

Langley City's 70th Anniversary Series

"Innes Corners: The Place Where the City Began"



The Southeast Portion of Innes Corners, early 1900s
Credit: Salishan Place by the River

Most people who have lived in Langley for any length of time are familiar with Murrayville's Five Corners. A few may know that the area surrounding its roundabout was once known as Murray's Corners. But only a handful will know that the intersection of the Fraser Highway and Glover Road was once called Innes Corners.

Named for early settlers Adam and William Innes, Innes Corners marked a key point in the Fraser Valley's early transportation system. It was there that the New Westminster to Yale Waggon Road (today's Fraser Highway) met the roads to Fort Langley and Cloverdale. As such, the junction was a logical place for travellers to stop and take advantage of the meagre services that the infant settlement could offer.

Adam and William were born in Scotland and emigrated to Ontario with their parents while still quite young. When news of a gold rush in British Columbia reached their family's farm, the brothers (then in their twenties) headed west. Family tradition states that William had

participated in the California Gold Rush of 1849. Perhaps aware that only a lucky few would "strike it rich," the brothers turned their hands from mining to hauling freight over the newly-built Cariboo Road.

When the Gold Rush ended most miners returned home. A smaller number opted to engage in agriculture, benefiting from the colonial government's policy which permitted adult male British subjects to "pre-empt" (claim) 160-acre parcels for a nominal fee. Clear title would be granted once improvements (such as clearing or fencing) had been completed. The system was far from just. Indigenous people lost most of their traditional territories and were consigned to reservations far too small to provide them with a livelihood.

The Innes brothers were among the first to settle in what later became the City of Langley. Adam acquired land north and west of today's Innes Square, while William took up land to the south and east. In the interest of economy, the two brothers may have shared a common household, allowing one or the other to periodically work at wage-paying jobs in the growing cities of New Westminster, Victoria, and (after 1885) Vancouver and Port Moody. But until urban markets expanded and reliable roads were built, farmers around Innes Corners lived modestly, their farms providing little more than their basic needs. As Rev. Alexander Dunn, the first Presbyterian minister in Langley recalled, **"The houses of the settlers [were] scantily furnished [and] barely sufficient for the necessities of their own families. Many of the settlers around me would have**

given much to have been in a position to leave."

Those who could afford to did leave. Adam operated a wood and coal yard in Victoria from 1885 until his death in 1889. William returned to the family homestead from time to time, but left permanently about 1901, having sold his property to John and Mary Logan, farmers of another generation who would help turn the hamlet of Innes Corners into a town called Langley Prairie.

-Warren Sommer



The William Innes Family at Innes Corners, late 1800s
Credit: Salishan Place by the River



Innes Brothers Freight Wagon near Ashcroft, early 1860s
Credit: BC Archives C08237