town Hall.

The Grauers

Harry Eburne sold his store in 1898 to Churchill and McKay and became a successful chicken farmer in the area. Jacob Grauer opened one of his butcher shops in Eburne, Sea Island in 1895. Jacob was an immigrant from Germany via New York and Seattle who had become the owner of a butcher shop in Vancouver in 1886. He would eventually own four butcher shops, two in Richmond and two in Vancouver. His move to Sea Island was prompted by his purchase of 300 acres of land from George Garripie and the obvious commercial promise of the location next to the Marpole bridges.

Eburne soon became a thriving community, a way station between Vancouver and Richmond. It was a service area for the farming families of Sea Island and northern Lulu Island. Near the Grauer butcher shop was

Billy White's blacksmith shop, and the Eburne Post Office. Also in the vicinity was the Sea Island Presbyterian Church. The bars and entertainment facilities of Steveston were noticeably absent in Eburne.

Jacob Grauer and his wife Marie had 9 children; the seven sons were George, Gustav, Rudy, Carl, Jake, Albert and Fred and two daughters, Pauline and Marie. The butcher's shop was initially built as part of the family home and a slaughter house was also built on the farm. All the deliveries were made by horse and cart and meat was taken to Vancouver on a daily basis. The new bridge to Marpole facilitated this enterprise although horses had to proceed at a walk on the bridge deck. It was believed that horses moving at a trot would cause the timbers to vibrate. Each bridge had its own tender whose function was to enforce the law regarding the speed of the horses and also to open the span on the bridge to allow passage for boats.



The Road to the Crops,
Eburne ca 1906.
City of Richmond
Archives 1977 2 34.

In 1912 one of their sons, Rudy Grauer, took over Jacob's butcher shop and over the years he extended the business into a full grocery and general store. They eventually carried a full line of groceries, meat, fish, hardware, work clothes, rubber boots, appliances, stoves, paint and practically everything else. Rudy's brother Carl was an early employee as was Fred Ettinger who drove the delivery wagon through Sea Island and Lulu Island. The store was remodelled four times to increase floor space and add new lines of goods. Some of the new products included toiletries, home permanents, patent medicines and veterinary supplies. Eventually Grauer's Stores had nine full time employees and several part time clerks. Three trucks soon handled the deliveries. Grauer's Stores became the largest independent business in the Fraser Valley. Rudy Grauer's children all took their place working in the store.

When his sons, Carl and Lester, returned from service in World War II Rudy was able to devote more time to the rapidly expanding position of Reeve of Richmond, a position he held from January, 1930 to December, 1949. Rudy's brother Jake would eventually direct Frasea Farms and become prominent in many organizations including the Pacific National Exhibition, British Columbia Jersey Breeders Association, and British Columbia Holstein Breeders Association. Another brother, Albert Edward, known as "Dal", quickly rose to prominence with degrees from University of British Columbia, University of California, and Oxford as a



Grauer's Store, 1959.
City of Richmond
Archives 1978 37 4.

Rhodes Scholar. He eventually became President of the British Columbia Electric Company which later was amalgamated with the British Columbia Power Commission to become British Columbia Hydro.

Grauer's Store would become a casualty of the expansion of the airport and related transportation system and closed its doors May 31 1976 after much legal wrangling with the

Federal government over compensation and expropriation. The store was demolished in 1980 along with other buildings in the locality effectively putting an end to the life of Eburne. The North Fraser Port Authority building now occupies the previous store site.

In 1916 it was decided to rename the area of Eburne, located on the North Arm of the Fraser River, to Marpole. The community of Eburne, Sea Island was thriving and confusion often arose between the two Eburnes. In 1919 the Town Hall site moved to the Brighthouse area and eventually the Eburne name came to mean only the Sea Island community. The 1919 Wrigley's British Columbia Directory described Eburne as: *a post office, milling and fishing town on the Fraser River, opposite Marpole in the Richmond Provincial Electoral District, reached by B.C. Electric Ry., Lulu Island line, 6 miles south of Vancouver. Has public school. Local resources: Saw and flour milling, fishing and farming.*

The Laings, McDonalds and Cooneys

New Westminster was the market for the Eburne and Sea Island produce. The residents of the Eburne area were mostly farmers and fishermen but there were also several bee-keepers, carpenters, handymen, decorators as well as cannery workers and the bridge tender Mr. Frank Herbert Tuck living in the community. Very few women were listed as property owners, the exceptions being widows. Among the families listed in the directory were the Thomas Laing family with their children Thomas Jr., Arthur, Richard, Marion and Rachel and the McDonald clan..

Thomas Laing was born in County Durham, England and first came to Canada in 1884, working on a farm in Ontario. He moved to British Columbia in 1894, married Marian Mackie January 1 1895 who had emigrated from Scotland with her family, and rented a farm from the McCleery estate. The family lived in the former McRoberts house where all their children were born. Thomas Laing was able to purchase the farm in 1904. All the children attended the Sea Island School and did chores

on the family farm, which was primarily a dairy farm but also grew vegetables for sale.

Arthur Laing was born in 1904. He was elected Member of Parliament for South Vancouver in 1949 and became leader of the British Columbia Liberal Party in 1953 where he remained until 1956. Mr. Laing returned to Federal politics in 1962 and became the Minister of Northern Affairs in 1963. He was appointed to the Senate in 1972 and died in 1975 one year before the bridge, which bears his name, was completed.

Duncan McDonald, aged 25 and his brother Hugh, who was only 19, had purchased land on Sea Island in 1875. They were unable to afford to build a house or barn so they worked for several years for the Jeremiah Rogers' False Creek sawmill. They were able to move onto their property before their respective marriages. Duncan married Catherine McDowell in 1886 and they subsequently were the parents of six children. Hugh McDonald married Harriet Rebecca Stevens in 1885 and they also had a fairly large family, of five children. Duncan died in 1919 but Hugh lived until 1944, after farming for 68 years.

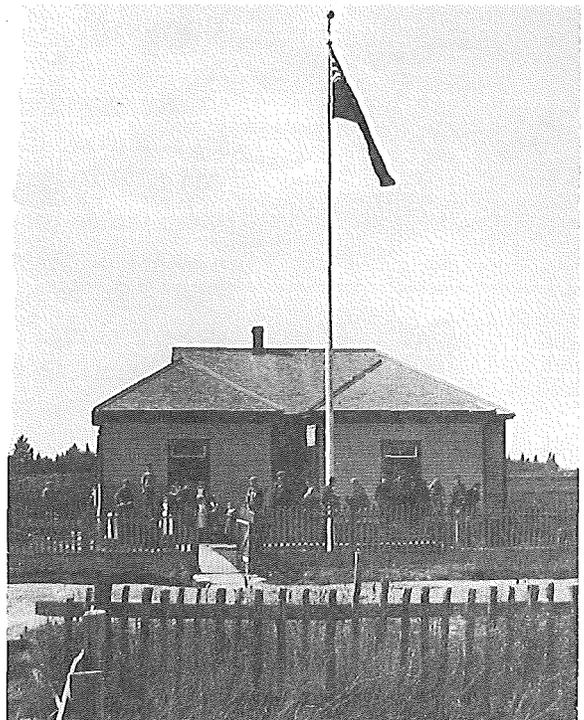
One of the many farming families to settle on Sea Island was the Cooney family. Originally from Scotland, they purchased 150 acres from Mr. Errington in 1896. This land was eventually split between the two brothers Ernest and Jim in 1918. They sold their grain to mills in New Westminster, transporting it to New Westminster by boat on the incoming river tide. Ernest Cooney farmed on Sea Island until 1941. The Sea Island Community Centre was originally the Cooney barn. He became a well-known Richmond Councillor, serving for 20 years, and was a very active community worker.

Schooling

The obvious necessity for a school arose and the Sea Island School District was created in 1889. The first school opened the following year. Previously any children wishing to attend school had to cross the Fraser River by boat to study at the North Arm school, established in 1877, under the auspices of the North Arm School District. Classes were held in the Methodist Church. Each area of Richmond had its own independent school board until 1906 when the Richmond School District was formed.

The school trustees on Sea Island were Captain W.F. Stewart, William Nicol and Duncan McDonald.

