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NEWS

Fitzgerald McCleery (seated at right) with his family in their home in the 1890s. In the background is the piano that his daughter said was the first piano in South Vancouver. The McCleerys also had the first plow and the first sewing machine-all brought by ship around Cape Horn. Photo-City of Vancouver Archives CVA 677-344

Memories of Marpole

by Lisa Smedman-contributing writer

About 140 years ago, according to one Vancouver pioneer, a thirsty ex-soldier walked into a saloon and laid some "land scrip" (a government-issued credit note) down on the bar. If he'd used it to purchase land in the wilderness that would one day be Vancouver, his descendants would be wealthy today.

Instead, the former Royal Engineer traded the land scrip for a bottle of rum.

The soldier was one of the Royal Engineers sent out in 1858 and 1859 to impose order on Britain's newest colony, mainland British Columbia. The 150 "sappers" and six officers who came to survey and build roads-all volunteers for colonial duty, and all skilled at a second trade such as carpentry or stone masonry-remained in B.C. for the next four years. They laid out the colony's capital of New Westminster, surveyed the boundary between the new colony and the U.S., built trails and wagon roads to the gold fields, established military reserves on land that offered good timber for ship building, surveyed settlers' preemptions and chose sites for government town reserves.

As an inducement to serve in the colony, the British Colonial Secretary offered each of the sappers 30 acres of land-an offer that was later upped to 150 acres. Many of the men, intending to settle after their discharge, brought wives and children with them when they shipped out from England in 1859.

At the end of their service in B.C. in the fall of 1863, the six officers of the Royal Engineers-including their commander, Colonel Richard Moody-returned to England with a handful of non-commissioned officers and enlisted men. But most of the sappers-about 130-remained in B.C.

Some claimed their 150 acres, but others saw the land grants as a means of ready cash.

John Henry Scales, just five years old when he sailed with his Royal Engineer father to B.C. in 1859, told the Vancouver City Archives in 1933 that his father, John Scales Sr., arranged to sell his land scrip for $50 to the owner of Moody's Mill on Burrard Inlet, and that Moody later used it to purchase timber land.

His father didn't get his asking price.

"Just what happened I do not know exactly, but I surmise they got [father] into a saloon, they had a few drinks; anyway, he came home with just $25 of the $50," said his son.

Other former Royal Engineers also sold their land cheaply. "Some of the Royal Engineers held their scrip for years; did not put it on land," said Scales. "Land! Who wanted land? There was lots of land, land wasn't worth anything... why, over in Victoria one military land scrip, the fellow who had it was in a bar and wanted some more, so he sold his for a bottle of rum."

Other former sappers were more savvy. One-John Murray-"got wind of the [CPR] railway coming" and used his military land grant to acquire land in what would become Port Moody, the transcontinental's first official terminus, said Scales.

Another Royal Engineer, William Henry Rowling, opened a saloon in New Westminster called The Retreat after being discharged, but soon turned his attention to real estate. In 1868, Rowling, wife Mary and their five children settled on District Lot 258 on the north arm of the Fraser River-his military land grant (the modern Fraserview Golf Course in East Vancouver). His son was also interviewed for the Archives in 1933.

"Quite a number of the soldiers sold their [military land] grants, some as low as $20," said Henry Sayre Rowling. "My father bought several, one of them for $20... By purchasing military land grant scrip_ he acquired, at one time, no less than five quarter sections of land stretching, side by side, along the river front, from what is now Boundary Road_ westwards."

By the end of the 1880s the family owned two-and-a-half miles of riverfront along the north arm of the Fraser River-everything from modern Boundary Road to just west of Victoria Drive. Their homestead, called Truru Farm after Rowling's birthplace, became known for its grapes.

When the area became part of the Municipality of South Vancouver, a street was named after Rowling. That road later became East 67th Avenue. The street disappeared in the 1950s, when Champlain Heights was developed.

Like Rowling Road, the "land scrip" issued to the Royal Engineers has disappeared. Some even question its existence. Neither Graham Neale of the International Bank Note Society nor Ronald Greene of the Canadian Numismatic Research Society had heard of land scrip being issued to Royal Engineers.

