



The Fraser Valley Heritage  
Railway Society  
presents

# A Centenary Celebration

of the

## B.C. Electric Railway Fraser Valley Line

### 1910 - 2010

by Ray Hudson  
with Henry Ewert



# 100 Years and Going Strong

## BCER Fraser Valley



The Fraser Valley Heritage Railway Society car barn at Sullivan Station (152nd Street & 64th Avenue in Surrey) at a recent Open House. Car 1304 is at the left, and in the barn without wheels is car 1225. At the far right is our "speeder" 1225 ½.

*A good idea endures and meets the test of time. One hundred years ago the now historic B. C. Electric Railway line was opened to passenger and freight service from Vancouver to New Westminster and Chilliwack. This collection of images and words you hold reminds us all of the wonderful rail (green clean energy) transportation system of the past and offers a glimpse of what will return in the future. The B. C. Electric Railway brought more than just a railway to the Fraser Valley; electricity changed the lives of many and truly moved the people of the Valley into the new 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we look back to a great idea in transportation and look forward with enthusiasm to returning passengers to the Fraser Valley Line using the same interurban cars that served the region. Enjoy this celebratory publication as a reminder of what we had and how this historic vision might help us build for the future.*

*John Sprung, Chair*

The Fraser Valley Heritage Railway Society was born of an idea by, and personal funding of \$25,000 from, Mr. Jim Wallace, a commissioner with the Surrey Heritage Advisory Commission (SHAC). A feasibility study was undertaken between 1996 and 2000 to ascertain the feasibility of reactivating the B. C. Electric Railway (BCER) line in the Fraser Valley for heritage tourism passenger service.

Based on that study a recommendation was made to Surrey City Mayor and Council that interurban cars, 1225 and 1304, could be repatriated from their US museum owners and that reactivating the interurban line through Surrey was feasible. Council requested that a not-for-profit group be formed to repatriate and rehabilitate and return the original BCER interurban cars to the original Fraser Valley Line for use in a heritage tourism initiative, to run in Surrey from Scott Road to Cloverdale.

In 2001 the non-profit, charitable, Fraser Valley Heritage Railway Society (FVHRS) was formed to acquire, restore and operate two BCER interurban cars. The original Fraser Valley Line still exists in the valley from New Westminster as far east as Chilliwack. Some adjustments to the tracks have been made in the past 50 years, but most of the original track is still there.

After about 16 thousand volunteer hours, the first car, 1225, is restored and ready to go as soon as the last piece, the trucks (that's the assembly containing the wheels, motors, brakes and springs) are finished being refurbished and rebuilt, and reconnected to the chassis later this spring. After that, 1304 will receive the TLC of those same volunteers under the direction of Vice-Chair Robert Ashton.

Soon now, because of the enormous effort and dedication of our many volunteers and sponsors, we will climb aboard and ride the BCER. Fraser Valley Line, a long forgotten jewel in the valley.

*This publication was designed and compiled by FVHRS director, Ray Hudson, working with historian and FVHRS member, Henry Ewert. We hope you enjoy the stories and vignettes on the following pages, many of which were from "The Story of the B.C. Electric Railway Company" written by Mr. Ewert.*

# 1890: It All Began



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Saturday, February 22, 1890, with the incorporation of the National Electric Tramway & Lighting Company Limited, in Victoria, with 4 cars and five miles of track. October 12, the first "interurban" started from Victoria to Esquimalt to service the naval base.

Four months after Victoria, Vancouver started its street railway with the forming of the Vancouver Electric Railway and Light Company, originally intended as a horse-drawn operation. Horses were purchased, a barn was erected then just days before start up, the decision was made to go electric.

By the end of 1891: New Westminster had commenced its system, but rail travel to Vancouver was via CPR through Coquitlam. It took an hour and a quarter at a steep cost of \$1.

October 1, 1891: the first run of the Westminster & Vancouver Tramway was made between New Westminster and Cedar Cottage on

the boundary of Vancouver. Within a week the line had been extended to Carrall and Hastings.

