

Chapter 6: The B.C.E. Railway

It was 1910 before a railway was put through on the south side of the Fraser River expressly built to carry valley farm produce between New Westminster and Chilliwack. This line was called the British Columbia Electric Railway.

The British Columbia Electric Railway had been founded by an American in 1886. R.R. Giltner, an electrician from Portland, had come to Vancouver hoping to induce the newly-incorporated city to install an electric lighting plant under his direction. The city council was not interested. As a result Giltner started his own company which supplied both light and power to the city. He sold out in 1890 to the newly formed street railway company known as the Vancouver Railway and Lighting Company. Over the next few years the railway, which had branched out as far as New Westminster, changed hands frequently. It would (183) probably be more accurate to say that the name changed frequently but that the principal shareholders remained the same. The top financier during these early times was Francis Stillman Barnard, the son of Francis Jones Barnard, the original owner of the Barnard Express which operated between Yale and Barkerville during the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rushes. The junior Barnard's first business experience had been as a clerk in his father's express company. In 1881 he was made general manager of the company and served as its president from 1882 until 1886. Upon leaving his father's business the junior Barnard got involved in politics in Victoria. In 1888 he became the Member of Parliament for Cariboo.

He had inherited his father's ability to succeed in business. In 1894 he got the English capital he had been seeking through a chance meeting with Robert M. Horne-Payne. This Englishman had been sent to Canada by a group of British financiers (one of which was his father) to seek out sound investments. Upon his arrival at Montreal he immediately got in touch with William Cornelius Van Horne, the president of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Van Horne invited Horne-Payne to accompany him in his private railway car across Canada on an annual tour of inspection. The English capitalist took the invitation.

At Nelson, B.C. Van Horne and Horne-Payne met with Barnard who was at the time the Director of the Columbia and Kootenay Navigation Company. Barnard invited Horne-Payne to inspect the mining developments around Kootenay Lake. It was while steaming up the lake that Barnard pointed out to Horne-Payne the desirable field for investment in and around the cities of the Pacific Coast. Barnard explained that New Westminster, Vancouver, and Victoria were all growing like magic and were in dire need of adequate transportation. Each had a system of street cars which were developing their power through steam engines. The companies, including those in which Barnard had shares, were finding it harder and harder to remain solvent. Barnard also explained that abundant latent power, in the form of electricity, was going to waste in the many (184) mountain streams and lakes in the vicinity of these cities.

Barnard, seeing this, had already with others, formed the Consolidated Railway and Light Company with a working capital of \$1,000,000. Horne-Payne made it his business to fully investigate this company. As a result he recommended to his British principals that the investment was desirable but premature. Horne-Payne rightly reckoned that the railroad would be more of a success once more settlers moved to the Pacific Coast. His British backers at once formed the Railway Amalgamation Syndicate with a paid up capital of 200,00 pounds sterling. The syndicate waited and while they waited they permitted Barnard to join their ranks.

In January, 1895, the Barnard tramway was forced into liquidation by the Bank of British Columbia. The time was now right to buy for

the British financiers. As a result the Consolidated Railway and Light Company, whose principal shareholder was Barnard, was now bought by Barnard, representing the English Railway Amalgamation Company, for a fraction of its value. The British investors and Barnard smiled each time they thought about the purchase. They were not smiling a year later when the Point Ellice Bridge in Victoria collapsed sending one of their much overloaded street cars onto the rock killing over 50 passengers. The disaster pointed to carelessness on the part of the street car company. Immediately the British financiers withdrew their cash from the company leaving Horne-Payne and Barnard on the spot.

The two men managed to get out of their unpleasant situation by proving that the accident was caused by the rotten condition of the bridge timbers and not the overloading of the street car. By this time Horne-Payne was obsessed with making the electric transportation scheme his life's foremost ambition. He returned to England and diligently set to work piecing together the tangled skein of the financial structure now torn to shreds. He managed to form the Consolidated Railway Company, a shorter name than its British Columbia owned predecessor, but with greater capital. Its charter authorized a capital of \$1,500,000 whereas that of the Consolidated Railway and Light Company was for \$1,000,000.