Sea Island School,
ca 1896.
Vancouver Public Library
Photo 9952.





Sea Island School class in 1898. Man at the left wearing hat is teacher H.B. Barton. Don Gordon Collection.

Barton who later became a partner in Clugston and Barton Hardware Store, Marpole. When the school became two rooms, Mr. Barton was the headmaster, teaching the advanced classes and Miss Francis Sexsmith taught the primary grades.

The Sea Island School Trustees decided to build a one room school at the corner of McDonald and Grauer roads on land donated by the McDonald family. It is highly probable that the school trustees were also the school builders and labourers. The original size of the school was 20 x 34 feet but this was expanded in 1896 due to increased attendance. One of the first teachers was a Mr. H.B.

In 1902 the annual budget for the Sea Island School was \$ 1,380. Furnishings for the school were rather spartan: roughly finished desks, wooden floors and heating supplied by a coal or wood burning stove. Toilet facilities were in the outhouse. The students had to supply their own textbooks. They had to use a slate for writing purposes (cleaned with a damp rag) until 1904 when scribblers were supplied. In 1902 there were 52 students at Sea Island School. They were divided into senior and primary classes. The attendance would fluctuate with the farming year as many children were expected to help out during busy times such as seeding and harvest. This first Sea Island School closed in 1914.

Dairying

By 1890 Sea Island had become a centre of the local dairying industry due to several factors. The implementation of the Municipal Drainage Act of 1889 had improved drainage all over Richmond making the land more viable for crops and animals. An expanding population in Vancouver led to an increase in the demand for fresh milk. The completion of the North Arm bridges meant that fresh milk could be carried daily from Sea Island to Vancouver. James Mellis, a fisherman from Terra Nova, was one of the first to see the commercial opportunity and he started a stage line between Terra Nova, Sea Island and Vancouver which carried the mail and milk.

From 1890 to the Vancouver Airport's expansion in 1954, Sea Island was known for its dairies. The peak expansion time was between 1920 and the Second World War when many innovations were brought in, including the milking machines and artificial insemination. The Milk Act of 1913 allowed each municipality to set its own regulations for milk production and the Milk Producers Association was organized in the

same year. Milk was regularly transported into Vancouver on the British Columbia Electric Railway, which began serving Eburne and Lulu Island in 1905 after taking over the Canadian Pacific Railway line. The increased use of the automobile meant that milk could be moved more directly to the customer. The invention of pasteurizing and refrigeration, along with province-wide regulations, all created opportunities for growth in the industry.

The Grauer family established their dairy farm on Sea Island in 1922 as a means of diversifying their farming activities. The manure from the cows improved the general fertility of the land. A cow barn was built which housed 50 purebred Holstein-Friesian cattle. At this time George and Gus were operating the farm and Jake Jr. had just returned from Oregon State Agricultural College. In 1927 Jake Grauer Sr. formed the family company, J. Grauer and Sons Ltd. Four sons and the two daughters operated all the farm operations under the presidency of Jake Grauer senior. The original small dairy farm was expanded into a large, mechanized dairy operation. The land holdings eventually amounted to 400 acres producing all the required feed - hay, roughages, and mangols - apart from specialized feeds. In the early years of its operation, milk was sold directly to the customer in Vancouver in its raw state as Vancouver would not allow sale of milk that had been pasteurized elsewhere.

Eventually the family business owned 300 Holstein cows, for their high milk production, and 200 Jersey cows, for their high butter-fat content. All the cows were tested regularly for tuberculosis and inspected every two weeks by a veterinarian. Many of the cows were milked up to 3 times a day and the farm won hundreds of trophies and awards over the years

Frasea Farms, ca 1940.
City of Richmond
Archives 1978 43 7.



In 1938 Richmond was included in the Vancouver Metropolitan Health area which meant that Frasea Farms were automatically authorized to pasteurize milk in Richmond and sell it in Vancouver. The pasteurizing plant and distribution business became a subsidiary of J. Grauer and Sons Ltd. and was known as Frasea Farms with the younger Jake Grauer as President. The breeding stock was eagerly sought after by other farmers in Canada, the United States, and overseas. Several hundred gallons of milk were distributed on a daily basis in Vancouver and Richmond. The close proximity of the farms and dairy to the market also meant there were many visitors to look at the operations. During the war years a hog raising feed barn was added to the business, feeding the pigs on milk by-products, grain and potatoes.

In 1954 Frasea Farm was sold due to the land appropriations for the Vancouver International Airport. The Grauer family also owned other farmland on Sea Island, which would be held in a legal dispute with the federal Government for 30 years. The Frasea Farm was impressive with its large barns and dignified farm house. Although Frasea Farm was the largest dairying operation, there were many other dairies on Sea Island.

In 1912 Bob Doherty arrived in Richmond and farmed with Bill Oldfield on the Thomas Kidd farm. In 1920 he purchased Dinsmore Island and Pheasant Island in a tax sale. He cleared the land on Dinsmore which he then rented out for the production of sugar beets and peas. Mr. Doherty also arranged for the construction of a bridge from Sea Island to Dinsmore Island. Mr. and Mrs. Doherty owned Seabright Dairy, on Buckingham Road, Sea Island from 1929 to 1939. There were two large barns on their dairy farm, one was 100 feet long and the other 60 feet long. The barns were kept immaculately clean and the farm buildings were modern and well-maintained. The life of a farmer's wife was a very busy one, working hard from morning to night, seven days a week. Mrs. Doherty had responsibility for the accounts, management of the dairy, household duties as well as all the meals for the farmhands.

"The Seabright," 1935.
Robert Gordon built the ice cream parlour to cater to those who came to watch the planes land and take off.
Don Gordon Collection.



The airport opened in 1931 and in the following years, the airshows became a popular attraction. The Doherty family built a soft-drink and ice-cream stand on their property to sell refreshments to sightseers. They also realized that there were no toilet facilities in the immediate area so the mangel and potato storage houses were converted into toilets. Surplus milk from their farm was sold in half-pint bottles in the ice-cream stand. In

1939 the dairy farm was expropriated by the Federal Government for airport expansion and Mr. and Mrs. Doherty moved to Ladner. The family home became the Air Force Officers headquarters.

