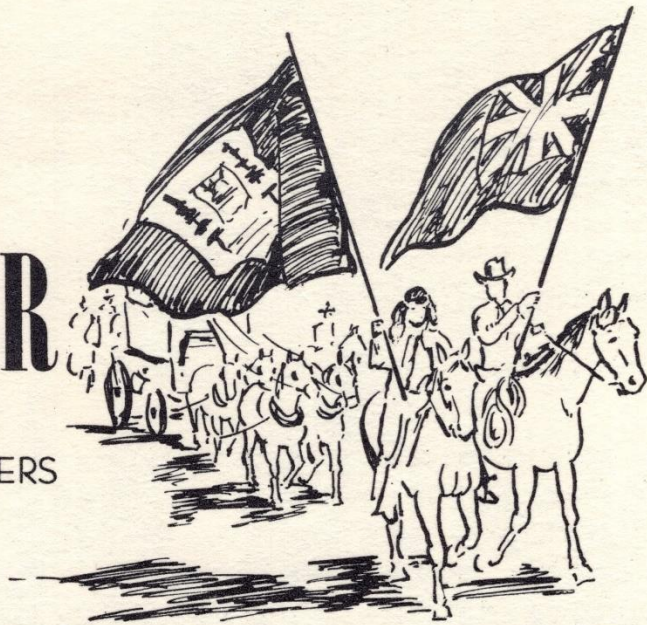


# **HISTORY of FORT FRASER**

Compiled by  
**ALICE BELSHAM and J. PHILIP MYERS**  
Fort Fraser, B.C., April 1958

# HISTORY of FORT FRASER

Compiled by  
ALICE BELSHAM and J. PHILIP MYERS  
Fort Fraser, B.C., April 1958



On April 27, 1958, the boom of guns heralded the opening of British Columbia's Centennial celebrations. Beacon fires burned, flags fluttered in the breeze, dedication services were held, and elaborate parades and ceremonies took place throughout the Province.

## FORT FRASER - 1806

Fort Fraser participated in a way more modest but no less sincere; for we celebrated the centenary of the province and also the 152nd anniversary of the trading post later known as FORT FRASER. It was established in 1806 by the North West Company which was a combination of the North West Fur Trading Company and their rivals, the "XY" Company.

Alexander McKenzie, of the "XY" Company, was the first white man to cross the Rockies and discover the interior of British Columbia, but it was for Simon Fraser to establish it.

## SIMON FRASER

Simon Fraser joined the North West Company in 1792, as a clerk, and rose to partnership in ten years. Following the discovery of McLeod Lake by James McDougall, Fraser set out in June, 1806 to explore the potentialities of land to the west. He first encountered Carrier In-

dians near the confluence of the Stuart and Nechako Rivers. They wore robes of beaver, lynx, and marmot. Early history records that a flourishing Carrier village there was abandoned in 1740, after vicious attacks by the Chilcotin tribes, who slaughtered women and children, spitting and hanging the children on poles like drying salmon. Some Nautley (Fraser Lake) Indians assisted the Chinlac Carriers in later wars of reprisal.

## STUART LAKE

August found Fraser and his party at Stuart Lake with dangerously low food supply. Young John Stuart, with three men, was dispatched to explore further westward, intent on locating salmon and sites for further forts. Stuart's favorable report prompted Fraser to travel down Stuart River, up the Nechako and the Nautley to the lake originally known as Fraser's Matleh Lake, where the friendly natives supplied them with dried salmon.

## ANOTHER HUDSON'S BAY TRADING POST

During construction of buildings at the east end of the lake, Fraser explored, and made friends with Stellakuo and other Indians, returning with Stuart to spend the winter at Stuart Lake.

## QUESNEL RE-OPENS FORT FRASER.

Owing to lack of trade goods the Fort Fraser post was vacated for awhile, but in 1810, M. J. Quesnel, with labourers and goods re-established it and Daniel William Harmon operated the post during winter 1810-11. Harmon, born in Vermont, joined the "Nor'westers", as the Company was then known, in 1800. With a young Indian wife and many children he travelled from Fort Dunvegan to Fort St. John, McLeod and Stuart Lakes and eventually to Fraser's Lake. He reported meeting Indians known as Sekanais around McLeod Lake.