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In London on April 3, 1897, a new company was again formed to be known as the British Columbia Electric Railway Company. Its Board of Directors was practically that of the Consolidated Railway Company which it superseded. Only 12 days later, on April 15, this company assumed control of the entire system in and around New Westminster, Vancouver and Victoria. The company now turned its attention to the development of electric power to replace steam. The first hydro-electric plant on the mainland was the Lake Buntzen plant. It was put into production in December of 1903. The plant was named for Johannes E. E. Buntzen, a Dane, who by this time had taken over as direct manager of the company.

It was not until 1906 that the municipalities on the south side of the Fraser passed a by-law which authorized the British owned company to operate light, heat, power and tramway systems without fear of competition. The company felt that the valley now had enough settlers to justify an extension of their line from New Westminster to Chilliwack.

Barnard's original company had provided a rapid tramline between Vancouver and New Westminster as early as 1891. This line was intended to transport Lower Fraser Valley farm produce from the Royal City to the residents of Vancouver. These farm products would usually arrive at the New Westminster Farmer's Market by the river steamer Ramona. The market was an important distribution center for produce going to Vancouver. The Royal City merchants enjoyed the system since they had the opportunity to play middle man between valley farmers and the Vancouverites. When the Ramona floundered at Gilbert McKay's Landing on April 21, 1909, her place was taken by the Paystreak, built at New Westminster that same year for the Royal City Navigation Company.

Vancouver merchants were not happy with the fact that two-thirds of the farm produce sold at New Westminster was bought by their customers. In an effort to take away some of the Royal City's business the Vancouver City council endorsed a proposal to subsidize a river steamer to make twice weekly runs between Chilliwack and Vancouver.

Although the river steamers provided cheap transportation (186) for freight and passengers their service was far from ideal. They were slow compared to the railroad service. Sometimes the river froze which put them out of commission altogether. The public's dissatisfaction with the steamers told the British Columbia Electric Railway shareholders that the time was ripe for a line through the Fraser Valley.

On August 6, 1907, Rochford Henry Sperling, the General Manager of the Company, turned the first sod which began the work on the first section of the line from New Westminster to Cloverdale. This section took eighteen months to complete.

The first surveys through the Langley district turned pioneer settlers into land speculators. They expected to get top dollar for any of their land used for a right-of-way. The B.C. Electric Railway Company financiers expected this and approached the milk producing farmers that were anxious to have the line pass as closely as possible to their farms. In the end the railway (187) owners worked out deals with these farmers where very little money changed hands with the promise that they would put the line through certain farms and that their trains would stop at any farms showing a flag. Charles Mufford was one Langley farmer that made such a deal. He raised proper hell a few years later when a train failed to stop at this farm which was showing a flag. He telephoned the next station demanding an explanation. As a result the train backed all the way back to his farm and picked him up.



The Inaugural trip of the Paystreak, March 10, 1910.
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The Cloverdale to Abbotsford section of the British Columbia Electric Railway was not completed until the spring of 1910. Widow Eliza Towle, who ran the Commercial Hotel at Fort Langley with her son, decided to build a big house on the Towle property at the northerly portion of the old Hudson's Bay Company Farm. She expected to make a small fortune supplying room and board to the many railway workers. Unfortunately her (188) age was against her and she died before the house was built. Once the line went through, the British Columbia Electric Railway officials chose to call their station, located near the Towle property, Jardine.



The first B.C.E.R. poles through Langley.
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The Jardine Station was named for John Jardine who had bought land near the Towle farm in 1885. His parents-in-law had moved out to Langley five years earlier. The William Stoddard family were originally from Lockerbie, Scotland. They had spent time in St. Paul, Minnesota, before pulling up stakes and coming to British Columbia. Their daughter Jane had married Jardine in Cumberland, England, in 1880. Immediately after their marriage the pair crossed the Atlantic to join the bride's family. As they reached St. Paul her parents and the rest of her family departed (189) for British Columbia. The Jardine couple remained in Minnesota until 1884 when they too decided to come to Canada. Although Jardine had property in Langley he chose to live in Esquimalt on Vancouver Island. The Stoddard family worked his land for a few years and then moved into New Westminster. Their other daughter had by this time married Mrs. Towle's son Stanley.



Eliza Towle (1835-1909)
Ran the Commercial Hotel at Fort Langley with her son George.
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The electric line through the Langley district also gave work to brothers Nathaniel and Henry Coghlan. They cut some 20,000 ties for the British Columbia Electric Railway and were honoured by having the Coghlan Sub Station named after them.