Tim Watkins of the Royal Engineers Living History Group said there are several references to "scrip" in Royal Engineers correspondence from the period-in one letter, a Royal Engineer overseeing land sales in Victoria in 1861 asks if he can accept scrip as payment-but there are no specific mentions of "land scrip" being issued to Royal Engineers themselves.

"I feel sure that, if Royal Engineer/British Columbia land scrip was actually issued, then there would be some remaining tangible evidence of the cancelled certificates today, or at least an illustration [of it] in an early B.C. history book," said Neale. "But one never knows for sure..."

Rowling wasn't the first settler on the north arm of the Fraser River. During the time he was serving with the Royal Engineers, Fitzgerald and Samuel McCleery, two brothers from Ireland, settled in 1862 on the north bank of the river, just west of modern Marpole.

Fitzgerald McCleery kept a series of diaries beginning in 1863. The short entries mark the day-to-day work of a homesteader. In the first diary, he speaks of renewing the wooden stakes that marked his claim; the excitement of receiving letters and newspapers from home, canoe trips up the river to "town" (New Westminster); building his first cabin; sightings of deer and bear; the high tides that flooded out the lower portions of his land; clearing the forest to plant potatoes, oats, onions, turnips, carrots, cabbage and barley; and a trip by steamship to Victoria to buy fruit trees and get his photograph taken.

The McCleerys were followed by a handful of settlers in the 1860s, all of whom hacked farms out of the forest. Most had taken advantage of a law that came into effect in 1860, allowing settlers to "pre-empt" up to 160 acres of land.

The Henderson's B.C. Gazetteer and Directory of 1889 explained how this was done. Males aged 19 and up who were British subjects-or who declared that they would become British subjects-could make a single claim on unoccupied Crown lands that weren't already designated as military or government town reserves. Once the land was "improved"-for example, by building a house and barn on it and clearing trees-the settler could apply for a certificate of improvement. Eventually, the settler could apply for a Crown grant of the pre-empted land. Only after this grant was in hand could the property be sold.

Some settlers used a loophole to amass more than one 160-acre lot. The law required that the land be occupied, but it made provision for a family member or "agent" of the pre-emptor to occupy the land-as long as this agent wasn't Indian or Chinese.

As the Europeans settled the north arm of the Fraser, its original inhabitants-the Musqueam-lost their traditional lands. The Musqueam had been living at the entrance to the north arm of the Stalo (Fraser River) for centuries, but after smallpox epidemics swept through the area in the early 1860s there was plenty of "unoccupied" land to be

had-including the future site of Marpole, where a midden remained from a settlement that dated back to about 3500 B.C.

River land east of the Musqueam Reserve (which was created in 1869) slowly filled up. Those who settled along the north bank of the river in the 1860s included Elijah (or Obediah) Betts, Henry Mole, Hugh Magee, the McCleery brothers, James Mackie, George Garypie (whose surnames is also recorded as Garopee), Thomas Sneyd and Rowling.

"Garopee's land, now the site of Marpole, was mostly covered with forest, and beyond, towards the west and the Musqueam Indian Reservation, was fertile flat land covered with wild grass and small bushes," Henry Sayre Rowling recalled.

Of these early settlers, only the McCleerys had a road named after them-perhaps because at the time these men pre-empted their lands roads were a distant dream.

In 1862, Hugh McRoberts (who settled across the river, in modern Richmond) contracted to build a trail down the north bank of the river-a land route that could be used in winters when river ice prevented ships from reaching New Westminster. He hired his nephews, the McCleerys, to help him. They were paid in land scrip.

The trail they built was completed by 1864 and ran west from New Westminster to approximately the southern end of modern Dunbar Street. It later became a wagon road, parts of which were incorporated into Marine Drive.

Henry Sayre Rowling recalled the North Arm Trail as a rough path through the woods. In several places the trail crossed ravines up to 50 feet deep that would force a rider on horseback to dismount and clamber up and down steep stream banks.

"No road!" he told the archives. "It was a narrow trail or footpath. You couldn't drive along it, you could scarcely have pushed a wheelbarrow... The trail was used very little, as most of the traveling was done by boat or canoe."

The area that became the heart of Marpole-District Lot 318-was pre-empted in October 1865 by George Garypie. But it was another early settler who would later give the area its original name: Eburne.