1902: Construction of the rail and road bridge from New Westminster to South Westminster began.

1906: June 26, marked the incorporation of the B. C. Electric owned Vancouver, Fraser Valley and Southern Railway Company, empowering it to build a line to Chilliwack.

1907: January 10, the company signed an agreement with the provincial government for the running rights on the Fraser River bridge. The B. C. Electric was given permission to connect its tracks to those already on the bridge, and to erect on the bridge and its approaches overhead trolley wires, telephones and telegraph wires and all other light and power wires or cables necessary for the operation of its system on the south side of the Fraser River.

1908: May, The Fraser Valley line actually began as tenders were called for the construction of the 13.5-mile line from New Westminster to the Great Northern town of Cloverdale.

## 1910: Inaugural Run New West. to Chilliwack

The interurban line that runs diagonally through Surrey on its way to Chilliwack turned 100 years old this year. An excerpt from the Chilliwack Progress, reprinted in the book, The Story of the B.C. Electric Railway Company, written by Henry Ewert, takes you back to that chilly, overcast October morning 100 years ago for the inaugural run on the line.

*For the occasion the company had invited a large party representative of the cities of New Westminster and Vancouver and the rural municipalities between Chilliwack and the*

*Coast, and headed by Lieut.-Governor Paterson and Premier McBride, [with many others from provincial and municipal governments and business]. The special excursion train left New Westminster at 10 o'clock in the morning, the Vancouver guests having come by regular tram [sic] via the Eburne line.*

*This special train consisted of three gaily-decorated coaches; two passenger and one baggage. Stops were made at Cloverdale, where the company's sub-station was inspected, and at Milner, the Langley Prairie station, Mt. Lehman, Clayburn, Abbotsford and other points. Good time was made along that portion of the road, the track being down for considerable time and well ballasted. From a short distance east of Abbotsford the road was not so good owing to the heavy rains of the past week and slower time was made, while at Sumas Mountain it was found that a pole had fallen across the track owing to the storm of the night before, thus destroying the electric communication for the last stage, so that the train was pulled in by one of the company's steam engines, arriving shortly before 3 p.m. At Sardis a stop was made to enable the councils*



*All aboard cars 300, 301 and 405 for the run to Chilliwack!*



# 1910: Inaugural Run

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*of the city and township of Chilliwack to come aboard and experience the pleasure and honor of being among the first passengers to enter the city on the new line. All along the line as the train passed the residents turned out to welcome it. Chilliwack turned out en masse and with a brass band, handkerchief waving and steam whistles shrieking showed their appreciation of being able at last to get out of the woods.*

*Little time was lost detraining and within a few minutes Premier McBride stood with a sledge-hammer and spike and well and truly drove to the head, the last spike that connected the Garden City of Chilliwack to the commercial cities of New Westminster and Vancouver.*

Regular service began on October 4, 1910 and that first train from New Westminster to Chilliwack carried 72 passengers. Return fare from Vancouver to Chilliwack was \$3.00. \$1.85 for the three hour one-way journey; past New Westminster, forty-two stations were in place. The fares when service on the line ended, in September 1950, was \$2.10 one way, \$3.85 return, for the 76.3 mile ride between Vancouver and Chilliwack, servicing sixty-one stations.



*Premier Robert McBride driving the last spike at the Chilliwack terminus.*

**1912:** *As the inaugural run made its way east, a power pole fell across the line due to a storm taking out the electric wire. The first run arrived in Chilliwack pulled by a locomotive instead of under its own power!*

In 1912, on the Fraser Valley branch, the company put a steam shovel to work at its Sullivan gravel pit, ten miles from New Westminster, on February 27. The gravel had three principal destinations: the many new spurs on the branch itself, the Queensborough line, and the new double track to come between Eburne and Vancouver. On March 2 a boxcar ran away for a mile and a half, before it ditched, on the hill at Mount Lehman, fracturing the brakeman's ribs, tearing up track and tying up the line for six hours.



## 1912: The Connaught, Car 1304



Car 1304, Connaught, after being refurbished in the royal livery.