About that time the post at Fraser Lake was destroyed by fire. Harmon rebuilt the post but had no trade goods; and it was October 1814 when J. LaRoque and company in two canoes laden with goods from Fort George re-established it.

## FIRST GARDEN

The first record of a garden planted west of the Rockies is May 10, 1815, when Harmon writes: "We have surrounded a piece of ground with palisades and planted potatoes and sowed onion, carrot, beet and parsnip seed, also a little barley and corn." A later report shows a yield of 2,460 lbs of potatoes and that the turnip and barley yield was good.

## DEATH RITES

Harmon records the cremation of a Carrier Brave and the cruelty to the deceased's wife or wives who were forced to stroke and caress the body as it burned. A few bones, not completely consumed were carried by the bereaved in a leather satchel, from which custom the name "Carrier" is derived.

A notation in 1820 reports a respected old Indian called "Canoe Chief" expressing a dying wish to be buried by the white traders. The wish was gratified, but it was twenty years or more before cremation with its attendant cruelty was abolished.

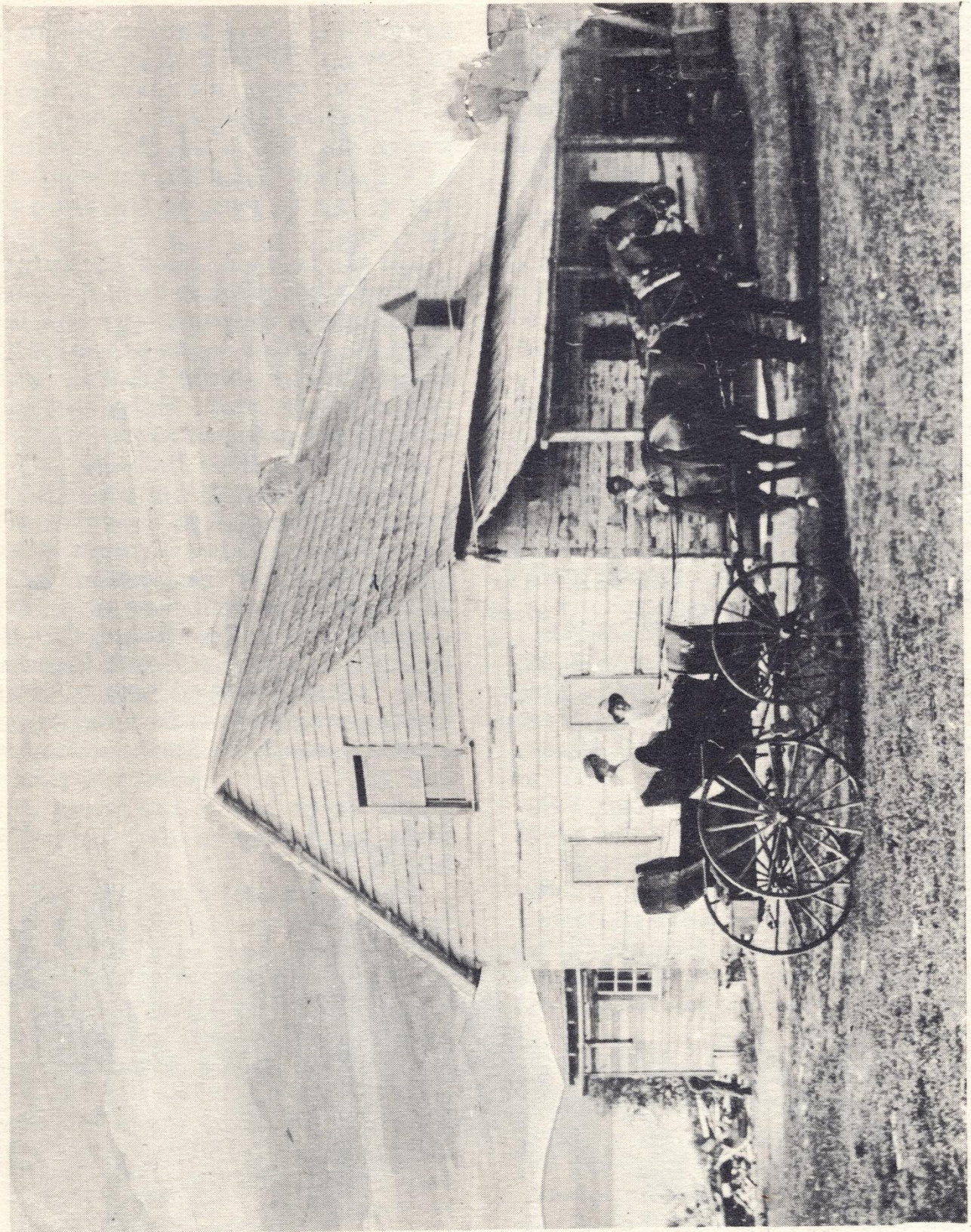
## FUR, FISH AND FIRE-WOOD

In 1821 over 1,000 lbs weight of furs were shipped out. Sturgeon and carp were caught and dried, sturgeon oil obtained, fire wood cut, buildings improved, and 25 good strong sledges made.

The Hudson's Bay Company and the Nor'westers coalesced in March, 1821, but the news was not received in Western New Caledonia until November. Complete union of the two Companies was consummated in 1824.

## A CENTURY AND A HALF IN TWELVE PAGES

This small brochure could not possibly record even an outline of operations at the trading post and the surrounding country, of the hardship, privation and danger of the Company's officials and servants; of the difficulties of transportation, and the inter-tribal Indian Wars. But examination of old records and journals indicate that in 1825 this was the most important post in New Caledonia and that though the local Indians were turbulent amongst



HUDSON'S BAY TRADING POST, erected by Factor Alexander when post was moved to new site in 1879 - 80, just west of Nautley Indian Reserve, on north shore of Fraser Lake. Photo, taken shortly before post was destroyed by fire in 1920, shows Mrs Myers and son Alton in buggy. There are no traces left of the post today, but the land - where the first garden was planted, ~~is now part of the T. E. Gerhardt farm.~~

*is the field at Beaumonts  
railway crossing.*