Born in 1855, Harry Eburne immigrated to British Columbia in the spring of 1875 with his foster parents. He worked for Fitzgerald McCleery that summer, then pre-empted 160 acres of land east of the North Arm wagon road (modern Fraser Street), which was then just being built. He farmed for a while on what is known today as Twigg Island, but soon tired of farming and abandoned his pre-emption.

In the mid-1870s, at what would one day be the southern end of Hudson Street, Eburne purchased an acre of Garypie's land for $1 and set up a store. Starting in 1885, Eburne operated a post office out of the store. The "Eburne Post Office" gave the area its original name.

Mrs. H.E. Campbell, in a 1931 interview at the archives, recalled arriving at New Westminster in 1889 and coming down the river to Eburne. "We used to cross over in boats, or in a scow to a little wharf

where there was a store, the only one, run by a Mr. Eburne. At that time there were a few shacks around but the store was the main building."

Jane Lougheed (nee Paull), step-daughter of Henry Mole, recalled for the archives in 1940 her mother's second marriage, to Mole, in 1881. Lougheed was three years old when she and her mother travelled down the Fraser River from New Westminster by rowboat to Mole's farm, just east of the Musqueam Indian Reserve.

Before Eburne opened a post office in his store, Lougheed's parents used to travel upriver once a month to New Westminster for their mail. Their address, Lougheed recalled, was simply "North Arm, Fraser River, B.C."

Lougheed recalled a paddlewheeler named the Alice that ran up and down the river, stopping in at farms. "In those days each farmer had a wharf with a barn on the end of it. And when we wanted the boat to call we put up a flag on a flag pole and flagged the Alice."

By 1889 a wooden bridge had been constructed across the Fraser River, linking Eburne with Sea Island. In 1891, Eburne took advantage of this new transportation link and moved his store across the river to Sea Island. He took the post office with him.

For several years thereafter, there were two Eburnes.

In 1894, Eburne sold his store and took up chicken farming. He died in 1924.

Prior to the early 1900s, settlers in Eburne who wanted to travel to Vancouver faced a long and arduous journey. One option was to travel by rowboat or canoe. Thomas Kidd, author of a history of Richmond, mentions a trip Eburne took by rowboat from Granville Township (Vancouver) to Sea Island, to visit his friend Christopher Wood. The man Eburne hired to row took 18 hours to complete the trip.

The other option was to use one of the roads-trails, really-that had been hacked through the forest. In the 1870s, settlers on the north arm of the Fraser River could get to Granville Township via the False Creek trail, which led north to eventually cross False Creek at what is today Main Street, or via the "North Arm Waggon [sic] Road," which linked the trails that would become Southeast Marine Drive and Kingsway.

In the 1880s, a second North Arm Road (modern Granville) was cut through the forest. Campbell recalled it as "just a slit in the forest, a solid wall of trees on both sides from Eburne to False Creek with timber so tall you had to look straight up to see the sky." Buggies and wagons would bog down to the hubs in mud; the trees were so tall the sun couldn't get in to dry up the road.

"The road was no wider than a wagon and every half mile or so, there was a little space, somewhat wider, where wagons could pass," she said.

In 1902, the Canadian Pacific Railway built a branch line-the Vancouver and Lulu Island Railway-from Vancouver to the canneries

at Steveston. The tracks passed through Eburne; the local station was at the southeast corner of Hudson Street and Marine Drive.

In 1905, this railway was taken over by the B.C. Electric Railway Company, which electrified the line for its hourly streetcar service.

In 1909, an Eburne-Westminster interurban line began operating, and in 1912 B.C. Electric extended its streetcar south on Oak Street to Eburne. Realtors' ads of the day boasted of the range of commuting options.

"The junction of three electric railways is south of the general store at the foot of Fourth Street [Hudson Street] while there are stations at [the] foot of Granville Street on Townsend Road [West 70th Avenue]. Traveling accommodation galore."

Today, Granville Street is the main transit corridor through Marpole, but this wasn't always the case. A 1923 map shows streetcar service on Granville Street only running as far south as West 41st Avenue.

When Vancouver City incorporated in 1886, it ended at what is today 16th Avenue. Everything south of the city was heavily forested and sparsely settled.