The royal tour stops at Edmonds in Burnaby to adoring crowds.

In 1912, a royal tour of Canada included the use of an outstanding interurban car, 1304. It was one of several built in 1911 by the B.C.E.R. shops in New Westminster. So-called "soft woods" such as Douglas Fir went into 1304 and yet the finish was so well done that it was chosen to be the Royal Coach in its first year of operation.

The Victorian splendour of the British Empire had not much diminished and Canada was intensely loyal to the British Crown. King Edward VII installed his brother, the Duke of Connaught, as Governor General of Canada, and this required a state visit across the Dominion. The Duke brought the Duchess and their daughter the Princess Patricia

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# 1912: The Connaught, Car 1304

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*Interior of Car 1304*

with him in the most lavish way possible, travelling with a large personal suite and many ranking army officers. Vancouver went mad with civic pride to welcome "His Royal Highness", building great triumphal arches of imitation stone through which the Duke would pass in his carriage. Even the Great Northern Railroad created a huge arch of fir boughs surmounted by a locomotive. Great crowds cheered the Royal Party wherever they went and newspapers of the time declared the streets to be like that of ancient Rome. Such was the spirit of the times.

The Duke who "ruled as representative of the King" stayed in Vancouver three days before he used the interurban. On Sept. 21, 1912, he motored to the Interurban Terminal at Carrall and Hastings streets, where he began his trip aboard 1304. The royal car was freshly painted in the dark green of the Company and highly polished in honour of the trip. It bore the designation "Connaught" and the royal coat of arms. Inside the seats and partitions had been removed and new interior equipment provided by the Hudson's Bay Company store. The idea was to make it as much like a living room as possible with carpet, upholstery and curtains mostly in green and cream colours. The window arches contained orange glass, but this was hidden on the side windows by curtains. "In one corner a bank of incandescent lights with red globes have been placed which when lighted give the illusion of an open fire in a grate." "The compliments passed by His Royal Highness and the various members of

the party on the splendid results . . . were specially pleasing." Evidently, the B.C.E.R. had done its best to create the finest in electric railway transport even to surpass the Ottawa Electric Railway's efforts a few years earlier.

The Duke and his party of military men and officers of the B.C.E.R. crossed the red carpet to enter the "Connaught" which moved out of the terminal promptly at 10:45 a.m. Cheer after cheer went up from the crowds and the Duke responded by bowing and raising his feathered Field Marshall's hat at a side window. All traffic on the interurban lines and tracks over which the royal car left the city was halted for fifteen minutes prior to the departure of the "Connaught." Turnouts were spiked and a pilot car containing police officials ran five minutes ahead. Thousands gathered along the city route and on the interurban line through Central Park and Burnaby to New Westminster. One newspaper estimated that ten thousand people came out to see the Duke in his special car, which would be most of the population in those days.

The "Connaught" and numbers of other things named for the Duke were left behind on his departure, and for a time, the royal car became a special conveyance for officials or dignitaries. There is no available record when this car became BCER 1304 again, but soon the interior was restored as a "typical" interurban with rattan flip-over seats, car advertising, and a partitioned-off smoking section where the seats were all of wood for fire prevention purposes. On the outside, 1304 was repainted and, ultimately, joined the ranks of the other B.C.E.R. cars in the typical jade green and very light cream livery, as was all the company's rolling stock.