themselves they were friendly to the whites. At times intensely cold weather was experienced, accompanied by four or more feet of snow, hunting then being impossible and starvation facing both Indians and whites.

Salmon was the staple diet. Some years the salmon fishery was a failure; other years there was abundance and the winter of 1826-27 shows 20,000 salmon in store.

At one time a bastion was built after bloodshed was reported amongst the natives. This seems to have been unnecessary but it was a wise precaution. A census taken in 1844-45 shows a total of 258 Indians around Fraser Lake and 211 at Stuart.

#### PESTILENCE AND FAMINE

Peter Ogden Junior was in charge in September, 1845. The natives were suffering from whooping cough and dearth of salmon. No salmon were procured at Alexandria, Fort George, Fraser Lake or Stuart and the usual ration was reduced one-third. But 1851-52 found salmon plentiful and 44,000 fish were in store. The salmon fishery again failed in 1859-60 and both natives and whites suffered privation and many natives died.

#### THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH

About 1864 conditions were changing throughout New Caledonia. Transportation was improved and provisions imported. The Collins Overland Telegraph was being built to connect Europe with America via Siberia and Bering Strait. In 1886 the 850 miles of line from New Westminster to Skeena was completed, the line running along the north shore of Fraser Lake. A

report by Chief Factor Graham in 1868 notes that during his journey from Stuart to Fraser's Lake he observed that a fire had laid waste the land from the "Coule" to Fraser's Lake; evidence of which can be seen in the bush to this day.

On October 3, 1870, Peter Skene Ogden died at Fort Fraser of influenza and was buried at Fort St. James, near his father, Chief Trader Peter Ogden, who died six days later. Many natives died of the ailment at this time.

#### WIFELY INFLUENCE

Changing conditions are shown by the report of J. M. L. Alexander, Junior Chief Trader, who was in charge of the post in 1873-74. A serious decrease of profit was caused by the Stoney Creek opposition and by wifely influence and: "trade goods were sufficient had it not been for the opposition who have a splendid assortment of dry goods, nicknacks and fancy goods which draws the wives and takes away much of the husband's hunt".

Mr. Alexander also urged that the post be removed across the Lake as "we can't raise any crops here, and to prevent any opposition taking a position nearer to what will be the Indian Reserve". In 1879-80 Mr. Alexander was promoted to head the New Caledonia District and it was then that the post was removed and rebuilt as he had previously recommended.