By the early 1890s, those who had pre-empted or purchased lots south of the city began to think of incorporating, as well. For a time, it looked as though everything west of North Road (which linked Port Moody and New Wesminster) might wind up as one municipality. One map, published in June 1891, announces this area as the "proposed new municipality of Burnaby."

Settlers in the western half of this vast area had other ideas, however. That year, they met at Peter Cordiner's farm (located at what is today the corner of Fraser Street and Southeast Marine Drive) to hammer out plans for the incorporation of South Vancouver. Francis Millar Chaldecott, a solicitor and notary who came to Vancouver in 1890, was at that meeting and recalled it during a 1935 interview at the archives.

"We got a table and some chairs and had the meeting in the barn," he said.

After South Vancouver was incorporated in April 1892 (Burnaby wasn't incorporated until two months later), the first council wasn't voted in, but took their seats by acclamation. Both William H. Rowling and Fitzgerald McCleery were councillors.

In 1908, Eburne became part of Point Grey, which separated from the rest of South Vancouver to form its own municipality.

A map, published in October 1911 in the Point Grey Gazette by realtor M.R. Wells, offered a "then and now" comparison of Eburne. In 1909, the settlement had a population of less than 100, no water mains, just two miles of road (none of it paved) and no sidewalks or street lights. Just two years later, Eburne's population was 1,200 and it had 14 miles of road (nearly two miles of it paved), street lights on "all prominent corners," water mains and sidewalks. A telephone service was also available, at a rate of five cents per call.

It noted that streetcar service was scheduled to begin on Oak Street in April of 1912, with cars every half hour.

The map listed rough-cleared lots with "beautiful views" of Lulu Island and Sea Island for $750 to $800. Lots along Oak Street with streetcar line frontage were listed at $50 per foot of frontage.

The map noted that Fourth Street (modern Hudson Street) was "a paved thoroughfare with a business future." Lots there also cost $50 per frontage foot.

"Watch Eburne grow," Wells urged the Gazette's readers.

While many of the Vancouver streets originally named after pioneers later shed their names and became numbered avenues, the north-south streets in Eburne bucked the trend. The six streets east of Granville originally bore numbers, but gradually acquired names. This process began in 1912, when the Municipality of Point Grey renamed two streets after explorers. Second Street became Cartier Street, and Fourth Street became Hudson Street.

The following year, Fifth Street was named Selkirk Street, after the earl who founded the Red River settlement in 1812. Sixth Street was renamed Osler Street, after a director of the CPR.

In 1914, filled with patriotic fervor, councillors renamed First Street after Sir John French, commander in chief of the British Army in World War I. At the same time they changed Third Street to Montcalm Street, after the Marquis de Montcalm, the French commander who died on the Plains of Abraham in 1759.

By the mid-1910s, the people of Eburne had become fed up with sharing a name with the Eburne across the river, on Sea Island. In April 1916, some 250 people signed a petition, asking the dominion government to change the name of the post office from Eburne to Marpole. The name was taken from Richard Marpole, general superintendent of the CPR's Pacific Division, who lived in Shaughnessy.

Throughout the 1910s and '20s, Marpole continued to grow. In December 1924, the Municipality of Point Grey offered nearly 300 municipally owned lots for sale, including 148 lots in and around Marpole. Terms for the properties, said to be offered at "bargain prices," were a minimum of $50 cash down with the balance over a period of six to 18 months. All of them were "close to street car lines" and had water and light available. Sewer and telephone service were also available "with very few exceptions."

"Property values are increasing-and remember, the lots are all located in [Point Grey], Vancouver's finest residential suburb," the flyer reminded prospective buyers.

Marpole, it noted, had both electric power and light, as well as 872 telephones.

"Here is undoubtedly an unusual opportunity for the homesite seeker and the small investor."

By 1929, when Point Grey-as well as South Vancouver-amalgamated

with the City of Vancouver, Marpole was just one neighbourhood in a city with a total population approaching 250,000. Its residents worked in the canneries, abbatoirs and sawmills that lined the north arm of the Fraser River at Marpole, but the days of the river being the primary transportation corridor were a fading memory.

So too were the Royal Engineers, the last of whom had gathered, grey-bearded and leaning on canes, for a reunion in 1909.

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