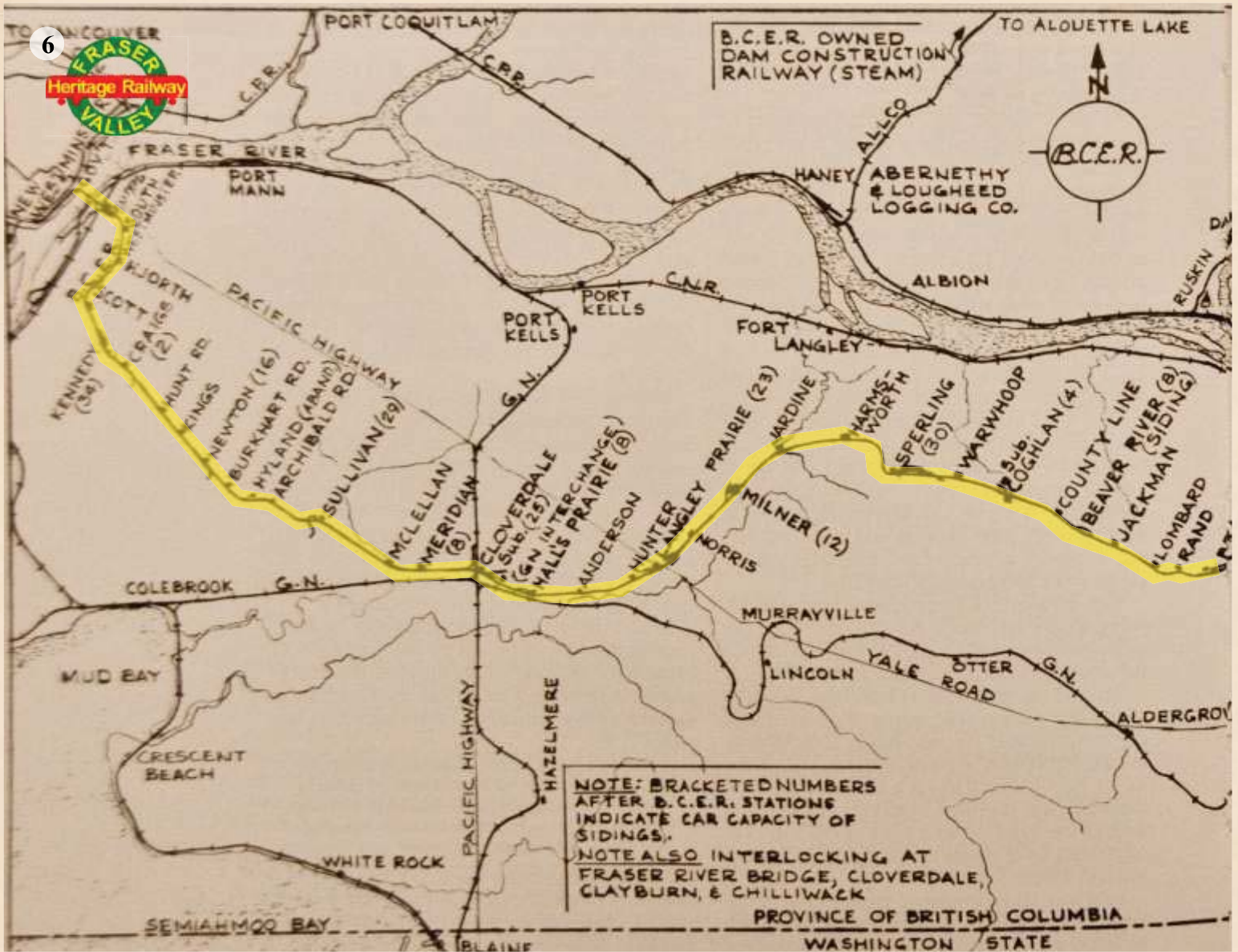
*Original piece written in 1970, by David E. Reuss a life-long fan of the B. C. Electric Railway*



*Typical station along the Fraser Valley Line*

In late December 1924, the Fraser Valley Line was plagued by numerous instances of its track being heaved by frost, the worst problems having been encountered between Harmsworth and Bradner. And in Cloverdale at year's end the Great Northern Railway was still operating 2.61 miles of the otherwise abandoned New Westminster Southern Railway. As 1924 closed, it became apparent that the hoped for positive growth trends in ridership and freight tonnage had not materialized; the former was up slightly to 69,585,740, the latter down to 351,308 (on the whole system).

## 1924



The B.C. Electric Railway map of the Fraser Valley system 1909 - 1950 created by David Reuss. It is interesting to note the Great Northern line which ran up the Clover Valley. As you cross the intersection of the Pacific Highway (176th) and the Fraser Highway, a small piece of that roadbed is still visible as a berm, on the south side, where it turned northeast and travelled up to Port Kells on what is now Harvie Road.