At this time, A. C. Murray, apprentice clerk, was in charge of the post. Mr. Murray died only recently and is buried at Fort St. James. We are now coming to more recent days. Some supplies were coming in

via Skeena, Babine Lake and Stuart; some by the old boat route to Soda Creek or Quesnel and then overland via the Black - water trail. Opposition was keen and the Company was considering retrenchments; but Fort Fraser post was kept open as it was still producing beaver and other valuable furs. In 1887 Chief George, (ancestor of the present "Georges" of the Nautley Band) was hired as interpreter and cattle keeper.

#### REVEREND A. G. MORICE

That the old order changeth is shown by the recorded building of a school for native children and a Carrier language service being held by Rev. A. G. Morice, O. M. I. in the Church on Christmas Eve, 1899, which was attended by all the Indians.

#### THE KLONDYKE TRAIL

In 1890 railway survey parties were at work, prospective

settlers were coming in, and in August, 1892, Judge O'Reilly and Judge Loring met the Fraser Lake (Nautley) Indians to define the boundaries of the Indian Reserve; and during the next few years miners were passing on their way to the Klondyke and Omineca gold fields.

#### NO SAWMILLS AT TURN OF CENTURY

May 15, 1898, Ferryman Frank Mathias was operating a public ferry and some Indians were running one in opposition. The Nechako ferry, later referred to as "Vital's" may be the previously mentioned or a successor to the Indian opposition; though it is probable that the Indian Ferry consisted of dugout canoes. There were then no sawmills in the country and it is improbable that the Indians whip-sawed lumber when logs for dugouts were readily available.



DRIVING OF THE GOLDEN SPIKE at Fort Fraser, April 7, 1914, to connect up steel on Grand Trunk Pacific (now C. N. R.). The only members of the first survey party for the Grand Trunk in 1890, still alive in 1958, are Charles Olds of Endako and Mr Francois of Fort Fraser.

### FIRST SHERIFF

Coming to more recent years, we find William Sinclair in charge of the post until his death in November, 1899, when first H. E. A. Greenwood and then Ernest S. Peters were in command. Mr. Peters later became the first sheriff of the County of Cariboo and many of his descendants are now prosperous residents of the Province. In 1910, Mr. Peters relinquished the post and moved to farm land on the north shore of Fraser Lake. Mr Greenwood, clerk, then took charge until the arrival of William Bunting in 1910. Mr. Bunting remained in charge until the outfit of 1914-15, when the post was finally closed and Mr. Bunting transferred to Fort St. James.

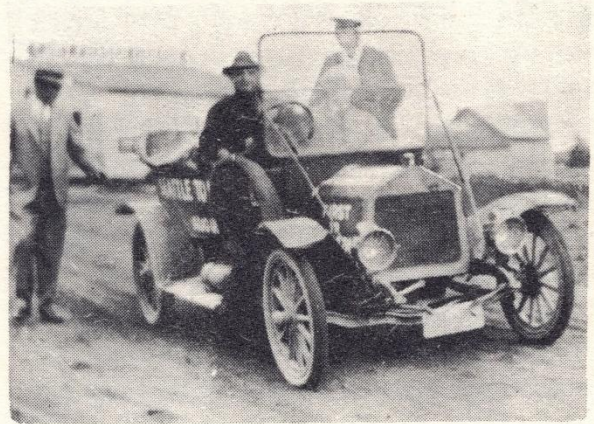
### FIRST AUTOMOBILE

From 1900 onward, rapid changes took place throughout New Caledonia and especially at Fort Fraser. In 1911 an automobile arrived from Seattle but it had to be dismantled here and taken by pack-train to Hazelton. 1912 heralded the first Provincial Election in the Western District. W. Bunting was the returning officer and J. A. Fraser, R. Callahan and J. Holt the candidates. The first sawmill arrived for J. Ruttan; and men arrived to take charge of the new townsite which, as laid out, comprised an area sufficient for a city of ten thousand people.

### FIRST TELEPHONE

October 21, 1912 was a "Red Letter Day" in New Caledonia's history for the first public telephone was opened between Fort Fraser and Fort St. James. Mrs Bunting, Mr Burnett, Mr McAllan, and George Ogston spoke

from Fort Fraser with Mr Murray, Miss Murray, P. B. McLeod and A. Kynoch at Fort St. James. Harry Worthington and his crew strung the line.