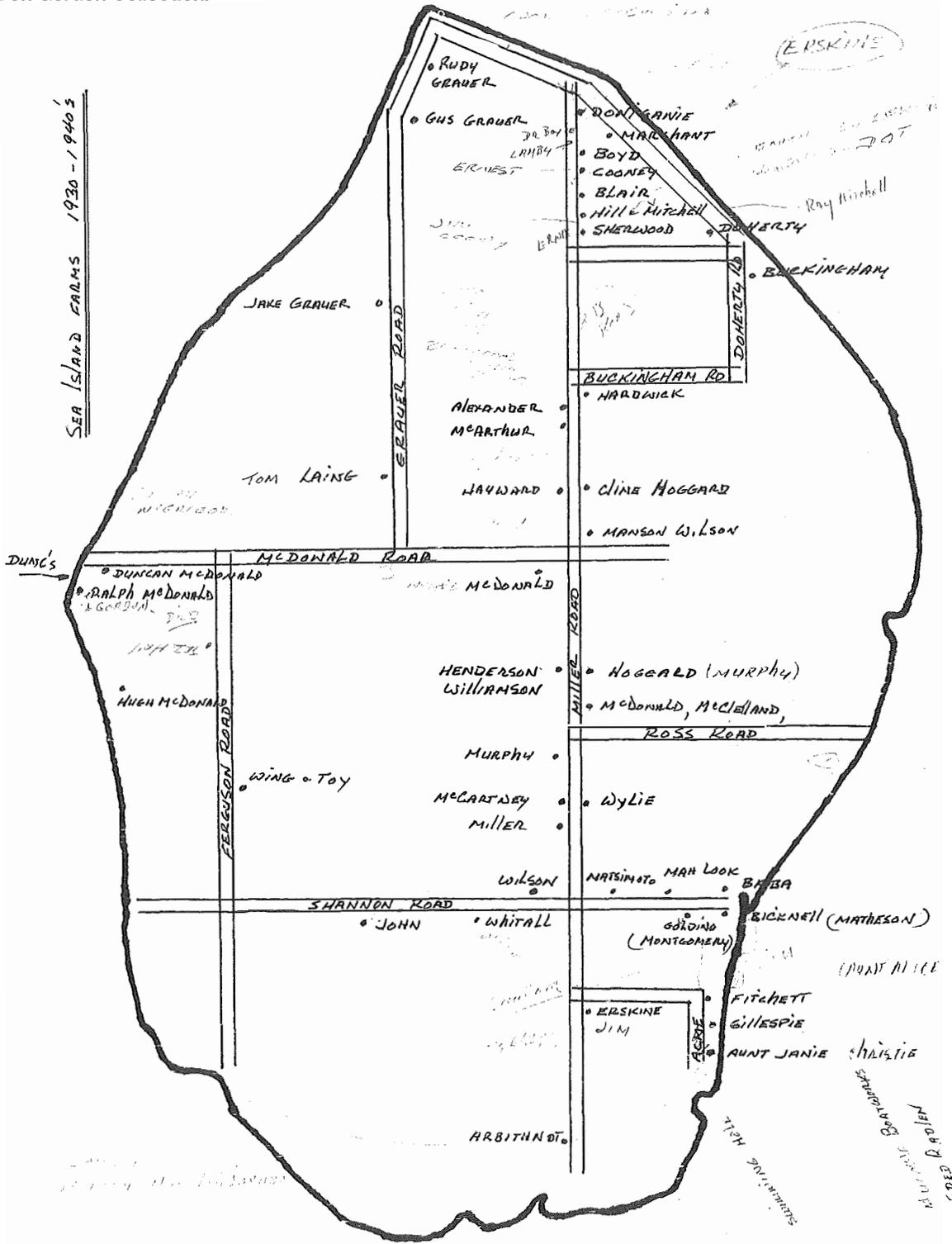
Raising cattle can be a dangerous business as evidenced by the experiences of the McDonald family of Sea Island. In 1919 Duncan McDonald was injured by a bull and died a few months later of related causes. Fred May, a relative by marriage to the McDonald family was killed by a domestic bull. In January 1955 Hugh Herbert McDonald, nephew of Duncan, was gored by his normally placid bull and subsequently died in St Paul's Hospital of his injuries.

Crops on Sea Island

There were many crops grown on Sea Island once the land was adequately drained. These included hay, oats, barley, clover seed, timothy, wheat and corn. In 1887 Hugh Boyd was awarded a medal for growing the best wheat in the British Empire. A variety of berry crops were grown: raspberries, cranberries, blueberries and strawberries. Many small farms also grew vegetables for their own consumption as well as for sale. The crops were subject to a host of pests and diseases. Some which were reported in 1892 were potato blight, caterpillars, aphids, bot flies, gad flies, mosquitoes, and scotch thistles.

At harvest time everyone would work in the fields - children, wives and neighbours. The first harvests were brought in manually with scythe and flail but later harvesting machines drawn by horses were able to lighten the load. Harvesting teams of eight or nine men would work their own farms and then hire themselves out to other farmers. Mechanization transformed the agricultural industry. The farmers on Sea Island kept abreast of the new ideas and inventions. Crops on Sea Island were generally bountiful due in large part to the fertility of the soil and equable climate.

Sea Island Farms in the
1930's and 1940's.
Don Gordon Collection.



BILL

An Act to Incorporate Sea Island Municipality.

WHEREAS a petition has been presented by inhabitants and owners of property on Sea Island, in the Municipality of Richmond, Province of British Columbia, praying that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council be authorized, without requiring observance of Section 4 of the "Municipalities Incorporation Act," by Letters Patent under the Great Seal to divide the present Municipality of the Township of Richmond by incorporation into a District Municipality, under the name of the Corporation of the District of Sea Island, hereinafter particularly described, and reducing the limits of the present Municipality of the Corporation of the Township of Richmond accordingly:

AND WHEREAS it is deemed expedient to permit a departure from the provisions of the said Act, and to grant the prayer of the petition:

THEREFORE, His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, enacts as follows:—

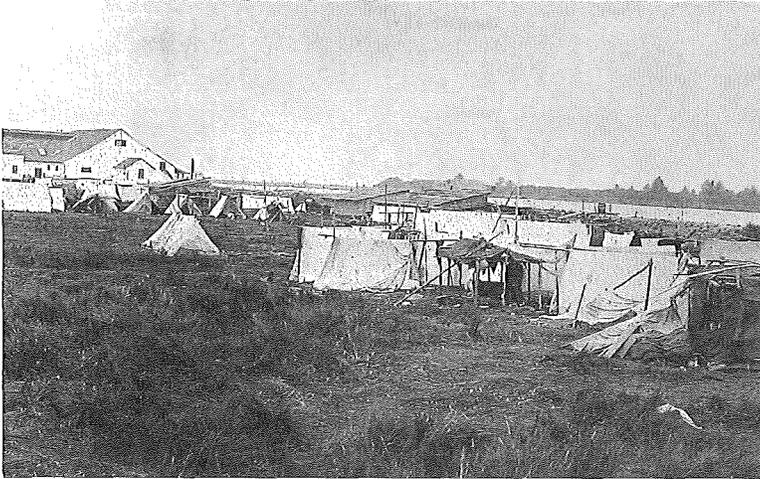
1. This Act may be cited as the "Sea Island Incorporation Act." Short Title.

A portion of the first page of the Act to Incorporate Sea Island Municipality, 1921. City of Richmond Archives, MR Series 36.

The Tax Base and Threat of Secession

Sea Island was considered to be a prosperous place in relation to other areas. Richmond Council divided the Municipality into three wards in 1880 and then in 1892 revised the ward system to five wards. Sea Island was Ward 1, which also included a small part of northern Lulu Island directly across from Sea Island. The tax base for Ward 1 was very stable and was improved considerably by the canneries. Most of Sea Island had at least one building per section before 1905.

This burgeoning prosperity led to a movement towards secession in 1921. A Private Members Bill was brought before the Legislature in an attempt to incorporate Sea Island as a District Municipality. Sea Island acreage comprised of 3,766 acres compared to 25,677 acres on Lulu Island and the other small islands. All of the land on Sea Island was under cultivation, which meant a high tax bill in proportion to the rest of the wards. Other areas of Richmond contained a high percentage of bog land, railway right of ways, and the Rifle Range, which were all unproductive. Residents of Sea Island felt that they were paying the way for many of the improvements on Lulu Island so a petition was drawn up which led to the Private Members Bill.



Sea Island Cannery
ca 1900.
City of Richmond
Archives 1993 3 1.

The majority of Richmond Council was unequivocally opposed to this secession and moved a resolution in Council against this Bill. Councillors Mackie and Martin voted against the resolution. Councillor Mackie represented Ward 1 so his opposition was not surprising. However Councillor Martin represented Ward 3, Steveston which was quite unlikely. The Bill died a natural death in the Legislature and the idea of secession did not publicly arise again.

However it probably had appeal for many residents. Sea Island had many ties to the Mainland, the physical tie of the bridge as well as commercial and social links. The location was a natural stepping stone between Marpole, Vancouver and Richmond. The island was a separate entity, self-supporting in its agricultural and fishing industries.

The Canneries

Another reason for the continuing stability of Sea Island was the establishment of the salmon canneries. One was the Sea Island Cannery built in 1890 by Alexander Ewen and Company. Its original name was Bon Accord but it was renamed Sea Island to avoid confusion with the Bon Accord Cannery in Port Mann. This cannery was located on Swishwash Island just off the southwest corner of Sea Island. Richard E. Gosse built Dinsmore Island Cannery in 1894 on Dinsmore Island, which, in later days, became part of Sea Island through infill. A Mr. Costello of the Canadian Canning Company built the Vancouver Cannery in 1896. Acme Canning on the Middle Arm of the Fraser River, Sea Island, built the Acme Cannery in 1899. Jane R. Cassidy and Allan Cameron owned Acme Canning Company.

