

Every Street Tells a Story: Naming Langley City's Roads

Fraser Highway, Langley Prairie, showing the Langley Prairie General Store and the Timms' Theatre.
Credit: salishan Place by the River



Langley City's street network - with roads that cross the prevailing grid at seemingly irrational angles - can confound both visitors and residents alike. We travel them every day, but thanks to GPS, we may not pay attention to their names or know how those names came to be. The naming of Langley's roads is rooted deep in the community's history, and like the roads themselves, that history is full of twists and turns of its own.

Langley's first road predates the community itself. In 1824, Hudson's Bay Company explorer James McMillan reported trekking northeast from the Nicomekl River via an ancient indigenous trail. The condition of the trail was "so soft and miry" that it took his expedition a full day to reach the Salmon River.

The old indigenous trail proved highly useful to the Hudson's Bay Company, connecting its post in Fort Langley with its farm on Langley Prairie, a vast expanse of fertile land extending from the Salmon River to today's City of Langley. In 1874 the trail was graded, widened and extended to connect with the province's New Westminster to Yale Wagon Road (today's Fraser Highway).

The Yale Road, as it was later known, had originally been a winding, makeshift path passable only on foot or on horseback. The province's investment made it a year-round artery capable - when road conditions were favourable - of accommodating horse-drawn vehicles, and later, automobiles. In its first few

decades, however, parts of the unpaved road could present major challenges to travellers, including one who noted in 1891 that a section east of Innes Corners was "so abominable... that justice to its woebegone condition cannot easily be given."

Increased tax revenue resulting from population growth, provincial grants, and residents performing "statute labour" in lieu of paying property taxes eventually led to improvements to the road system throughout Langley. **But it was not until 1911 that one Vancouver land promotor was able boast that the Yale Road was "always in the best of condition" and that the round trip from Vancouver to Langley Prairie took "less than five hours."**

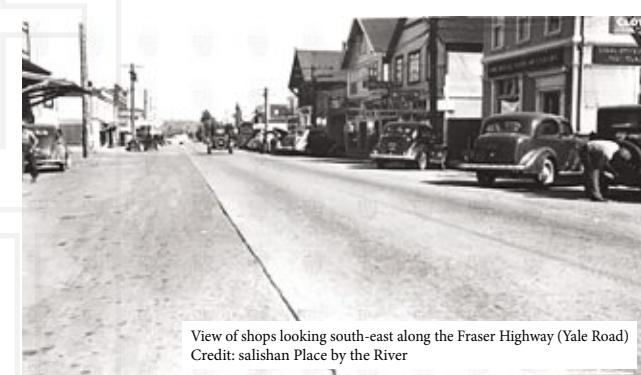
As Langley Prairie grew, additional roads were required to enable settlers to reach their farms and businesses. These inevitably took the names of those who lived along them. Today's 200th Street was initially known as Griffith Road and subsequently as Hunter Road. Other roads named for early farm settlers included Michaud Crescent, Logan Avenue, Bryden Crescent, Mableson Road (today's 201st Street south of Michaud Crescent); Blacklock Lane (today's 207th Street north off Douglas Crescent); and Rinn Road (part of today's 208th Street).

After the First World War, several streets in Langley Prairie were renamed to honour fallen soldiers Jack Carvolth (200th Street), Ed and Bill Berry (208th Street), John Topping (204th Street), Fred Roberts (56th Avenue), Mathurin Gueho (203rd Street), and Frank Glover. Of these, only the name Glover survives to the present, the other names having disappeared when Langley replaced street names with numbers in the 1940s.

Other street names in the City date back to the mid-1900s, Salt Lane deriving its name from its paving process, McBurney Lane honouring a local physician, Grade Crescent being built on the bed of a now-defunct railway, while the names

Industrial Avenue and Production Way reflect the City's diversified economy. Although it may seem improbable today, the Yale Road grew to become part of the Trans-Canada Highway, assuming the name Fraser Highway after the completion of the four-lane Highway 1 in 1962.

- Warren Sommer



View of shops looking south-east along the Fraser Highway (Yale Road)
Credit: salishan Place by the River



Zotique Michaud (left) and Harold Robinson (right) pulling a scraper
Credit: salishan Place by the River



Zotique Michaud (right) and Harold Robinson (left) ploughing a new road in Langley. c. 1935
Credit: salishan Place by the River