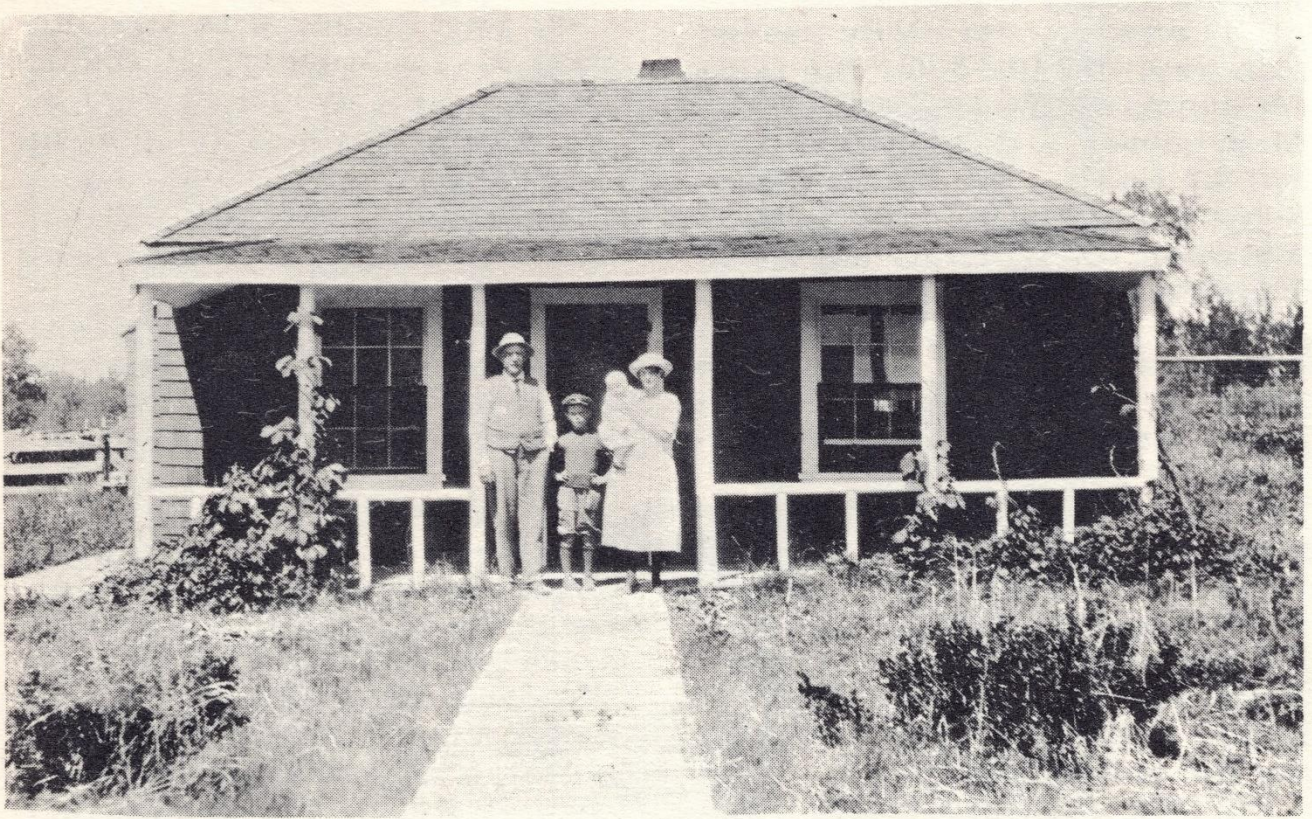
DR TOLMIE in 1929 in first car that travelled road in 1911 - and was packed in to Hazelton was later packed in to Hazelton.

### LAST SPIKE

On April 7, 1914, the last spike of the rails of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was driven just east of Fort Fraser, thus connecting the east coast with the west.