Three sub stations were built along the British Columbia Electric Railway right-of-way between New Westminster and (190) Langley. The Coghlan Sub Station, which still stands, is a high, four storey cement building which seems entirely out of place in the forests of Langley. (It is presently owned by Holt Glass.) These sub stations were built to supply 600 volts of direct current for the trolleys. As the trains passed by these stations they would get their voltage boosted to keep moving. Poles lined both sides of the track which held the wires which connected with the trains. The electric power came from the hydro plant situated at Stave Lake. The line crossed the Fraser River at Mission.



The Coghlan Brothers
Had B.C.E.R. Sub Station named in their honour.
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It was William John Mufford, the school teacher at Langley Prairie, who suggested the name Milner Station in honour of (191) Lord Alfred Milner. He had been reading a biography of the English notable and had been impressed with the man's character. John Walter Berry, or J.W. as he came to be known, reckoned a more appropriate name would be Berry's Station. He even went so far as to erect a sign. J.W. had not been satisfied to run only a general store. He had earlier run for Member of Parliament in the Delta riding against Honest John Oliver. To save on costs Oliver suggested they go



The first British Columbia Electric Railway train through Langley.
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The Coghlan Substation
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John Walter Berry's Belmont Farm
The "farm where the bull milked the cows."
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together in the same horse and buggy to campaign meetings. J.W. went along for the ride until he realized the seasoned Oliver was taking over the meetings. Berry lost this election. In 1904 Berry sold his Murray's Corners General Store to Hugh A. MacDonald and settled on a 135 acre farm north of the Corners and began milking Holstein cattle.

The names for the British Columbia Electric Station of Milner or Berry were voted on by local residents. Mufford's suggestion received the highest number of votes and the Berry sign was taken down. Had Mufford chosen to call the stop Mufford's Station that name would no doubt have stuck as most of the Langley Prairie farmers were Muffords. For years any time a Mufford ran in municipal politics he was elected providing all his relatives turned out and voted.

In 1910 Berry was one of seven men who organized the Fraser Valley Milk Producers Association. This organization was formed to insure that farmers got a fair price for their milk. When Berry put in his first milking machine the original form of energy to drive the units was bull-power. Their 2,000 pound bull walked a tread mill to generate 3-4 horsepower which operated the units to milk the 50 cows. For years Berry's Belmont Farms was known as the "farm where the bull milked the cows."

In order to clear his heavily timbered farm Berry hired 15-20 Hindu labourers for 50¢ a day and all the milk and potatoes they could eat. Using horse, block and tackle, shovels, and stumping powder the Hindu work force soon had the land ready for the plow. Roderick Cumming would often bring as many as 30-40 boxes of stumping powder, at \$5 a box, out from New Westminster via (194) the Old Yale Road, to be used on the Berry farm alone. The Hindu workers would dig under a six-foot diameter Douglas fir stump to its center and place just the right amount of powder. When the right amount of powder was used the blast would lift the stump clear of the ground without any problem. If too much powder was used flying debris would be sent 200 yards and more. John McLellan in Glen Valley once used far too much powder which sent a huge fragment of stump cartwheeling through the air which knocked out a portion of a neighbour's barn. To add insult to injury McLellan fired the blast when the neighbour was in the barn milking.

The British Columbia Electric Railway did much to change the operations of the municipality. Every few miles the line had stations where passengers could board with freight for Chilliwack or New Westminster.

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One of the trains, appropriately called the Milk Train, picked up the farmers' milk cans each morning for delivery to New Westminster dairies. It left Chilliwack each morning at seven and arrived in New Westminster at ten. Another train was called the Owl. It made a midnight run from New Westminster out through the valley after the pubs closed on Saturday nights. The onus was on the train's conductor, who knew his passengers on a first-name basis, to put the inebriated souls off at the right stations. The following morning the Owl would return from Chilliwack, leaving at 6:15, and would pick up milk cans at the many stations.

One person who lost his life with the new modes of transportation was George Moody, son of Moodyville founder Sewell Prescott Moody. He had moved to Milner with his mother following the drowning of his father in 1875. Here he had married Lucy Brousseau, the daughter of Hudson's Bay Company dairyman Basil Brousseau Jr. and began raising a family. Moody had been dropped off by a jitney at Jardine by mistake instead of at his destination at Milner. In an intoxicated condition, he began following the British Columbia Electric tracks in an easterly direction instead of going west towards home. He was on the trestle just east of Jardine when the Owl came through and struck him. He was killed outright.