## 1928

Milk train near Meridian station



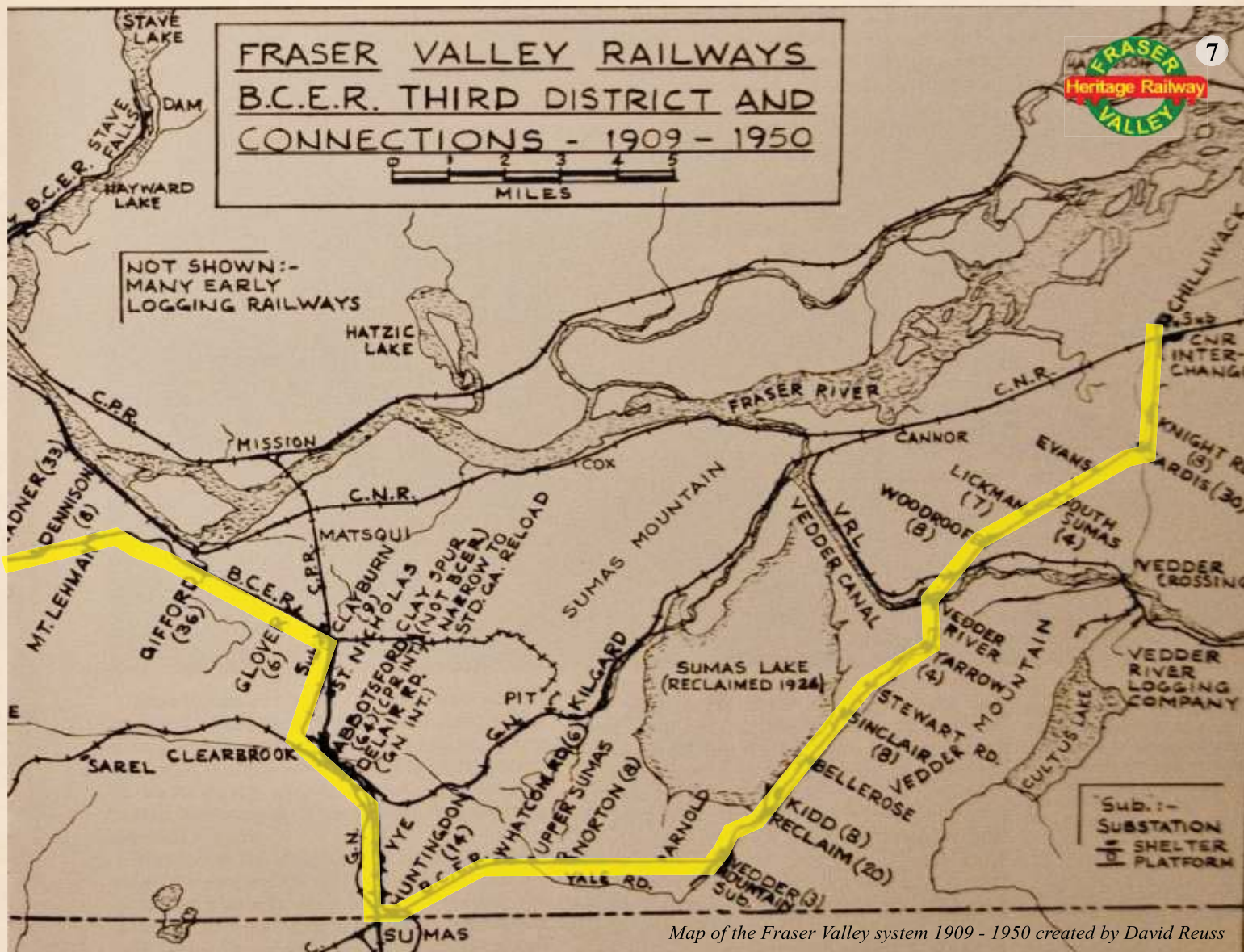
During the year 1928, the Fraser Valley Line had seen its Chilliwack (power) substation at Vedder Mountain doubled in capacity. By this time there was a substantial settlement of Mennonites, largely from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Mexico, in the Yarrow area. They created a village patterned after their former Russian villages, and brought in lumber for their first houses and buildings on the interurban line. Such business certainly contributed to the B. C. Electric's record shattering 487,896 tons of freight hauled (across the company) in 1928. Ridership across the company was up even farther, to 77,063,656.