### VITAL'S FERRY

No authentic record is found as to the type of ferry operated by Frank Mathias in 1899; but in 1906 there are records and photographs of the cable ferry used by Vital LaFore, an ingenious French Canadian, who appears to have been prospector and miner arriving with the wave of miners following the Cariboo gold rush and later moving towards the Klondyke and Omineca. Vital's ferry was a single scow of cable-currentboard type, about 12 by 20 feet. Vital had a dislike for water for personal cleanliness despite his mastery of the swift river currents. During the oper-



INDIAN AGENT'S RESIDENCE. Original log house, constructed for the late Mr McAllan. Located on old Highway 16. Taken in the early 30's, photo shows Mr ~~and Mrs Chas. Edkins, now of Quesnel.~~

*McAllan and Mrs Myers.*



FIRST PUBLIC WORKS ROAD CREW FROM FORT FRASER - 1911



ation of Vital's ferry, many large droves of beef cattle passed this way, destined for the mining camps opening up to the west. Men, horses, and gear were ferried across, the cattle swam. Some were drowned. A Mr Larson would immediately buy these from the herd boss, butcher them and sell the meat. Cataline, the famous Spaniard, passed with his pack-train several times. He spoke little English but was understood by many Indians and Chinese. Never known to cut his hair, he would, before drinking liquor, pour a little into the palm of his hand and rub it in his scalp. He was also known to buy a new white shirt before leaving Ashcroft, wearing it day and night for the entire journey.

In 1911, the ferry was taken over by Fred Clarke, who had been Vital's helper, and in the fall of 1918, Clarke left in order to develop some land he had acquired. For many years the ferry, relocated upstream, was operated by John Kemp.

#### KENNEY DAM

In 1952 the newly-constructed Kenney Dam diverted the waters of the mighty Nechako River; and the erection of a new bridge ended the ferry's usefulness. It is noted that the original scow ferry was replaced by a two-pontoon one and finally a two-pontoon of steel construction. Vital has undoubtedly been called to his fathers, but Clarke and Kemp are still in the land they helped establish.

The early surveyors and construction crews were soon followed by traders and businessmen and others less reputable; and the speculators came as well as the genuine land-seekers.

#### NEW TOWNSITE

In 1914, the new townsite of Fort Fraser, now located three miles east of the original Trading Post, was a busy spot, with stores, poolroom, livery barn, Government and Indian offices, and other businesses, legitimate and otherwise.

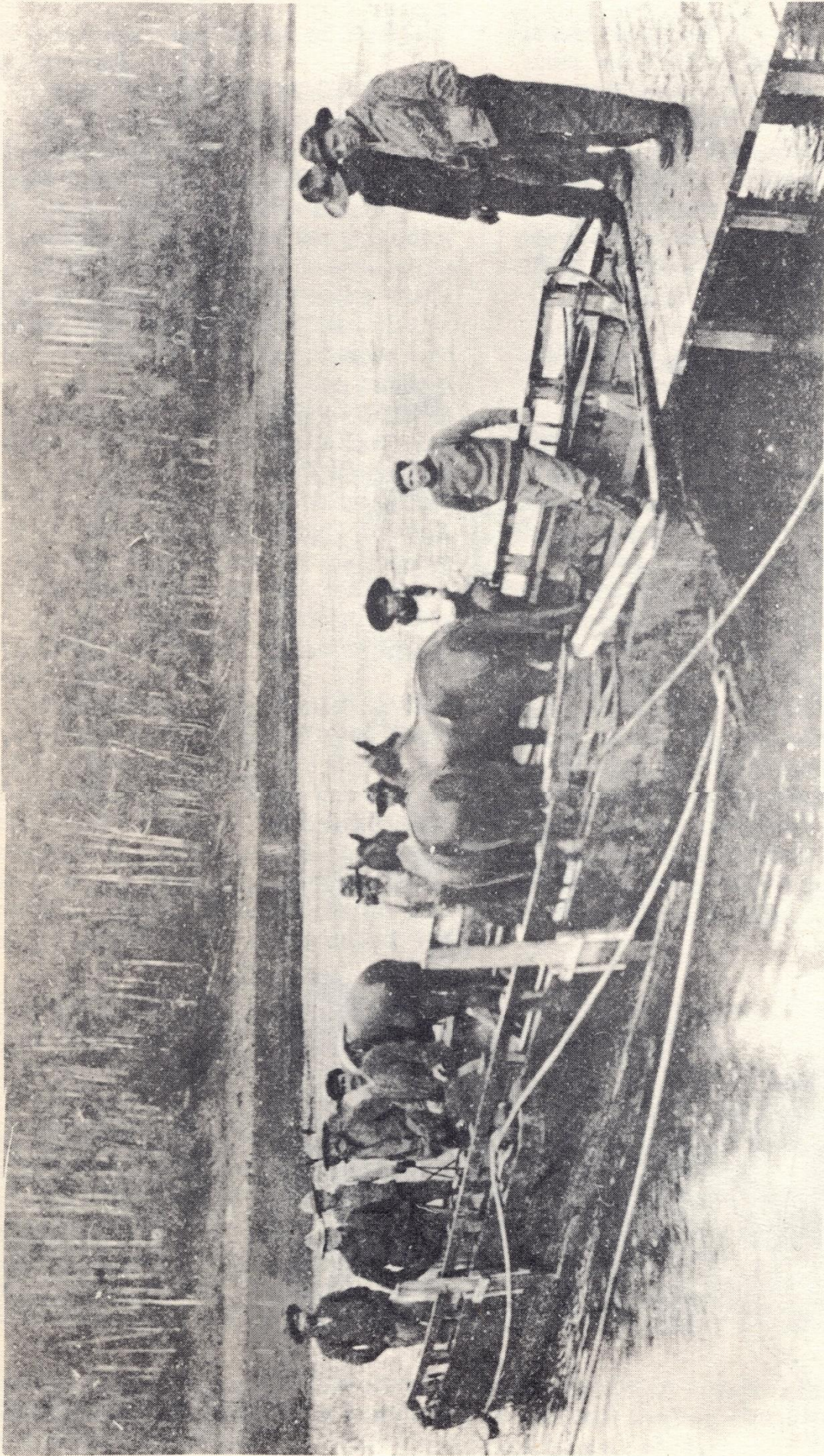
Much of the activity was centered south of the railway track, where one can still find traces of old building foundations and cellars.

