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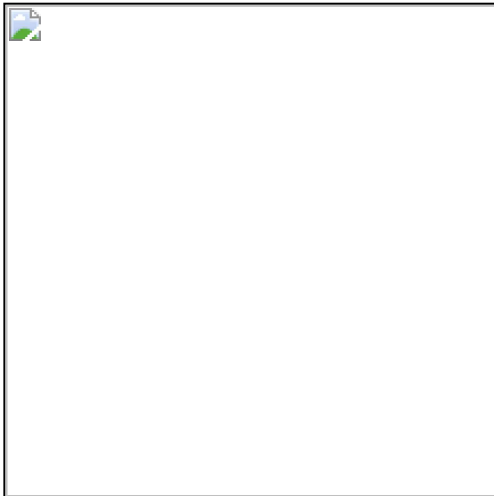
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Jonathan Rogers: the Welshman Who Helped Build Vancouver

By EIFION WILLIAMS



VANCOUVER - The name Rogers is well-known to Vancouverites, being most often associated with the famous sugar company of the same name. But contrary to popular belief, such landmarks as the 10-story Rogers Building at 470 Granville and Jonathan Rogers Park in Mount Pleasant commemorate Welsh-born entrepreneur Jonathan Rogers, whose career almost exactly paralleled the first 60 years of the city's growth.

The latest edition of The Cambrian News, the Vancouver Welsh Society's monthly newsletter, contains some interesting information on Jonathan Rogers, who was also one of the founders of the Cambrian Hall and one of Vancouver's most prominent citizen-benefactors.

The information is contained in an extract from the book *Watermill* by author and Vancouver Welsh Society member David Llewelyn Davies, who now lives in retirement in Kamloops. In his book Davies describes Jonathan Rogers' Welsh background and his successful career in Vancouver.

According to Davies, Jonathan Rogers was born to a prominent, long-established farming family at Plas-Onn, near Llangollen, North Wales, and grew up speaking only Welsh. At the age of 16 he moved to Liverpool where he lived for seven years working at various jobs and perfecting his English.

In 1887, at the age of 23, and armed with a legacy left to him by an aunt, Jonathan sailed for Montreal and crossed Canada on the first transcontinental train to Vancouver, then a small settlement of 2,000 people on the edge of the rain forest.

Two weeks after he arrived, Jonathan attended a public auction of parcels of CPR land within the newly-created city. He bought four lots in the middle of the forest, land which is now located in the heart of downtown Vancouver. He managed to hold on to the land through the depression of the 1890s, correctly judging that his investment in the fledgling city would eventually be rewarded.

By 1895 Jonathan had set himself up as a contractor and builder and soon became involved in all kinds of construction work – offices, manufacturing plants, hotels, banks, even an electricity-



generating station – in what was Vancouver’s first great building and real-estate boom.

In 1902 Jonathan married Elisabeth, a girl from Oswestry, a town near his ancestral home in Wales. They lived close to Stanley Park in a large, elegant house appropriately named “Argoed,” which in Welsh means “beside the wood.” Elisabeth was one of the founders and early benefactors of the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Symphony Society.

By the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 Jonathan Rogers was a very wealthy man and a prominent public figure in Vancouver. He spent the last 30 years of his life repaying the city for the opportunities it had afforded him over the years. He held a number of elected and honorary offices in many fields, most prominently serving for 26 years on the Parks Board, one of his prime interests.

Jonathan Rogers died in 1945 and left what at that time was a very large sum of money, a quarter of a million dollars, to various causes in Vancouver. The largest single bequest of \$100,000 was given to the City of Vancouver to create a neighbourhood park in a poorer part of the city. After several delays, the park was finally opened in 1958 and called Jonathan Rogers Park in his memory.

In 1996 an urban encyclopaedia of Greater Vancouver listed the 500 Vancouver citizens who achieved the greatest prominence between 1886 and 1994. Jonathan Rogers is included amongst this elite few.

The cornerstone on the Cambrian Hall at 17th and Main commemorates Jonathan Rogers’ contribution to the building of the Hall, which this year celebrates its 75th anniversary. He is still fondly remembered by some members of the Welsh Society as a generous individual who was ever mindful of his own good fortune and the obligation to help those less fortunate than himself.

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