Logging train circa 1914



Sullivan Station, 64th Avenue and 152nd Street, May 1923



Map of the Fraser Valley system 1909 - 1950 created by David Reuss

The B. C. Electric Railway continues through the eastern valley including Abbotsford to Chilliwack. It is interesting to note the Great Northern line running up from the US at Sumas, following the north shore of Sumas lake. This shallow 30,000-acre lake forced the BCER to hug the mountains along the south shore. The lake was drained in 1924.



Heavy snow near Huntingdon circa 1935

# 1928

A fire that had ignited in the kitchen of the Langley Hotel on May 21, 1928 quickly spread through the building and out onto B. C. Electric's adjacent Langley Prairie station and freight shed, destroying them both, as well as much of the centre of the town. The two-hour conflagration had cost the B. C. Electric alone \$30,000, but by the beginning of July the company had completed a new, larger station and freight shed.



The second Langley Prairie station circa 1928



The scene looking east toward Sumas Lake before it was drained.

# 1945: The Train's On Fire!



*1304 immediately after the fire*

On Sept. 16, 1945, the 1304 was returning from Chilliwack as the last car of an empty, three car train. The crew had all gone forward and said afterward that the sun seemed very bright behind them. However, people near the private right-of-way saw that it was 1304 that was glowing – and burning up. When the fire was extinguished there was only a burnt-out shell left to tow into Kitsilano Barn where the salvage was done. However, there was a shortage of cars so the veteran car builders were called out once again so that by the end of the year, old 1304 began to take shape. Much was salvaged, mostly from the underfloor and framing.

At this time the B.C.E.R. was slowly rebuilding the old fleet of street cars and it seemed natural to apply many of the innovations in the reconstruction of 1304. Instead of the clerestory roof, 1304 received an arch roof rather like the 1309 – 1311 had from the beginning, but not quite so high. A wider “facia” board above the windows compensated for this. The toilet compartments were not needed as badly as seats so they were not installed and the two elliptical windows were omitted in favour of two arched double windows. As well, 1304 returned to service with leather seats, the only car in the interurban fleet so equipped.



*Left: 1304 chassis, after all the burned materials were removed in preparation for rebuilding. (Right) 1304 leading a Chilliwack train, newly-rebuilt following the devastating fire.*

## 1945: Slides on Vedder Mountain

In 1945, two slides of mud and rock, precipitated by an extraordinary fall of rain and the diversion of a mountain stream, played havoc with the Fraser Valley Line's operations between October 24 and 26. The October 24 evening trains from Vancouver and Chilliwack, blocked by a slide three to four feet deep and a hundred feet long alongside Vedder Mountain near Reclaim, had to transfer passengers gingerly and with difficulty, and return to their respective points of departure. Fifteen section men of the company's Abbotsford, Vedder Mountain, and Chilliwack gangs successfully cleaned up the mess, only to see an equally large slide cover the right of way on the following night.



*At Chilliwack station early 1940's*



*At Sullivan station 2009*



*At Chilliwack station late 1940's*

# Cloverdale: Surrey's Historic Town Centre



*Cloverdale station, demolished in 1950.*



*Cloverdale town centre is Surrey's historic centre boasting a new museum.*

When the Great Northern Railway (under the guise of the New Westminster Southern) thrust its way up into Canada from Washington state in February 1891, reaching for Vancouver, Cloverdale was created, drawing to it services and residents from miles around. Cloverdale immediately became strategic, the most important stop on this new railway between the U.S. border and New Westminster, part of Great Northern's main line south to Seattle for 18 years, until a new line was built through White Rock adjacent to the waterfront.