The fortunes of the canneries and their owners fluctuated with the supply of salmon and unstable foreign markets. Some canneries were only open for one season while others merged and went onto to be prosperous. 1902 saw the organization of the British Columbia Packers Association of New Jersey, which took over many canneries in Steveston along with the Dinsmore Cannery, Sea Island Cannery and the Acme Cannery. One of the more prosperous and longer lasting canneries was the Vancouver Cannery, which was finally closed in 1930 and was dismantled in 1935. The net building served as a warehouse and fishing camp for British Columbia Packers until it was sold to the Department of Transport and torn down in 1955.

Tom Goulding who had lived on Dinsmore Island for some years owned and operated a cork mill, close to the canneries, which in winter made wooden corks for salmon nets. The wooden corks replaced the original corks made from Spanish cork trees. These "corks" were manufactured from aged cedar "bolts" which measured 4 inches by 4 feet. Each bolt was cut into cork lengths of 6 or 7 inches and they were then aged by soaking in sea water. They were then reamed into corks which were used to provide floatation for gillnets. A good worker could make 2,000 a day, which was intensive piece work. The cork mill closed in the 1950s when plastic corks began to make inroads into the industry.

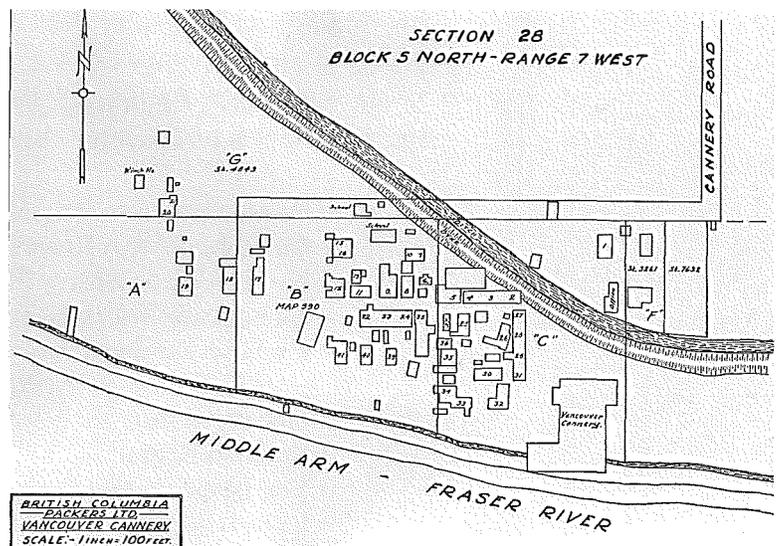
The Fraser River canning industry began in the early 1870s when the cans for fish packing were manufactured by hand in the off season. Almost every year saw an improvement in the process. The canneries were always heavily dependent upon manual labour, as was the fish catching industry that provided the salmon.

Many fishermen emigrated from Japan at the turn of the century. The majority lived in Steveston but there were quite a few who lived in bunkhouses and houses on the south shore of Sea Island. There were also several Japanese families living in cannery-owned houses. A formal photograph of cannery workers, including fishermen and their families was taken on the occasion of the visit of the Japanese Consul to the Vancouver Cannery. The photograph was published in *Richmond, Child of the Fraser* by Leslie J. Ross on page 119. There are many children and wives in the picture. The Japanese children who lived in the Vancouver Cannery and other cannery houses attended school in a building, surrounded by Japanese cabins, on the wharf on the outside of the dyke. This school was opened in 1929 and closed in 1942. One of the teachers at the Sea Island Japanese School was Mary Leona Thompson who taught there from 1929 until her marriage in 1940. She was the daughter of James Thompson of Terra Nova.

Chinese manual labourers working on contract also lived in the bunkhouses but they were employed as a unit with all negotiations being handled by a contract agent. The Chinese workers were normally employed under contract to be housed on a single basis, either being unmarried or leaving their families behind in China or elsewhere.

The canning industry attracted mostly migrant workers with the

Site plan of Vancouver Cannery, ca 1930. Cabins for Japanese cannery workers are numbered 22/23/24. Huts for First Nations Workers are shown north of the Winch House in the top left of the drawing. City of Richmond Archives, 1997 15 6.



Japanese and Chinese often returning in the off season to the railways and the mines. The seasonal work also suited First Nations workers who would follow the canning and fishing seasons from employer to employer and would occasionally take work in the logging and mining industries. The cannery owners would provide rudimentary housing for the migrant workers. But often the First Nations workers created temporary villages close to the canneries.

The Airport

The image of Sea Island as a rural paradise close to the bustling and growing city of Vancouver endured through the years until 1931. While the rest of Canada and North America was just beginning to realize that the economy had nose-dived, Sea Island was undergoing a profound change that altered the community irrevocably.

On July 22, 1931 the Vancouver Civic Airport and Sea Plane Harbour was officially opened on Sea Island. The actual location of the airport had been a topic of much debate over the previous few years. A delegation from Vancouver and its environs had presented their case to the Federal Government in 1928 where it was pointed out that Vancouver was cut off from the rest of Canada by mountains. It was also stated that a ship from anywhere in the world could land in Vancouver and have immediate access to all facilities, Customs and Excise, and transportation into the city. An airplane would have to find a flat open area in which to land and could then be faced with an irate landowner or the police wondering if the plane was from a foreign country.

Several sites had been proposed to the Joint Air Board in Ottawa. Major Cowley, on behalf of the Board, had surveyed these sites from the air and had reported to Ottawa on their general features. He then reported his findings on August 8, 1928 to the local Air Board which was comprised of representatives of Vancouver, North Vancouver, Point Grey, South Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Town Planning Commission and the Association of Property Owners.[®]

The nine possible locations listed were:

- Capilano Indian Reserve
- North Side of Burrard Inlet above Second Narrows
- Musqueam Indian Reserve, North Arm of the Fraser River
- Chinese Gardens, foot of Main Street,
North Arm of the Fraser River
- Burnaby Lake
- Spanish Banks
- Sea Island
- Lulu Island
- Woodward's Landing.

Major Cowley reported that the best two sites from the air were the Sea Island and Second Narrows Burrard Inlet locations. It came down to a question of cost and the Sea Island site was selected as it could be used almost immediately with the elimination of a few fences. The decision was made in December 1928 by the Joint Air Board, with the Government represented by Major McLaren, to call for the City of Vancouver to go ahead with the arrangements for the acquisition of 200 acres on Sea Island.

An earlier landing field on Lulu Island located near Lansdowne Park was used by British Columbia Airways in 1928 for landing the twelve passenger Ford Tri-motor on the Vancouver-Victoria run. Many well-known early pilots flew from this site including the members of the Aero Club of British Columbia.

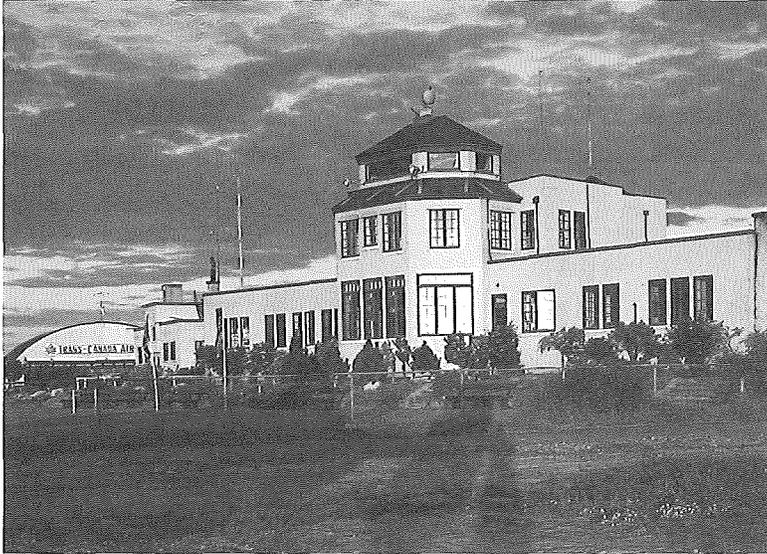
The Sea Island site was also superior as regards accessibility to Vancouver and surrounding areas. The City of Vancouver purchased land from various farmers (among them the Erskines, Murphys, Cooneys, and McDonalds) to assemble the required acreage. The first sale of land was undertaken between James Erskine and the City of Vancouver. The purchase price was \$600 per acre. Construction began in 1930 under the auspices of the City Airport, Vancouver. Richmond Council was required to upgrade the roads leading to the airport site for the expected heavy traffic and provide the water and sewer connections. On September 13, 1930 the corner stone was laid for the official Administration Building, and a commemorative dinner was held by the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Richmond Council and the Vancouver City Council passed resolutions in February, 1931 requesting the Post Master General to extend the Air Mail Service to the new airport. All was made ready for the opening of the airport. An Inspector, a Sergeant and twenty Constables from the Vancouver City Police were sworn in as special police to work in the Richmond jurisdiction for traffic and crowd control during the ceremonies. The airport truck was equipped with a siren so it could act as a fire truck or ambulance if any problems occurred on Opening Day.

