

Fred Borden

Interview by Mary Jackson, 23 January 1988

Words in bold print are by interviewer

Tape #1 Side 1

I'm Fred Borden. I was born in Saanich in July 1898, ninety years this coming June. I've seen some changes around these parts. My parents came here from the Maritimes. My mother came out in 1875 when she was 7 years old. There were no rail roads in Canada at that time so she came out to San Francisco by boat to Victoria and up the Cariboo highway by stage to Clinton. The reason they came out at that time, her stepmother was a sister of Steve Tingley, and Tingley and Barnes were running the B.C. X Stage Coach up the Cariboo highway and he was a cabinet maker and wheelwright and came out to work on the stages with his brother-in-law in Clinton. I'm not sure how long they were there, later they moved to Seattle and she was a member of the first graduating class from the Seattle High School in 1886. They moved to Victoria in 1887. She was studying for a teacher and she had to take a year in high school here to pick up Canadian and English history because she hadn't had it in Seattle. She taught school at the old Cadboro Bay School, that was her first school, which was on part of what is now the Uplands Golf Course. Later she went up to Lytton, taught there for 4 years before she came back to Victoria.

My father came out from Nova Scotia in the early 1880s. He and his brother came out to work in the building trade for a number of years, one of the buildings they worked on was the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Douglas and Broughton Street. There was an epidemic of smallpox in Victoria about that time and building trade went flat, there was nothing much to do so he and his brother went down to Salt Lake City. One of the things they worked on down there was the Mormon Tabernacle – some of the alterations they were making then. His brother stayed down there. He actually married the daughter of the contractor they were working for. Dad came back to Victoria in the early 1890s, and worked here. He and my mother were married in February of 1895. Just at that time he rented the Hudson's Bay North Dairy Farm, which at that time was about 450 acres. That was [bounded?] east by Blenkinsop Road, north Nicholson Street. Going on the west of Quadra Street, and the south boundary was just south of Rock Street in through there. Some parts of it had been sold and they subdivided half of it from Cumberland Street west in 1901 and they were selling it off from then on.

The original lease was in 1895 for four years and after that it was just from year to year and the agreement was that any property, parcel that was sold, he would be paid for any crop he had on it and he would be able to remove any fences he had put on, that sort of thing. Otherwise they would agree to the sale. At that time they

bought 13 acres at what is now the corner of Reynolds and Quadra Street where the home and the farm buildings were.

We had livestock, cattle, horses. At that time, all the deliveries and everything in the city were horses, and quite often you'd have a number of horses got sore feet or went off their feet and we would turn them out to pasture two or three months to get them back in shape again. [We always had a good supply of horses at that time.]

Was there a local vet? Did you have to do your own farrier work?

No usually they belonged to either a livery stable or livery--, and they had their veterinarians in town.

So would the farrier come out to see the horses?

He would come out to see that they were in shape. Take the shoes off and turn them out to pasture. Get them back in shape again.

What kind of horses did you raise?

Oh there were different kinds. The heavy [draft] horses were usually Clydesdales more than anything else. Then there was the horses from the livery stable, this would be a lighter breed [...].

There was quite a lot of rough pasture on the farm. I remember there seemed to be miles of split rail snake fences dividing the pastures from the grain fields [...]. In my time they were getting pretty fragile, seemed to be repairing all the time. We would replace them with the wire fences. For years, we had a stack of these rails in the yard – that was the spare time job for the Chinese help. With the bucksaw, cutting it up into firewood for the kitchen range and the air tight heater which was our heating for the house at the time. [...]

Did you hire the Chinese on a seasonal basis?

We usually had one or two pretty well full time. They had a cottage on the farm and looked after themselves as far as food was concerned and that sort of thing. For harvest season and sometimes fruit picking we had extra help.

What was it like growing up on the farm? What are some of your earlier memories?

Oh we went to Cedar Hill School, my older brother and I and my sister. It was the closest school at that time. Later they opened the North Dairy School on Quadra Street. My younger brother went to that, I went to the one [...] high school. There was only a high school in the city at that time and I had to walk down to the

Cloverdale car, transfer at Fort Street to the high school. Later on I had a bicycle and went that way.

