

Langley City's 70th Anniversary Series

Langley Prairie: From Rural Settlement to Thriving Town



Businesses on the south side of the Fraser Highway, c. 1927-29
Credit: salishan Place by the River

Ask any Langley resident where the community's downtown area is located, you will generally get the same answer: the City of Langley. Originally known as Innes Corners and later as Langley Prairie, Langley's commercial core has grown from a tiny settlement at today's Innes Square into an extensive complex of businesses stretching from 208th Street in the east to 196th Street in the west.

When the Innes family sold their farm in 1901, Innes Corners had little to recommend it. Apart from a few houses, barns, and sheds, the small community consisted of a general store, a Roman Catholic Church, and a one-room schoolhouse. The community had no electricity or telephone service and not a single road was paved. The post office once housed in the Adam Innes house had long since moved to Murrayville. The economic growth that many hoped would come with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway seemed to have passed Langley by.

Two developments changed all that. The first was the construction of the British Columbia Electric Railway. Popularly known as "the

Interurban," the BCER reached Langley in 1910, connecting the community with markets in New Westminster and Vancouver. Securing a railway connection was something that other settlements in Langley had also hoped for. New Westminster's British Columbian newspaper had recognized the fact in 1891: **"The universal cry from Langley is give us a railway and telegraph communication and our highest ambition is gratified."** Although other aspiring communities – Fort Langley, Aldergrove, and Murrayville – acquired railway connections of their own, only Langley Prairie (as Innes Corners came to be known) possessed the railway service that neighbouring farms required.

The second development in Langley Prairie's fortunes was the arrival of considerable capital, brought to the community by English immigrants George and Harriett Timms and their adult children. Recognizing that the intersection of the Interurban with today's Fraser Highway, Glover Road, and 56th Avenue afforded an opportunity for a good return on investment, the Timms family set about building a theatre, a café, a business block, and a hotel on the north side of the Yale Road; and what was in its day one of the largest greenhouse complexes in the country on today's Douglas Crescent.

The Timms family's investment began to transform the area into a small but thriving commercial core. **Other business were attracted to the area in the coming years: a blacksmith's shop, meat markets, variety stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, hotels and boarding houses, grocery stores, clothing shops, a weekly newspaper (the Langley Advance), bakeries, garages, feed stores,**

churches, banks, barbers and hairdressers – everything that a growing town required.

The Great Depression and the war that followed slowed the community's development, but the advent of peace, the return of servicemen and women from overseas, and the subsequent baby boom brought new prosperity to Langley Prairie. The construction of Highway One encouraged new commercial and residential development, increased demand for more urban services, and led the incorporation of the City of Langley in 1955. The completion (in 2029) of the Skytrain extension to what was once the Innes farm will initiate an equally exciting chapter in the City's evolution.

-Warren Sommer



North Side of the Newly Paved Yale Road (Fraser Highway) c. 1920
Credit: City of Langley



George Timms at his Theatre and Refreshment Rooms
Credit: City of Langley