The Honorable S.F. Tolmie, Premier of the Province of British Columbia, officially opened the City of Vancouver Airport and Seaplane Harbour on July 22, 1931. An Air Pageant and Show was staged for the



Cover of the brochure produced for the official opening of the Vancouver Airport in 1931. City of Richmond Archives, Reference Files.



**Vancouver Airport
terminal building, 1937.
Eric Rathborne
photograph.
City of Richmond
Archives 1997 5 22.**

first four days July 22 to 25 and it was estimated that more than 70,000 people visited the airport during that time. Concurrently at this time there was a "Canadian Air Pageant" which toured the country putting on air shows and those nineteen planes were present for the opening. Forty planes from the United States were present as well as military aircraft from Camp Borden and the RCAF. Night flights were made over Vancouver during the opening times and fireworks and a siren were discharged from these planes. Many stunt pilots

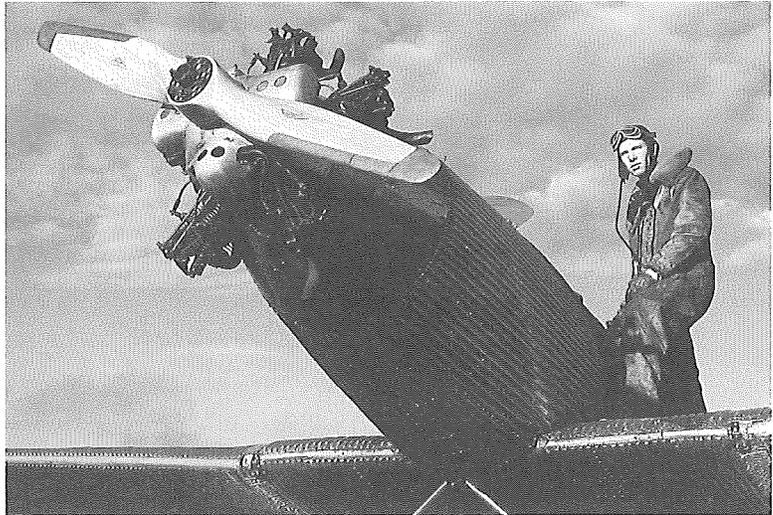
from Canada and the United States showed off their abilities to thrill the crowds.

The airport was considered to be one of the best on the Pacific Coast at that time. It had two runways; one running east and west, 2,350 feet in length, and the other, 1,350 feet long, running north and south. Both were hard surfaced but it was said that the grass surrounding them was so well drained that planes could also land there if necessary. There were two large concrete hangars; one for airplanes and the other, located on the bank of the Fraser River, sea planes. The cost of each hangar was \$38,000. The Administration building cost \$22,000 to build and equip. It contained offices, club rooms, Customs and Immigration, and lunch rooms. There was also space for all the passengers and their luggage in case of inclement weather.

However despite these first class facilities the airport was run on an economy basis. The manager, William Templeton, a well-known pilot, had a staff of three men, a horse and a home-made wagon. The horse was extremely cost effective as it grazed down the airport grass while providing fertilizer. If a plane landed after dark, the landing area was illuminated by a string of storm lanterns. On occasion the public would respond to appeals on the radio, drive to the airport and turn on their car headlights to assist the lighting arrangements.

The majority of flights from the airport in these early days were sightseeing tours of the city and its environs. Members of the Aero Club, which was the first tenant of the airport, would log hundreds of solo flights and instruction hours. In November 1936 a dawn to dusk patrol was undertaken by seven women pilots, all from the Vancouver area, to show that women were capable pilots too.

The start of the commercial air transportation service was in 1934. This business would eventually dominate the airport. United Airlines began a trial service to Seattle with transcontinental links from there. The newly formed Canadian Airways would compete with their own flights to Seattle. In 1936 the Federal Department of Transport was formed and the airport was vastly improved with longer runways, radio and meteorological services, and participation in the national traffic control system. The following year saw the first Montreal to Vancouver flight, which took 17 hours and 35 minutes and the birth of Trans-Canada Air Lines (Air Canada) and Yukon Southern Transport (Canadian Pacific Airlines).



Aviator and aircraft, ca 1936. Unidentified aviator is wearing a sheepskin flying suit as he poses on the wing of an aircraft, possibly a Junkers A50. Eric Rathborne photograph. City of Richmond Archives 1997 5 68.

The Airport and World War II

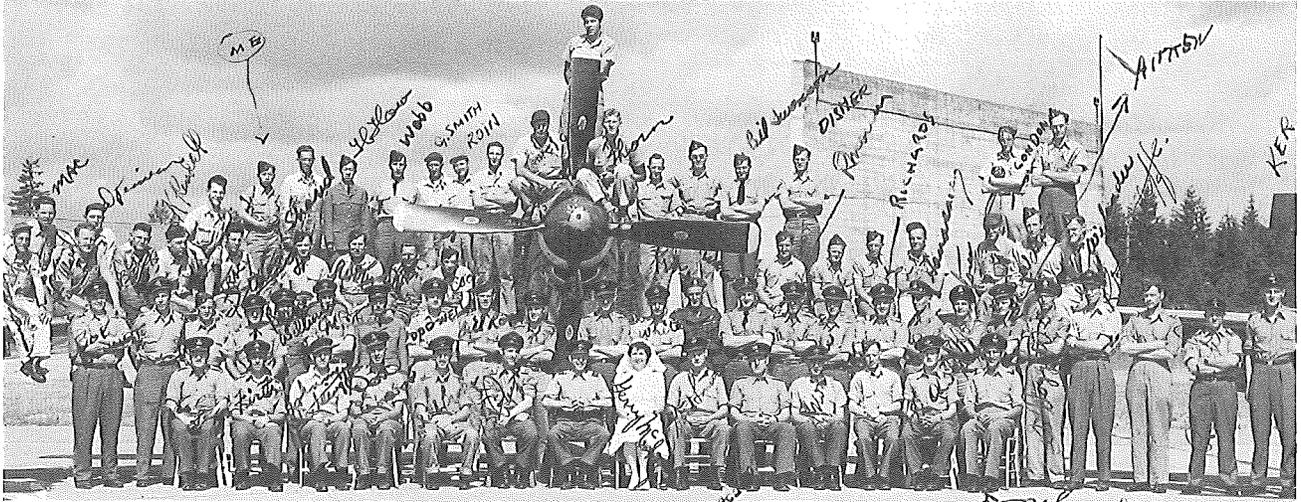
The outbreak of World War II meant great changes at the airport. As the only established air base on the West Coast available to the Canadian armed forces it became a defence zone operational base of the RCAF. William Templeton remained as the civilian manager. He said later, “It was a radical new phase, we now had to assume responsibility first to His Majesty and second to the taxpayers of Vancouver.”

Soon the little yellow Tiger Moths were familiar to all residents of Richmond as the Vancouver Air Training School, formerly the Aero Club of British Columbia, put young men through their initial eight weeks of training. Airforce personnel guarded all entrances to the airport grounds and facilities. The airforce had its own mess hall, lecture rooms and a “dry” canteen (no alcoholic beverages). The facilities for the ever increasing commercial aviation were also improved with the building of a new restaurant and waiting area.

More and more land was purchased by the federal government for airport expansion. In November 1942 the farms belonging to W.A. Hayward, James Williamson and Mr. McDonald were absorbed into the airport holdings and some roads were



Ruth Johnson with de Havilland Tiger Moth, ca 1946. Eric Rathborne photograph. City of Richmond Archives 1997 5 82.