There weren't too many neighbours at that time, there were some, and there was always the chores to do around the farm, kept us pretty busy.

Did your mother do much in the way of farm work? Did she work in the dairy?

No, she didn't do much at all in that way. The family kept her pretty busy.

She used to do quite a bit of sewing and that sort of thing. Matter of fact sometimes she'd have one of the Chinese in to do the housework, like laundry and stuff like that.

One of your neighbours was a very fine photographer, wasn't he?

Yes, oh around 1906 or 7 the Minister of the Department of Agriculture started boosting this area as a fruit growing area. R.M. Palmer was the Deputy Minister of Agriculture at the time and he had quite an orchard, up around what is now Palmer Road, Union Road. My dad planted about 10 acres of orchard and this Mr. Fleming, he was a professional photographer in the city, bought the property across Reynolds Street and planted quite a considerable orchard there at the time. And the orchard was coming along, he took some really good photographs of the trees [...].

Why did the fruit business go into decline? You don't see nearly as many orchards around here nowadays. Why is that?

Well when the orchards were first planted and the trees were young and the quality of the fruit was good, and at that time we had access to the prairie market, a lot of the fruit was shipped to the prairies. There was a packing house established just up on Rock Street, and we would take the fruit in there in field boxes, and it was wrapped and packed and graded and shipped to the prairies in car load lots.

We had some small fruits when the trees were young, but in that particular area, the trees were subject to frost and it wasn't too good for the small fruits. Then later about 1910 to 12 there was a fair boom in real estate in Victoria and quite a number of the orchards were subdivided and sold off for building lots. Then the war came along. There wasn't much sold after that for quite a time and what was left of these orchards, just went wild and became a breeding ground for every pest and disease there was, and it was almost impossible to produce and market the fruit. Carrying on through time, there was a cannery opened up in what was the old pumping station, they operated for a number of years and that was a market for

the lower grade fruit, apples particularly, they would take any quantity of them for the pectin in the jam business.

Was the pumping station where the Keg is now?

Yes, the Keg restaurant on Quadra Street.

That was the pumping station.

The city water works. Elk Lake was the water supply for the city and as the city grew they needed more, so they put a booster pump in their steam pump to boost the supply. That operated from about 1901 until 1912 when the Sooke water works came in, and they discontinued taking water from Elk Lake. Actually the supply was getting short in the summer, and the level of the lake would go down considerably and the water at times would be quite muddy and murky.

Were you on well water here?

Originally there was a stream about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the house and the first water supply was 2 – 40 gallon barrels on the stonebolt which we took over to the stream, filled up.

What is a stonebolt? I've heard this referred to in other interviews and I'm not sure what it is.

Well, it is like a sled, actually. There's two runners, usually very substantial timbers 6 or 8 inches wide with planks across them, and they were called a stonebolt, because they were used for picking stones off the field. When you ploughed, you turned up stones, and [...] picked them off. It was much easier just throwing them on the stonebolt, particularly large ones, than throwing them up into a wagon. It was one of the implements of a farm in those days, was the stonebolt.

And that's how it came to be called a stonebolt but it was used for bringing water.

Well, anything you wanted to move around, that was too heavy to lift up onto a wagon, you rolled onto the stonebolt if you could [...].

Quite a big thing, then.

Oh ya. It was probably 4 feet wide – 6 feet long. Something like that. Or bigger.

Where did you market your milk?

The milk at that time went to the, well we separated the milk and sent the cream to the creamery.

And where was that?

It was on Douglas Street just about where the Town & Country shopping centre is now, the Victoria Creamery, and the skim milk was fed to, usually given to the hogs at that time. Some of the farmers further out in Saanich would bring their cream in, come in with a big tank wagon and load up with skim milk for the pigs.

You had quite a crop of vegetables too didn't you.

In the early days we didn't go into vegetables, mostly farmed in grain crops, some grain sold and some ground [...]. Later on when we had the dairy farm again, we grew mangles and carrots down on the property on Blenkinsop on the low land there, where the Big Barn Market is now.