When the Great Northern opened its 17-mile railway line west from Cloverdale to Ladner (then Port Guichon) in 1903, with ferry service to Sidney, on Vancouver Island, Cloverdale was well on its way to becoming one of British Columbia's major railway hubs. And when, in early 1909, Great Northern inaugurated service over its new 29-mile line eastward from Cloverdale to the U.S. border at Sumas to connect there with the Milwaukee Road and Northern Pacific railways, Cloverdale's status as a major railway town was almost at its zenith.

This lofty position was surely achieved on July 1, 1910 when the British Columbia Electric Railway began passenger service through Cloverdale from New Westminster to Jardine (20 miles) on its new 64-mile electric interurban line all the way to Chilliwack. When regular service over the 76 miles between Vancouver and Chilliwack was instituted on October 4 on this the longest interurban line ever to be built in Canada, residents of an

ecstatic Cloverdale could travel in style on state-of-the-art interurban railway cars to New Westminster in well under an hour, and to the heart of downtown Vancouver in an hour and a half. The cars offered toilets, a water cooler, luggage racks and seats with integral headrests. For this passenger and freight operation, a splendid full service depot had been built on the north side of the track just east of 176th Street, and just a short distance east an impressive, but hulking, concrete substation, one of five along the line to Chilliwack, long since demolished.

Cloverdale in 1910 was the dominant community in the

Fraser Valley between New Westminster and Abbotsford; neighbouring Langley Prairie (today's city of Langley) was miniscule by comparison. When the Pacific Highway (today's 176th) and Highway 15 were built through Cloverdale, and then paved in 1923, years before the King George Highway (renamed Boulevard in 2010) was built, Cloverdale became the premiere stopping place for motorists between Vancouver and



*Main Street (176th Street) Cloverdale 2009*

the U.S. border.

Even though the Great Northern withdrew in stages from Cloverdale (finally completely in 1933) the B.C. Electric's interurban line to Chilliwack still functions as a freight line, operated by Southern Railway of British Columbia, and some of the former Great Northern east/west line forms the basis of the "coal train" railway line, completed in 1970 past Cloverdale to tidewater at Roberts Bank, rather than 1903's Port Guichon. *Written by Henry Ewert*



*Chilliwack loop with an interurban train in station 1923*



*Sumas substation at Vedder Mountain in 1911, and as a residence today*





# 1950: Fraser Valley Line Last Run



*Touching cowcatchers at Langley Prairie*

received the line's last running orders, for car 1309, over the telephone in the Chilliwack depot. Car 1304 was, however the very last interurban car in regular service carrying passengers running the "Owl" from Vancouver at 11:25 pm arriving at Mount Lehman at 1:45 am on Sunday October 1, and leaving there at 1:50 am for the 2:50am termination at New Westminster barn of almost precisely forty years of passenger service on the greatest interurban line in Canada.

While regular service was being run on that Saturday, much special activity was occurring, adroitly stage-managed by interurban superintendent Mouat and Chief dispatcher DW Stearman. Cars 1311, bannered, beflagged and beribboned, left Chilliwack in the morning, bound for Langley Prairie with forty civic and municipal leaders and guests, many picked up at stops along the way; at 10:52 am, a similarly colourful and festive train, cars 1310 and 1307, left New Westminster with one hundred and fourteen company and civic officials, old-timers and retired Chilliwack line employees, also bound for Langley Prairie. President Grauer rode the latter train.

At noon, the trains touched cowcatchers in the centre of Langley Prairie in front of the depot to the skirl of piper Tommy Farquhar's bagpipes, the blowing of whistles by the interurbans, and the shaking of hands through the end vestibule doors of the two facing trains by president Grauer and Langley reeve, George Brooks.

Within a week, Chilliwack's dignified depot was torn down to make way for bus driveways of the new \$75,000 combined Pacific Stage Lines depot and company general offices, opened October 10. With a view to the possibility of their giving longer-term service on the Central Park line, should that be necessary, the two "newest" interurban cars, 1304 and 1321, had their toilets removed in favour of seating space.