#### SHOO-FLY FILL

The present high-fill railway grade was originally a great trestle extending from the present stock-yard to the steel bridge. The earth for the fill was hauled by "dinkies," (small steam engines). The remains of the shoo-fly built by Joe Heron and other stationmen, with the aid of pick, shovel and wheelbarrow is a tribute to old days and old ways; as is also the clearing, 2 1/2 miles east along the Blackwater Road where most of the fresh vegetables used by the construction crews were grown. And many of the chimneys now in use are momentos of the past; for the brick was moulded and baked from local clay.

#### FIRST WORLD WAR

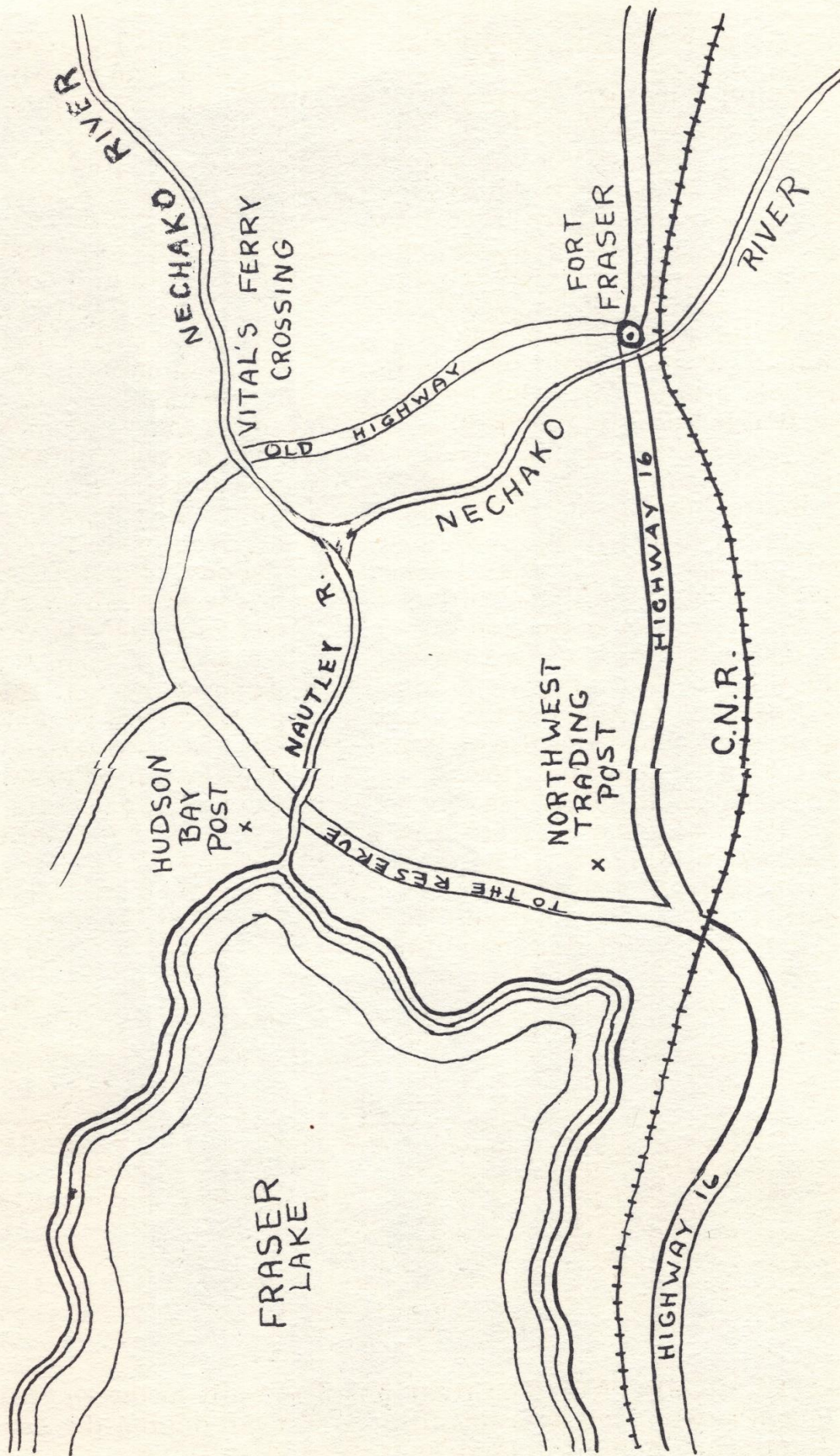
The declaration of war in 1914 brought signs of returning life. Servicemen were coming home; a back-to-the-land movement commenced; land seekers came pouring in. Housing was at a premium; business revived. The Farmers' Institute and other organizations were re-established. In 1921 the Community Hall was built under energetic leadership from within the ranks of the newly formed "Our Club," which was later incorporated into the



VITAL'S FERRY at the confluence of the Nechako and Nautley rivers. Ferryman Vital (now deceased) and his assistant, Fred Clarke, who took over from him in 1911, are both in the picture, although not identified. Mr Clarke was still alive when this book was published in 1958.

FORT FRASER  
and DISTRICT

NAUTLEY INDIAN  
RESERVE



Womens' Institutes of British Columbia.