You grew mangoes?

It was an ideal soil for root crops. Mangles and carrots.

Mangoes have always struck me as being something of an exotic fruit, so I wouldn't have expected it to have been grown here.

It's not mangoes, it's mangles.

What is a mangle?

Well, it is like a great big beet, red like a beet. It's a root crop and it grows in the soil, some of them on that swamp, soil well fertilized, it could get as big as 20 pounds or more.

That's pretty peaty soil.

It was ideal for growing that type of crop. We grew 35 tons a year [...].

Any problem with pests?

No, at that time nothing seemed to bother the carrots. There was no carrot fly or anything like that.

Did you fertilize at all?

Yes, the farm manure went back in the soil of course, that was one stipulation of the lease, the Hudson's Bay lease. Any manure on the farm was to stay on the farm, couldn't sell it. And we used some chemical fertilizers as well. That swamp soil needed very little nitrates [...] phosphates. And the grain crops, we used to grow considerable crops too, soil was well fertilized.

Was that marketed locally, the grain crops?

Yes, later on we went back into the dairy, we had the silos for grain feed for the cattle and a lot of the grain went into that [...].

Did you ever used to go to the market in town? I understand there was a market that used to be held twice a week, and farmers used to take their produce there.

Yes, there was a market, north of the city hall, the farmers market. We never had a stall in the market, although we sold considerable fruit at different times to people that sold at the stalls there.

You did take over a milk route at one time?

Yes, during the Depression we had been selling the milk to a man who had a retail route in the city. He came to the farm and picked up the can, took it home and bottled it and [delivered it] on his route in the city, and he got pneumonia and died one winter, and his wife tried to keep the route on, but she couldn't, so it was a matter of finding a market for the milk, and at the time the wholesale price of milk turned out to be 9 cents a gallon which was hopeless [...] for even breaking even on it, so I took over the route that he had and retailed it for a time.

I can remember when I was growing up in Scotland we used to have different types of milk. We used to have what we called TT, tuberculin tested milk, we used to have pasteurized milk. Did you have any grades of milk?

Yes, there was grade A, grade A preferred, to get into the preferred class you had to have a bacteria count below a certain number on 6 consecutive tests. The milk inspector in the city would just pick up a pint of milk off your wagon at any time at all and test it. There were I believe 8 retailers that were in the preferred class at the time I was in it, and I was one of them. At that time, the wholesale price being so low, anyone producing milk anywhere near the city the only thing they could do was retail it, and there were 142 separate retail milk prices in the city of Victoria. [...] I retailed it for a while, and later I sold the route to Shepherds Dairy, and he agreed to take it on [...].

Did you ever have a really bad harvest?

No, not what you'd call a total loss. Except we lost a crop one year by fire.

How did that happen?

There was an old barn on the corner of what is now Reynolds and Quadra, just a big old barn about 100 feet by 60 feet and we used to haul the grain off the field,

we didn't thrash it in the field at that time, it was all bound [...]. It had all been stacked, and the thresher came round certain times and threshed it all. It had all been stacked at one end of the barn there. The machine had been in threshing for a day, day and a half. The men went down across to the house for dinner, we used to feed the threshing crew at the time, and the engineer who ran the steam engine was doing some work on his engine and he saw this smoke coming up the back of a strawstack and blew his whistle and by the time the men got across from the house, the whole thing was ablaze.

The entire barn.

Barn, threshing machine.

Did you have insurance to cover that?

The barn was insured, but for some reason that year, the agent had slipped up on insuring the crop, so we didn't have any insurance on the crop. We had been going on for years, the barn was insured for just a small amount because it was an old building, while the crop was in for 3 months in the fall, the insurance used to cover it. At that particular year, somehow there was a slip up.

It would have to happen that year.

Ya.

Dreadful. What about the winter? Did you have a really bad winter at home?