Military use of the Airport continued after the Second World War when the "Cold War" of the 1950's saw Air Force Reserve forces return for training exercises. Shown here in 1951 are members of the RCAF Reserve Fighter Squadron 442, known as "weekend pilots." They spent two Sundays each month on Sea Island preparing for a war that, thankfully, never came. City of Richmond Archives, 2001 5 7.

closed. Also at this time, the government installed a chlorination plant close to the junction of Miller Road and Airport Road. The Richmond Council went on record as stating that any families living on Sea Island who objected to their water being chlorinated would have to deal with the Federal Government. The twenty families affected lived on land close to the airport, including several still living on the old Vancouver Cannery site which was southwest of the airport.

Sea Island was undergoing rapid change due to the emphasis on the war effort. The idyllic pastoral landscape of earlier years was fast giving way to a heated construction zone. Mud-coloured shacks and barracks were hastily thrown up to house the airforce personnel while abandoned farmhouses waited for the wrecker's ball to clear the way for more building. The Japanese fishing cabins at the Vancouver Cannery were burned in 1943, which seemed unnecessary during a time of lumber and housing shortages.

APPENDIX II

AIRPORT MANAGER'S REPORT, JULY, 1946

AIRPORT AND SEAPLANE HARBOUR
W.M. TEMPLETON
AIRPORT MANAGER



TELEPHONE LANGARA 0258

VANCOUVER, A. M. F., B. C.

8th July, 1946.

The Chairman and Members,
Harbours, Utilities and Airport Committee,
City Hall, Vancouver, B. C.

Gentlemen:

FIFTEEN YEARS OF PROGRESS

Vancouver Airport is *Fifteen Years Old* this month and I am sure we are all justifiably proud of the progress that has been made in a decade and a half. When the Airport was officially opened for business on July 22nd, 1931, there were only four small aircraft operating. There were no air services to other cities, no field lighting, no radio, no weather forecasting facilities, no air traffic control, no repair plants, no restaurant. The road leading to the Administration Building was narrow and full of holes, and the one paved runway, 2,400 feet long, had to serve for practically all wind directions.

Today, the Airport is one of the busiest and certainly one of the most important in Canada. It is the Pacific operating centre of Trans-Canada Air Lines and of Canadian Pacific Air Lines. It is the northern terminus of United Air Lines. Over four hundred passengers arrive or depart daily by air and not a single one of the 442,077 passengers who have flown have been even slightly injured in an accident at the Airport during the fifteen years of its existence.

Some idea of the increases in the number of passengers carried and the amount of air mail and air express handled is conveyed in the following comparisons:

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Passengers	Full year, 1935	4,282	(Average 12 Daily)
	March, April, May, 1946	38,115	(Average 414 Daily)
Mail	Full year, 1935	4,726 lbs.	
	March, April, May, 1946	205,431	
Air Express	Full year, 1935	3,210	
	March, April, May, 1946	129,657	
Scheduled Flights	Full year, 1935	335	
	March, April, May, 1946	3,748	

Our records show that since July, 1931, a total of 442,077 passengers have arrived or departed, and that 5,275,519 pounds of air mail and 1,305,076 pounds of air express have passed through the gates.

A Sub-Post Office at the Airport operates continuously and handles all regular postal business. The radio and meteorological departments are the equal of any in the Dominion and function on a 24-hour basis.

During the war the boundaries of the landing field were considerably extended and runways lengthened and widened. Today, the Airport actually covers an area larger than LaGuardia Field, New York, which is 550 acres.

The importance of the Airport to this City cannot be over estimated. By Trans-Canada Air Lines, air mail letters are received here from London, England, in less than three days. A passenger recently arrived at his home on Lulu Island from Amsterdam, Holland, in forty-eight hours, with stops in New York and Seattle of several hours. American tourists and business men, flying their own planes, arrive here daily. The distance from Los Angeles to Vancouver by air is less than seven hours.

There are now eleven daily return trips to Victoria. There are five trips each way across the mountains, and four trips each way between Seattle and Vancouver, daily. There is a daily trip each way to Northern British Columbia and the Yukon, and twice-weekly trips to Queen Charlotte Islands and Prince Rupert.

Vancouver Airport is now an established public enterprise, which in fifteen years has contributed in no small way to the growth of the community, and has definitely placed this city on the air maps of the world.

Yours respectfully,

(Signed) WILLIAM TEMPLETON,
Airport Manager.

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Burkeville

An article in the March 31, 1941 Marpole-Richmond Review reported, "Plans are underway for a wartime housing project in the vicinity of the Vancouver airport." Wartime Housing Limited, the government owned building company was preparing plans for a Sea Island community to house 300 families. This housing had become a necessity due to the establishment of the Boeing Aircraft Factory at the airport. Workers, air-force personnel and support staff were in desperate need of adequate housing close to their workplace. Gasoline restrictions and rubber shortage meant that it was deemed necessary by the government to house these people close to the airport rather than waste valuable resources on long commutes. The building of the new community, soon to be called Burkeville after the President of Boeing Aircraft, Stanley Burke, also meant the government expropriated more land. Farmers whose land was used for Burkeville included Ernest Cooney, James Erskine and Robert Boyd.

Burkeville's first residents, Mr. and Mrs. M. Neville and Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Jordison, moved into their new houses in January 1944. There were three different house plans in the total of 328 houses. The "Small Four" had two 10' x 12' bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, bathroom which contained a claw-foot tub, and a utility room all on one level. The "Large Four" was basically the same as the "Small Four" but with a different floor plan and looked more like a house whereas the "Small Four" was a true cottage. The "Big Six" had the same floor plan as the "Small

Burkeville in 1944 before the sloughs around Pheasant Island were filled in.
City of Richmond Archives 1984 17 84.



Four” but had two more bedrooms in an upper floor. There were no garages, no insulation, no furnaces, no trees or lawns but the houses were well built. The heat came from a Quebec kitchen stove, which burned either wood or coal. The townsite was well laid out with large lots and wide streets.

However the Richmond Council was less pleased with the housing development as it soon became apparent that the burden of providing services to Burkeville would raise the mill rate for the whole of Richmond. The houses were being built by the Government of Canada, which would only pay the annual water levy per house per year. If the government built the schools Richmond would have to provide the teachers and maintenance. Also the Municipality would be responsible for the sewerage pumping system, sidewalks, garbage collection, ditch cleaning and general maintenance. As the houses were built as rental units the Municipality would not be able to levy any property taxes.

The Council debated for many hours on this issue trying to come up with an equitable solution. One suggestion was for Burkeville to become an independent village belonging to the Government which would then be responsible for all the charges. The debates raged on throughout the war years. One Councillor, Ernest Cooney, was forced to resign his seat due to the tardiness of the Government. The Wartime Housing Ltd. had expropriated his farm but delayed his payment for many months. He was unable to purchase other land in Richmond due to this delay and therefore lost his voting rights for the municipality. He resigned in December 1943. A member of the Richmond School Board, Arthur Laing, was also caught in this conflict and was forced to resign his seat due to his inability to purchase land in Richmond.

It was not until May 1947 that Richmond Council passed a bylaw which brought Burkeville into the municipality of Richmond. When this happened, the Municipality agreed to hard surface all the roads, to proceed with all reasonable dispatch to build an elementary school with at least six rooms (possibly more) and take over all the houses. These houses were then sold to sitting tenants and returning veterans. The “Small Four” house had a price tag of \$2,500 while the “Large Four” house was slightly more expensive at \$2,800.

Sea Island School

Negotiations with the Government through Central Mortgage and Housing had been ongoing since the end of the War as the plans for the elementary school had been drawn up in 1945. The Sea Island School was a cottage style with all rooms on one floor and all modern facilities. This school was very necessary as there were many children now living



An aerial view of Sea Island School in 1977. City of Richmond Archives 1978 26 195.

in Burkeville. At least one “Small Four” house had five children living in it, three girls in one bedroom, two boys in the converted utility room and the parents in the other bedroom. The logistics of getting ready for school with only one bathroom must have tried the family’s patience!

