

Langley City's 70th Anniversary Series

"Farming on Langley Prairie"



Chinese, Punjabi, and European workers harvesting hay on the Robert J. Work farm, 1910
Credit: salishan Place by the River

Not long before the Fraser Highway, Douglas Crescent, and the Langley Bypass became the commercial core of the Langleys, today's City of Langley was a rural district largely covered by farms. The area's agricultural potential was first observed during the Hudson Bay Company's exploration of the area in 1824. Led by James McMillan, the company's representatives had travelled north from the Columbia River to survey the lower reaches of the Fraser River to determine a site for a new Pacific depot. Writing in the expedition's journal, clerk John Work was impressed by what he saw: *"The soil here appears to be very rich. [It] is a black mould. The remains of a luxurious crop of fern and grass lies on the ground."*

MacMillan returned to the Lower Fraser in 1827 to establish the envisioned fort. The new post would eventually supply agricultural produce to the company's Pacific posts as well as markets overseas. By the 1870s, Fort Langley's farming operations extended from what is now Trinity Western

University to today's Mufford Crescent, and perhaps beyond. The farm's production was diverse, and included beef, pork, oats, barley, potatoes, peas, and corn. Given the volume of work to be done on its farm, its workforce likely included not only Company employees and their indigenous wives, but additional indigenous labour as well.

It was not to last. The discovery of gold in the Fraser Canyon in 1858 unleashed a chain of events that greatly diminished the Company's activity and power on the mainland. The ensuing gold rush lured thousands of miners to the British Columbian mainland, resulting in the area being declared a British crown colony. The fort soon faced competition.

The colony's new government quickly opened First Nations traditional territories to European settlement. Land grants of 160 acres were relatively easy to acquire, and within a few years, the entirety of the future City of Langley had been claimed by intending settlers or land speculators. Operating farms eventually appeared, providing their owners with their basic needs.

The construction of the Yale Road in the 1870s and the B.C. Electric Railway line in 1910, however, encouraged the development of successful dairy farms owned by families such as the Michauds, Warks, and Logans. By the early 1900s a Vancouver land promotor was able to proclaim,

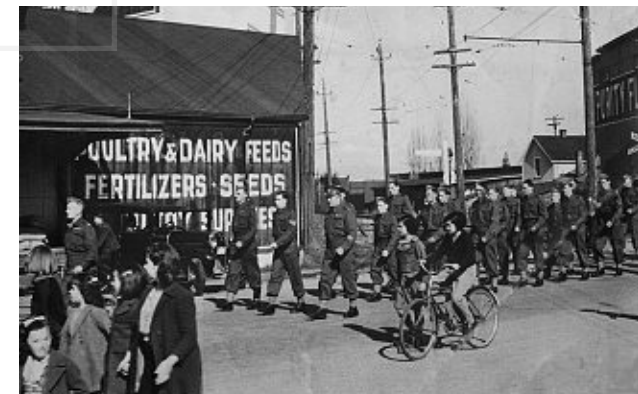
"It is difficult for one to picture a more independent, healthy or interesting life than that enjoyed by the farmer of Langley Prairie."

Over time, land for commercial, institutional, and residential buildings became increasingly needed to serve a growing population. The area's farms were sold off on a piecemeal basis. None remain today, and only a few street names and a pair of farmhouses survive to remind us of the City's thriving agricultural past.

-Warren Sommer



Aerial view of the Fraser Highway showing commercial and residential development with farmland beyond, 1940
Credit: salishan Place by the River



Soldiers marching past Buckersfield's agricultural supply and feed shop on the Fraser Highway, 1941
Credit: salishan Place by the River