Shortly after the completion of the British Columbia Electric Railway line George I. Blair, in the capacity of the municipality's police commissioner, received a letter from Vancouver that a large cougar was killing deer in Stanley park. The authors of the correspondence wondered if Blair knew anyone capable of bagging the huge cat which had eluded the city's sharpshooters for weeks. Blair got in touch with Maxie Michaud Jr. who rounded up a posse which included the Shannon boys from Cloverdale and their hunting dogs. The Frenchman told Blair to tell the Vancouverites to stay out of the park on a certain day and to give his posse two hours. The city folk consented to the request. The Michaud posse took the Milk Train into Vancouver. The dogs treed the cat and the men shot it in less than an hour.

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In 1909 Charles E. Hope came back to Langley and bought some 540 acres west of the Langley Fort Village. He had been involved in the real estate boom in Vancouver since marrying Alexander Mavis' daughter. He had also been the Western Representative for the United Grain Growers. At Langley he built a beautiful home, appropriately called 'Illahie', which in Chinook means 'My Home', and began raising registered Aberdeen Angus cattle. It was Hope that planted a row of California redwood, from seed obtained from France, along the south border of his farm. These trees, some 200-300 feet tall, are still standing. Charles Devine, his wife, and children, also moved out to Langley from Vancouver. Newly out from England, Devine worked for Hope.

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The Michaud and Shannon Posse
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The Fort Langley and District Board of Trade came into being in 1910 with D.W. Poppy as its first president. He was followed by Hope. The board members were concerned principally with transportation. They were not entirely satisfied with the services provided by the British Columbia Electric Railway. With its circuitous route the electric train took as long to reach New Westminster and Vancouver as did the steamers. To assist the electric company the board encouraged Clarence Noble to start a jitney service to pick up fares and deliver them to the Jardine Station to be picked up and taken the rest of the way into New Westminster and Vancouver by the train. The jitney's were ordinary passenger automobiles. Noble was not satisfied with working in conjunction with the electric train company. Instead of delivering passengers to their stations he would arrive moments before the train with his car and steal some of (198) the company's passengers. Noble's service had many advantages over the electric railway. Faster than the trains the automobile drivers could charge lower fares since they had no fixed routes, almost no overhead, and were not required to carry insurance. The electric company screamed unfair and attempted to have the provincial government ban the jitney operations. The government refused and the electric company put on buses to compete with the jitneys. Unfortunately for Noble the government passed by-laws which required him to offer a regular service and to carry insurance.



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The board of Trade was also successful in obtaining a larger boat, called the Fort Langley, to replace the Mina Wand. This vessel, gasoline powered, could easily outrun the steamers, and to the dismay of the British Columbia Electric Railway, their trains and buses. Board President Hope played an important part (199) in the planning of the village streets and in stringing power poles from Jardine down to the village. As a result Fort Langley was the first village in the Lower Fraser Valley to have street lights.



Mr. & Mrs.
Charles Edward Hope
Hope, in this photo also accompanied by

Clarence Noble was not the only one to have an automobile in Langley. Apparently R. J. Wark owned the first car in the district. John Maxwell's son William and George Blair were close behind him. Maxwell, on one occasion, became a little excited while driving his new tin Lizzie. Pulling back on the steering wheel while at the same time pressing his foot on the gas pedal he yelled whoa whoa as the car ran into the ditch. Blair had about the same success. He drove his car right through the end wall of his garage.

his father and son,
was an originating
founder of the Fort
Langley and District
Board of Trade.
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John Taylor Jr., the saloon keeper's son, owned one of the first gas powered boats on the river. For years he would pick up the mail at the Canadian Pacific Railway Station at Port Haney and deliver it across the river to the Berry and Coulter Store. His favourite remark to Coulter was "There's water in the gas and the boat won't go, what you going to do about it Coulter?"

The British Columbia Electric Railway bypassed Fort Langley and as a result the riverfront town began to slowly die as more and more fort residents gravitated to the many stations which sprang up along the electric line's right-of-way.

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