#### FORT FRASER TODAY

And so we come to present-day Fort Fraser. As one enters from the east, on Highway No. 16, the Nechako River lies to the south and located on its bank is the planing mill erected by Mark Conelley of Fraser Lake Sawmills in 1942 and since expanded by its present owners to include a stud mill. One passes the original Public Works office, later used as a school and now as a Scout Hall. The Provincial Police office and jail were housed in the next building, though only one prisoner was lodged there; today it is the residence of John Kemp, a Hudson's Bay freighter and one of the original old-timers.

Adjacent is the building that formerly housed the Royal Bank of Canada and later the B.C. Forest Branch. This service is now moved to the original Government building which has stood at its present site since construction days. The Anglican Church was constructed under the

leadership of Reverend Sweetman who was the first Protestant minister to this part of the Cariboo, holding his first service in the Hudson's Bay residence in 1911. Administering to all, he travelled his far-flung parish by horse and buggy almost until his death in 1933.

#### OLD LANDMARK

There remain but few of the old buildings of historic interest. The log residence of the late W. J. McAllan, Indian Agent, still stands at the North-west corner of the settlement; but most of the old buildings have been razed or destroyed by fire.

Today, the town has become concentrated into an area of a few blocks as was made evident when I. D. Bunting & Son (widow and son of the last Hudson's Bay post manager) recently moved their store to the new highway.

Whilst Fort Fraser had not developed into the city planned in 1911, it has retained its identity as a happy and thriving community and a land-mark in the history of Western Canada.



**HOTEL-HOSPITAL:**-The first hospital built in the Nechako Valley. Though never used as a hospital, it served during the early 20's as a temporary home for land-seekers and settlers.