Oh, we had a bad snow in 1916. It had been snowing off and on for several weeks. I had rigged up a snow plough of a sort, and we used to go out every morning with the horses and plough a path down to the barn and go over to two or three of the neighbours to keep a path open. Then there was one particular night there was about 18 inches fell with a high wind and drifts in places 8 to 10 feet high, stalled everything. So when I got up that morning and looked around, I thought 'well, it is everybody for themselves this morning' but eventually they did get a pass open. There was a drift between the house and the woodshed about 10 or 12 feet high I guess because we just burrowed a tunnel through it to get to the woodshed. The stock was pretty well all in the barn at that time, no problem there. As a matter of fact the roads opened up quicker in Saanich than they did in the city, the city had nothing in the way of snow removal equipment at all, but out here all the farmers had horses and they would get together with a couple of teams [...] and clear the roads out.

The buses didn't run at all. We rigged up a sleigh, put a couple of planks and made runners and put a box on it, and hitched it to the old mare and went. My sister was going to high school at the time, so she and her pal that was going to high school and a couple of girls next door that worked in the town and we ran

them into town for a couple of weeks with the horse and sleigh. Until the buses started running again.

They must have thought that that was great fun.

Tape #1 Side 2

My father was on the Saanich Council in 1915-16 and he was Reeve in 17 and 18. In 1914, there was quite a big road contract for paving Quadra Street and Saanich Road and Victoria right to Sidney. I believe it was a \$450,000 contract which was a lot of money in those days. And there seemed to be an impression that there was something not right in the way this thing was being handled. Some members of the Council weren't satisfied and then they approached my dad and several others to run to get on the Council and get this thing straightened out.

It seemed as though there was some collusion going on between the engineer and one particular paving company for them to get the contract. Their idea was that the specifications for the paving had been padded so that the estimates would come in high, and this company was made to understand that if they got the contract they wouldn't have to live up to the specifications, some such deal as that. Anyway my dad and George McGregor ran for Reeve and my dad for Council and Mr. Williams. There seemed to be a little difficulty with the staff at the time. George McGregor running for Reeve, all they would give him was one copy of the voters list at the time and he wanted more to cover the whole area, so he brought out a typewriter from his office and I had just got through a commercial course in high school, so I typed up several copies of the voters list for him for the election. And he was elected and my dad was elected and Sidney Williams, and they pretty well got the balance of power on the Council and got this thing straightened out by getting a new engineer.

So later on about 1926, there was a portion of the municipality, the farming areas, were trying to secede because they were getting too heavily taxed, for the benefit of the inside wards which were building up population-wise and requiring schools and roads and sidewalks and lights and all the rest of it. And the tax at that time was on land alone, no tax on the buildings or improvements, so the taxes were running from \$10 to \$20 for a house and lot no matter how valuable the house was, and the burden was getting so heavy on the land that these people wanted to get out, so there was a plebiscite as to whether to tax improvements or not. The balance of the voting power of course being with the people who had residential property, [...] about 4 to 1. The municipality at the time was divided into 7 wards. Three of the wards were definitely farming wards and wanted to tax improvements, 3 of the wards were more or less urban and were against it, and the ward that we lived in was ward 1 which was partly farming and partly residential. And they approached me at the time to run for the Council, which I did and I got in by a small margin, even although they pretty well had an idea that I was in favour of

taxing improvements but still, I got in by a small margin and that was the main question before the Council at that time.

But before we even got to setting the tax rate, quite a number of the farmers got together and got legal advice, and they stumbled on the fact that the assessment rolls had not been prepared according to the Municipal Act, for the reason that the Municipal Act considered, as far as the rural Municipality was concerned, considered improvements to the land like clearing, draining, cultivating, seeding, as an improvement and the roll had been prepared assessing improved land anywhere from \$50 to \$100 an acre higher than unimproved land so they had been taxing the improvements as land value and the Municipal Solicitor apparently backed them up on that and said that there was a very good chance of having the whole thing thrown out. Not only that, but the previous rolls back to 1914. So we got together on it and eventually agreed that if the new roll was made out according to the Municipal Act, classing improvements, the land as improvements, taxing improvements separately which would include the buildings, that they wouldn't proceed with the legal action at the time.

