

Mrs. B.T. Rogers reminiscences - 1885-1886

In the City of Vancouver Archives we found these reminiscences, written by [Mrs. B.T. Rogers](#) (born Mary Isabelle Angus) at age 85. She shares her memories of Vancouver seventy years prior, when she visited as a sixteen year old girl. She saw Vancouver not long before the Great Fire of June 1886, was a passenger on the first CPR train to arrive in Vancouver, and much more.

These pages were transcribed by Transcribimus volunteers [Siobhan Devlin](#) and [Jenn Ashton](#) in 2018.

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Reminiscences

Reading about the early discoveries made me think of my first visit to Burrard Inlet, when in February 1886 we came from Victoria to see the site of the proposed Pacific Terminus for the Canadian Pacific Railway. There was no Vancouver then on the Inlet, only a little settlement round the Hastings Saw Mill, a few shacks, considerable clearing, and on the North Shore of the Inlet, the Moodyville Saw Mill.

My father, mother, and I had reached Victoria only a few weeks earlier. We had left England in July, 1885 crossed the Atlantic in the Allan liner Peruvian, stayed in Montreal with Uncle Richard's family while my father visited several places before deciding where to settle. He finally crossed the continent, part of the trip being on horse back, riding in company with Mr. A. W. Ross M.P. of Winnipeg, through the Kicking Horse Pass, over the uncompleted railway track through the Rockies. He decided on Victoria

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for our future home, & returned to Montreal for my mother & me. Then we set out by C.P.R. as far as Winnipeg, from where we went to the States to spend Christmas with the Rennys on their Minnesota farm, & to visit Uncle Sandy & family in Fergus Falls. Then on to Chicago, & by Union Pacific to San Francisco, where we boarded the Steamer Umatilla for Victoria; we stayed first at the Driard Hotel, then took a small house off Menzies Street, on Simcoe St.

We lost no time in making the journey to the mainland to see the proposed townsite. It was an overnight trip to Burrard Inlet, so we slept comfortably on the S.S. "Princess Louise". Spent the day exploring the site which was covered with huge felled trees; there was no means of transport, so all this fine timber was burned where it lay on the ground, & the air was thick with its smoke. We clambered over fallen logs, in company with JW. Thos. Sorby, the architect, to the where the C.P.R. was planning to build their hotel.

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After a tiring smoky day, we returned to Victoria again, sleeping all night on the boat.

I remember well the fight in the Legislature over the change of name, when Sir Wm van Horne insisted on Granville becoming Vancouver, against the strenuous objections of Vancouver Island. That was in April 1886, & on June 13th 1886 came the fire.

On July 4th, 1886, we again visited the Inlet, this time landing at Port Moody, to meet the first trans. continental train. It was a Sunday, & a great crowd had come over on the steamer Yosemite, which was dangerously overcrowded. Before leaving Victoria at midnight on Saturday, a spectacular fire destroyed a warehouse & store at the N.W. corner of Fort & Government Streets. Many of the Yosemite passengers, who with the Captain - John Irving - had been celebrating the Fourth of July, on Beacon Hill, rushed ashore to the fire, & it was a very excited crowd, (Incidentally Capt. Irving in kilt) that boarded

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the boat, where conditions were chaotic, no place to sleep & no food to be had for the majority of the passengers. However, we arrived safely at Port Moody, & when the train rolled in, it was welcomed in turn to the terminus by the Reeve of Port Moody, to the real terminus by Mayor McLean of Vancouver, to the fresh water terminus by the Mayor of New Westminster & finally by the stout Mayor Fell to the Pacific terminus of Victoria. The Premier Alec Davie had come over on the Yosemite, & Col. Wolfenden, the Queen's printer, to welcome his brother arriving direct from England.

In Vancouver, everywhere there was excitement & real estate speculation. My father bought some lots on Richards Street, opposite where the Holy Rosary Cathedral now stands, & some on Powell Street. On Richards Street, he built two houses which were still in existence until very recently. We stayed at the Sunny Side Hotel, most of which was built on piles over the water. Sanitation was simple,

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in the bedroom, you opened the window and dumped the slops into the harbour.

Altogether, the twelve months from July 1885 to July 1886 were an adventurous year for a 16/17 year old schoolgirl. Crossing the Atlantic, & seeing a huge iceberg in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a smallpox epidemic in Montreal, with the militia called out to quell anti vaccination riots in the French quarter, part of our train wrecked by a spread rail north of Lake Superior in mid winter; forty below for Xmas on the prairies, the sudden change to blossoming spring in California, and attack of rheumatic fever in the Palace Hotel San Francisco, arriving in Victoria limping with a couple of sticks. Then seeing a new city emerging from the forest, sewing & knitting for the refugees from the fire, finally, the arrival of the first Through train. Truly a wonderful year for me.