From 1944 to 1947 Burkeville existed in a political limbo, neither part of Richmond nor Vancouver. Perhaps all the problems connected with its beginning created a

strong community spirit for Burkeville as many of the children grew up and decided to remain, despite the small houses.

Tenders for the school were initially placed in May 1946 but due to considerable government intervention and bureaucracy the school was not built until September 1947. The plans for the school were also changed from an eight-room school to one of six rooms. In the meantime the children were bused to various schools, and eventually Bridgeport School was forced to go onto a double shift system to accommodate the Sea Island students.

The grand opening of the school took place on October 17, 1947 with the Deputy Minister of Education, Colonel F.T. Fairey was in attendance. The Grade 1 students sang. There were recitations, dancing and a rendition of the brand new school song composed by Miss E. Dalby. The ceremony was closed by the singing of the national anthem, God Save the King. There had been three choices for the naming of the school: Sea Island, Princess Elizabeth, and Frasea. Reeve Grauer chose the name Sea Island.

Community Centre

The heart of Burkeville’s social life was the Community Centre, which had originally been the Cooney barn. Ladies from the Centre provided refreshments for the school opening and many other events. A newspaper report of December 1945 described how the centre had been transformed into a “veritable fairyland” complete with 300 elves and fairies for the arrival of Father Christmas. Each child received a gift and a bag of treats.

All the residents, approximately 300 families, were members of the

Sea Island Community and Ratepayers Association. The first President was Mr. Milton Windrim. The Sea Island Community Council was an original idea of the Wartime Housing Company to develop and foster a healthy community spirit in their brand new “villages.” First elected in 1945, the Sea Island Community Council had already worked towards an elementary school, better health facilities, and improving the streets. Miss Rowan, appointed by the Government, was responsible for organizing the social activities for the community. One of the first actions by the Community and Ratepayers Association was to create a kindergarten class in the Community Hall.

Cora Brown Subdivision

There was a great housing shortage following World War II and the Veterans Land Settlements subdivisions were established throughout Richmond and the Lower Mainland.

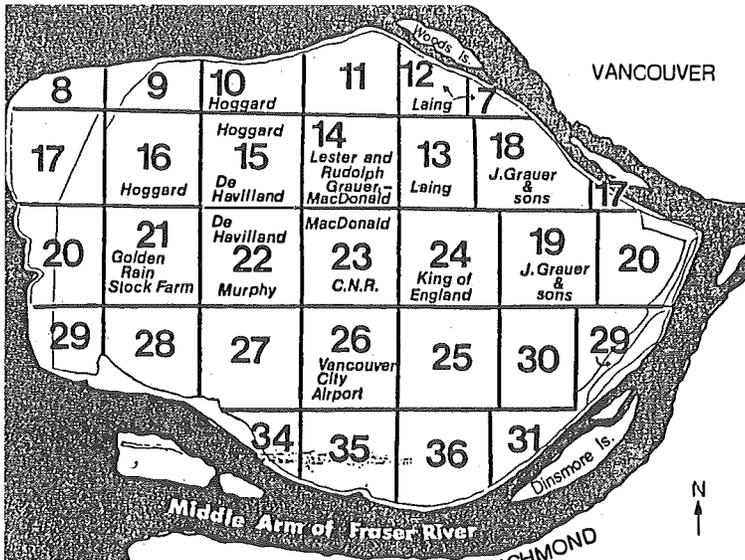
The Cora Brown subdivision was built on the northeast corner of Sea Island. Road and townsite plans were drawn up in 1945 and the first residents moved in December 1946. There were 50 families housed in the first construction phase but eventually there were more than 200 households in the subdivision. The Municipality of Richmond produced the street plans and road building but private contractors undertook house construction. The streets in Veteran Land Settlement subdivisions were named after casualties of the World Wars. Abercrombie, Myron, Edgington, and McCutcheon were the names of the Cora Brown streets – all young men of Richmond who had died in World War II.

Cora Brown was in existence for slightly less than 30 years, full of children and happy memories. The children lived in a close knit community, isolated in many respects from the rest of Richmond. The house lots were very large, often encompassing one acre which meant lots of room for animals, swings, backyard skating in the winter, and playhouses. The houses had wonderful views of the mountains and sea and many had bountiful gardens. The elementary school for the new subdivisions was named for Duncan McDonald. It was officially opened in 1962.

This ideal lifestyle came to a crashing end in 1974 when the subdivision was taken over for the expansion of the Vancouver

An elementary school class at Duncan McDonald School in Cora Brown subdivision, 1964. City of Richmond Archives 1986 24 68.





This graphic from a 1977 issue of the Vancouver Sun had the caption: "Government bungling surrounded the development of the Vancouver International Airport, where a new study has revealed land deals including one worth a million dollars." Vancouver Sun, Nov. 9 1977.

Department of Public works began buying properties in the Cora Brown subdivision on a voluntary basis. In January 1973, fourteen days of hearings into the proposed Vancouver Airport expansion were held.

To quote from the Hearing Officer's Report to the Ministry of Transport, March 1973:

This buying policy was carried out in an inconsistent manner. The buying procedures were secretive and sellers were told not to tell their neighbours what prices they had received. Many neighbours received different prices for similar properties, which led to distrust of the Government.

Vancouver Sun Nov. 9 1977.

Due to this piecemeal buying policy, the community was divided and set against one another. Once the Ministry of Transport had purchased houses they were often left vacant, which led to vandalism; or they were torn down which further incensed the community. Later the purchased houses were rented out but the occupants, although they were supposed to maintain the properties, often failed to do so. As everyone knew that there was no future in buying these houses, the homeowners were left without any viable alternatives and were forced to sell to the government. The Federal Government's vague policies and expansion intentions affected the whole community of Sea Island. In 1971 an agreement was drawn up between the Government and the remaining Cora Brown residents which would have brought some dignity to the proceedings. However the Government decided not to confirm this agreement and went ahead with the expropriation orders.

The stated policy of the Ministry of Transport was to pay a price which would allow the house owner to buy a similar property elsewhere. Some owners felt that the government received the better part of the deal

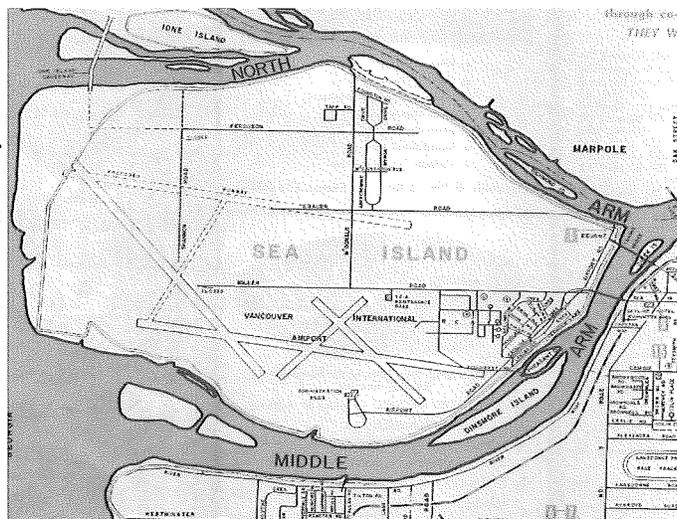
as the land values on Sea Island were depressed due to the government action. Several Cora Brown residents fought the expropriation of their properties but to no avail. By the end of 1974 all the houses had been purchased by the Government and the residents of this close knit community were living elsewhere. Although Burkeville was originally part of the wholesale expropriation of Sea Island housing, it escaped the airport expansion and still remains a viable community, the only residential area of any size on Sea Island.

A Benefit to the City

There is no doubt that the Vancouver International Airport has been a benefit to the City of Richmond. The tax base is far higher than if it had remained agriculturally based. The local economy has always been stable due to the jobs provided by the airport and other spin-off commercial developments. Many hotels have been built - some on Sea Island and others in the centre of Richmond. Light industry and commercial developments have been built close to the airport to take advantage of the transportation available.