So we had many discussions of it in the Council and finally agreed to ask the Provincial Government to pass an Enabling Act, which was called the Saanich Relief Act, to validate all our previous assessment rolls, validate the 1927 one to bring it into line with the Act, and give the Council the right, which they had, to tax improvements. And that was done. The Provincial Government passed the act which was called the Saanich Relief Act. And it was an extra 3 months preparing the second roll. So that was done. And when it came to setting the tax rate, taxing improvements, that was still up to the Council. And the 3 farming wards were definitely for taxing improvements, the 3 city wards were against it, and I was the one in the middle which had more or less the say, so I voted for the taxing improvements and the Reeve at the time who was opposing it, who would normally vote to break a tie, he voted to make a tie and tied the vote so the vote was lost. As far as taxing improvements was concerned, [Kurt?] brought in the tax by-law on the basis of what it was before and land loan, so we tied that vote up 4 to 4 and they couldn't get the tax by-law through. So we just sat tight until the deadlines came up and we had to do something, and one of the councillors from ward 7 said we have to have money so he'd vote for taxing improvements. And that's how taxing improvements started in Saanich. That was in 1927.

What were some of the other major concerns that were brought up while you were a Council member?

Another problem at the time was bus transportation. They'd been pressuring BC Electric to run a street car along Quadra Street for many years but they'd never done it. Then a couple of young chaps, Ernie Burgess and McDowell started a bus line. The first bus was a body built in Victoria on a Kelly-Douglas truck chassis. Solid tires, chain drive. And they ran that bus out to Lakehill to the corner of Reynolds and Quadra.

Was it dependable?

Oh yes.

Never broke down?

Very seldom. It seemed to go. They fixed it up at night I guess and keep it going. I don't remember it ever breaking down. Later they had another bus as well and in some of the not too busy hours they would just run a big passenger car. That went on for some time, and there was one running out to the Gorge and one running out to Gordon Head. But later on they had a problem with what they called Jitney's. At the time everybody with an old Model T would get in there and run just ahead of the bus schedule and pick up the passengers in the busy hours and take the cream of it, [...] which was very unfair competition. Because it was taking the cream of it, the business. So they tried to license these Jitney's and make it so that if they were going to run they had to submit a schedule, take out a license, and adhere to the schedule but it seemed almost impossible to enforce it because they'd run sometimes and they wouldn't run sometimes and unless they had somebody checking them all the time you couldn't check it. And it wasn't very satisfactory, and the bus service was just deteriorating all the time. Finally there was quite a move to get the Municipality to run the bus service out to Lakehill, and eventually they did.

1927 I think was the first year they ran it. They bought 1 bus, a complete bus from the Dodge motor people and they built 2 others here in town, one on a General Motors chassis and one on a white truck chassis, and ran those. And in that way they wouldn't issue any other licenses for that run. Don't remember just how long that service was run but to start it up they thought that the area that was going to be benefitted by it should actually guarantee the cost of operation in case it didn't pay for itself. But right from the start it paid, and I think the first year they had a \$2,000 profit. But they were having trouble with other lines as well, and eventually Sam Matson who owned the Colonist proposed to form the Vancouver Island Coach Lines and take over all the transportation for the Municipality. And to do that, he wanted the Lakehill run as well so that he could coordinate the whole thing. So the Municipality agreed to sell it out to him, and there was a certain area that guaranteed the operation and thought that they should get the benefit but they got sold out and the money from that was used to establish the playing field on Reynolds Street where the tennis courts and bowling green and playing fields are, and it paid for the park at the top of Rock Street.

Nice park. How much was gasoline in those days?

I'm not sure.

I was just wondering about the Jitneys. They must have had to charge a fair bit to cover the costs. Do you remember what they charged to take people on these short runs?

I believe the bus fare at that time was 25 cents. [I suppose it depended on how many people you could get into a Model T Ford.]

That's how they made it pay.

There was quite a battle over the Jitneys. I'm not sure what the gas was at that time. I know when I was in the business they were selling for far less a gallon than we are paying for a litre now.