## 1958: Last Scheduled Run

### Car 1225 draws the honour



*1225 last run done!*

It was early Friday morning, 12:30 a.m., February 28, when the final scheduled run of a B. C. Electric interurban train, car 1225, departed from Marpole with 68 passengers, mostly railfans and conductor Lawrence Love and Motorman Bert Hall. Among those on board were company security police and assistant superintendent L.R. Stewart. Having left Steveston at 1 a.m., and the Marpole depot at 1:30 a.m., car 1225 continued its final, lonely trip with its crew through darkened Kerrisdale and on the line's best speedway, alongside Quilchena Golf Course between Twenty-ninth and Twenty-second avenues, to the suddenly unnecessary barn at Kitsilano.

BCER 1225 was manufactured by the St. Louis Car Co. in 1913. It was operated "pay as you enter" from Vancouver to either Burnaby Lake or Steveston from 1913 to 1958. U. S. railfans rescued it from destruction. B. C. Electric had more than 600 street cars and interurbans; hundreds were scrapped! Ten such vehicles remain. 1225

was towed to Perris, California (close to Los Angeles) on its own wheels.

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# 1958: Last Scheduled Run

*Continued from Page 10*



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*1225's last conductor  
Lawrence Love*

The Orange Empire Railway Museum kept it operational.

The St. Louis design provided wrap-around steel side plating and window screens for safety and a high, arched roof for ventilation. There were 28 of the St. Louis interurbans to retain original features such as Watson wheel-guard safety scoops which were deployed when low sling triggers detect an object on the tracks.

FVHRS Director Bill Watson visited Orange Empire in 2002 and commenced negotiations for obtaining 1225. Ultimately, the museum directors decided that, while the interurban car had significant heritage value, it was no longer central to their collection and return to the region where it had operated was appropriate.

\$300,000 Canadian was raised by FVHRS with very generous support from the City of Surrey and the B.C. Ministry of Transportation to purchase 1225.

In August 2005, FVHRS director Bob Ashton went to Perris where members of Orange Empire helped with preparations for moving. Road height limitations required the body be lifted off, and carried separately from its trucks. Windows were boarded up.

“Anything to declare?” the Canadian border officer asked. “Just 35 tons of Interurban!”

With an enormous heavy-lift crane, the trucks and the chassis were lifted over the compound fence at the Sullivan Car Barn and set down on the trucks. 1225 was then pulled inside (the FVHRS barn), safe, and home after 47 years, where the rehabilitation began.



## 2010: Second Millennium: SRY

In 1988, the BCER, operated by BC Hydro was sold to ITEL Rail Corp. and became Southern Railway of British Columbia (SRY). In 1994, SRY became a Washington Group company. SRY owns the rolling stock and tracks and, from BC Hydro, has the rights to operate a freight service on the line.

The FVHRS has a strong and positive partnership with SRY, and president, Frank Butzelaar and his staff, whose assistance has been invaluable as the Society has worked to return 1225 to operational status in 2011. In addition, the Society is looking forward to a special train run on the Fraser Valley Line to mark its 100 years of operation, planned for the spring of 2011.



## 2010: Second Millennium: FVHRS Today

As you can see, our two interurban cars, “1225” and “1304” are looking better than ever. With 1225, our rehabilitation is pretty much done. We are currently awaiting the completion of the overhaul of the trucks, the motors, wheels, tyres and brakes so they may be reunited with the chassis and body of 1225. It will then be ready to run. 1304 has received a bright new paint job; however, it must undergo a full rehabilitation process (albeit nowhere near the magnitude of 1225's) before it will be ready for the rails.



*BCER Car 1304*

Meanwhile we invite you to join us as a member, volunteer, supporter through the “One passenger at a time” program, and keep track of our progress on our website:

[www.fvhers.org](http://www.fvhers.org)



*BCER Car 1225*



# The Beginning...

Thank you to our sponsors!



Surrey Heritage  
Advisory  
Commission



And thanks to all of the volunteers and supporters who are working tirelessly to bring back the historic interurbans.

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