However there are a few disadvantages apart from the uprooting of the Cora Brown residents. The few agricultural enterprises, which remained on Sea Island following the expropriation of houses and farms, became severely limited as to the crops, which were allowed to be grown. The agricultural output had to be confined to crops which were not attractive to birds. The salt marshes around Sea Island had also been a natural haven for bird life - one account stated that 185 species of birds were found there. The various expansions of the airport have had some impact on the bird life found around Sea Island but the population densities remain high. Various methods have been and are used by airport personnel to discourage birds from the runway areas. These include close mowing of the grass, adequate drainage to prevent water pooling, pesticide usage to control crane-fly larva, bird scarers, and dogs.

Recreation remains a part of Sea Island attractions; there are walking trails, beach areas, shoreline access, parkland and playing fields. All these resources are well used by the public.



This 1993 map shows Sea Island before major bridge and airport development. City of Richmond Archives 1993 6.

Iona Island

At the mouth of the North Arm of the Fraser River, off the northwest tip of Sea Island, lies the small island of Iona. Henry Mole took up the original Crown Grant, probably around the same time he took up land on the north side of the Fraser River in the late 1860s. Donald A. McMillan purchased Iona Island from Henry Mole in 1885. The land was still in its wild state and measured approximately 150 acres.

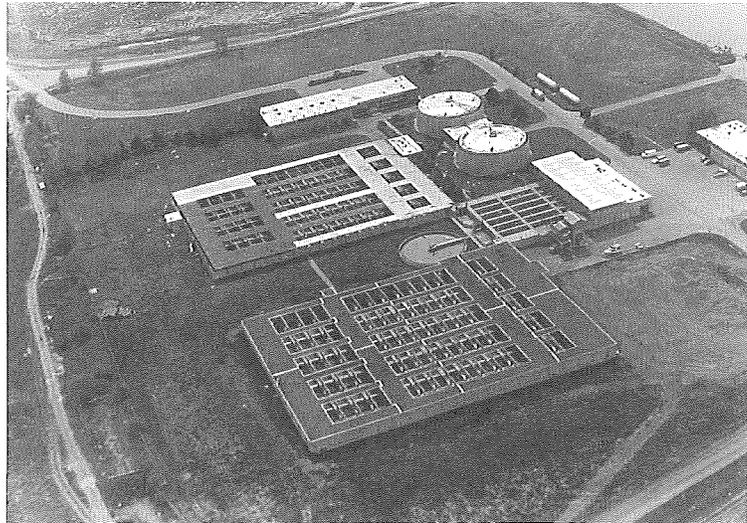
Donald McMillan married Nettie Elizabeth Faulkner in 1883 and they lived on Richmond Island where he was the manager of the Richmond Canning Company. During the slow seasons of 1885 and 1886, Mr. McMillan built a four-room house which he moved on a large scow to Iona Island in 1886. He had contracted a number of Chinese men to dyke approximately 80 acres of the island so that farming could begin. The McMillan farm was mixed dairy and crops. The herd was comprised of 40 Jersey cows and the milk was sold to either the Valley Dairy or the Richmond Dairy. The crops grown were hay, grain, turnips and mangols, which were used mostly to feed the cattle. In 1898 a further 20 acres were dyked in to increase the viable land to 100 acres. Hay and oats were sold to the Brackman-Kerr Milling Co and shipped on the "Alice" to Vancouver. Other boats were used in later years. Almost every farmer shipped by water. The farms on the Fraser all had loading wharves.

The McMillans had six children, five boys and one girl, all of whom went to school on Sea Island. They would row across the river, mooring the boat in the mouth of a slough and then would walk the rest of the way to school. The first school on Sea Island had opened in 1890. Hugh and John McMillan began school in 1891, rowing their little boat on the Fraser River when they were only seven and four years old. John was sent to school early so that the number of pupils in the school would be at the required quota of nine. When they grew older they would go duck shooting in the fall and trade the ducks for groceries at the Eburne store.

Mr. McMillan died in 1901 and Mrs. McMillan ran the farm with her brother, Jim Faulkner, until 1905 when she sold it to a Mr. McCready. The McMillan family moved to Marpole where Mrs. McMillan remained until her death in 1946.

By the 1940s the homesteads on Iona Island were principally used as summer homes but there was at least one permanent resident, Bill Robb, who lived a solitary existence. He would row up the Fraser River to Grauer's Store for his groceries using the tide to help him along. A large family from England, the Slacks, immigrated over time to Iona Island. Terry Slack was 8 years old when he, his parents Alfred and Mildred, and sister Valerie joined the rest of the family in 1948. They immigrated by

boat to Montreal, train to New Westminster, and then by riverboat to Iona Island. They lived aboard float homes, scows that had been made habitable. Their amenities included a wood stove and kerosene lamps, with the outhouse on the end of the boat. The family lived with few needs; their only taxes were on income to ensure their status as landed immigrants would not be jeopardized. These ex-coal miners set to work and built themselves a boat for fishing and log salvage. They could live well on fish, crabs, shrimp and other natural resources. Unfortunately in the early 1950s the wells became tainted with salt and the water was undrinkable so the float homes had to move.



**The sewage treatment plant at Iona, 1977.
City of Richmond
Archives 1978 41 10.**

In 1957 the Greater Vancouver Regional District was searching for somewhere to build a sewage treatment plant as the existing facilities were overloaded. It was decided that Iona Island would be a convenient location. Strong opposition was mounted by the Municipality of Richmond which stated the island would be better preserved as a recreation site. An official report described Iona Island as one of the finest areas for sandy beaches and potential parkland. The island was officially measured at 160 acres. The most northern 1,000 feet was sand covered. The North Arm Jetty, a rock pile, extended from the northwest corner of the island and a pure sand beach had formed on the south side of this jetty. This was known as the Spit, and measured 1,000 feet at its widest. At low tide there was a two-mile recreational expanse of sand. The main part of the island was drained by two channels, which became full at high tides. There were squatters' shacks near the western edge of the Spit.

Although Iona Island had been chosen for the site of the sewage treatment plant, few environmental tests were done and there was considerable opposition from the residents of Sea Island. However it was realized that a new plant was needed to prevent raw sewage from being pumped into local waterways and contaminating the local beaches. Despite protests the plant went ahead and a causeway was built from Sea Island to Iona Island to take the trucks and vehicles needed for the building and access. The plant was completed in 1963. Also in that year studies were undertaken on the feasibility of Iona Island as a ferry terminal but this did not go ahead. The sewage treatment plant has been expanded over the years to meet growing population requirements. The recreational facilities have also been expanded and improved and are now known as the Iona Regional Park.

Conclusion

Sea Island now serves as the gateway to Western Canada for the world. The Vancouver International Airport dominates the island, visually and logistically. Thousands of people pass through Sea Island daily but Burkeville is the only permanent residential area. There are scattered remnants of the old way of life, a few horses grazing in a field, two remaining roads bearing original names and many blackberry bushes. But the principal sound is that of jet engines not birdsong. The flat landscape draws the eye to the runways and planes that fuel the local economy rather than the canneries and dairies of past years. Photographs, documents and personal memories are preserved as an archive of Sea Island past and present. Sea Island has always been a place where innovation and expertise are welcomed. The future may see many different developments.

The "Rocket" statue was created by the Sheet Metal Workers Union 280 for the 1937 Exhibition Parade. The rocket was installed at the south side of the Airport Administration building in 1938. At a later date a replica was placed at the south end of the Cambie Street bridge in Vancouver. Eric Rathborne photograph. City of Richmond Archives 1997 5 13.



Endnotes :

1. "An Archaeological Heritage Resource Overview of Richmond B.C." by Leonard C. Ham. Commissioned by the Township of Richmond. 1987.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. "Richmond, Child of the Fraser" by Leslie Ross. Richmond Centennial Society and the Township of Richmond, Richmond British Columbia, 1979. Page 31. Quoted from "B.C. Genealogist" Vol VI, No. 1, 1977.
6. Baptismal Records, Sea Island Presbyterian Church. City of Richmond Archives. 1998 13.
7. "History of Lulu Island And Occasional Poems" by Thomas Kidd. Wrigley Printing Company, Richmond, British Columbia. 1927. Reprinted 1973. Page 141.
8. City of Richmond Archives. Series 25, File 341 1.
9. Vancouver International Airport Authority. Corporate Communications Division.