



Fig. 1

A Thumbnail Sketch of a Diamond Jubilee

The Vancouver General Hospital *and its Forebears*

THE year 1946 marks the Diamond Jubilee of the Vancouver General Hospital and its two forerunners, the C.P.R. Hospital and the Vancouver City Hospital.

In the year 1886 when the C.P.R. was forging its way through the forest separating the then terminus, Port Moody, from the new one, Vancouver, provision was made in Vancouver for sick and injured workmen in a primitive wooden building which contained nine beds (fig. 1). The nearest hospital was at New Westminster, fourteen miles through the bush. The population of Vancouver was then about 1,000, and was increasing so rapidly that the C.P.R. hospital was soon tending more of the local populace than it was workmen. In 1886 the City was incorporated and in that same year this primitive structure changed hands and, as the City Hospital, became the responsibility of the Health Committee of the Vancouver City Council.

It carried on, ably conducted by the very few local doctors in conjunction with the Health Committee, for some two years. The City and Provincial Governments had, however, been asked to provide funds

Fig. 1.—Hospital (left background) erected by the C.P.R. Construction Company in 1886 and taken over by the Health Committee of the Vancouver City Council, thus becoming the first City Hospital.

F. J. FISH,

Director, Medical Records Department

for a suitable hospital and, according to the pages of the old *Vancouver News Advertiser*, the success of these efforts was crowned by the opening, on September 22nd, 1888, "without fuss or feathers, of an institution . . . which will doubtless prove to be one of the best of the many investments that the City of Vancouver has ever made". The population in 1887 was listed as 5,000 and in 1888 as 8,500. This new and first real hospital, of frame construction and standing on a granite base, measured 75 feet by 25 feet, was two storeys in height and had a basement. The upstairs ward of 16 beds was intended for women, with similar accommodation for men on the ground floor and, in addition, three private rooms—a total of 35 beds, (see fig. 2).

From then on begins a tale which, almost unbrokenly, tells of lack of hospital accommodation.

The city's population continued to grow and soon this little building, which could accommodate only a handful of patients, had to be extended. Within a year or two work had been started on the erection of a hospital more permanent than the frame structure. Red brick was employed this time and, to the credit of the workmen of those days, all three buildings—the frame one of 1888 and its two additions of red brick—

are still standing and in daily use. The frame structure, after passing through many vicissitudes, including its use as a Japanese Christian Mission, has been for some years Vancouver's Labour Temple, while the two red brick annexes have for years been the centre of the city's social service activities.

At intervals, small hospitals have sprung up. Of these the earliest on record is St. Luke's which, under the banner of the Church of England and the personal guidance of the late and much-beloved Sister Frances, was opened in 1888. St. Paul's Hospital of the Sisters of Charity of Providence, was established in 1894, while the City Hospital was, even at that early date, clamouring for more beds.

The medical profession, without which no hospital is possible, played its part in the birth and growth of the city's infant. The C.P.R. physician in 1886 was Dr. J. M. Lefevre. He became an alderman in 1887 and was appointed Chairman of the City Health Committee, succeeding a lay alderman, Mr. E. P. Hamilton. The Chief of Police was the City Health Inspector.

The Vancouver Medical Association, then in embryonic state, contributed to the successful operation of the hospital. Mention of all its members would at this remote date be impossible, but here are at least some of the stalwarts: Duncan Bell-Irving, H. E. Langis, W. J. Mc-

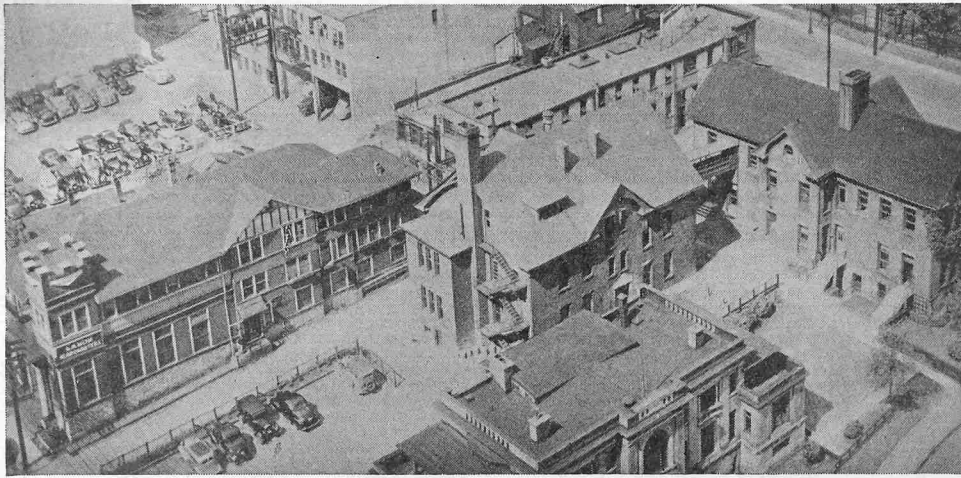


Fig. 2 (above)—Left of picture: the first hospital actually erected by the City of Vancouver, now the Labour Temple; upper centre and right: the two red brick additions to the hospital; foreground: building erected by the Rotary Club of Vancouver in 1918 as a Tuberculosis Clinic. Together with the two red brick buildings it houses the City's Social Service Department.

Guigan, A. M. Robertson, Beckingsale, G. F. Bodington, McAlpine and Stevenson, of whom the first four constituted the Hospital's first medical staff.

The training of nurses was a matter of concern to all. On October 26th, 1888, the Health Committee received a letter from the Matron, stressing this need. However, it was felt that the time was not ripe and the matter was "laid over".

Early Women's Aid

At this juncture comes possibly the earliest mention of the sixty years' unbroken record of "Women's Auxiliary" efforts and their invaluable aid to patients and administrators alike. The "Ladies Aid of the First Presbyterian Church" made an offer to the hospital, which was accepted, to "Equip and furnish eight beds and to maintain them for all time". Just what was intended is problematical. The cost of a patient's maintenance was low in 1888, com-

plete maintenance of eight beds today would be much more costly.

Admissions to the hospital were preponderantly male; whereas all 16 upstairs beds were intended for women, in December 1888, at the

urging of the medical staff, the upper floor was divided lengthwise—8 beds for women and 8 for "fever" cases.

In 1890 the city's population was 12,500 and the first addition to the hospital was commenced—the first



1892
Fig. 3 (below)—Entire staff of the Vancouver City Hospital (about 1902). Standing at left: the Matron, Miss Swan; Seated: nurse, Miss Way, orderly, Frank Humphrey; Standing at back: Head Nurse (dark dress) Miss Watmough, nurse, Miss Bushby.



Fig. 4—Horse ambulance presented to the Vancouver General Hospital by the Ladies' Aid of the hospital, to replace the worn-out vehicle used by the old City Hospital.

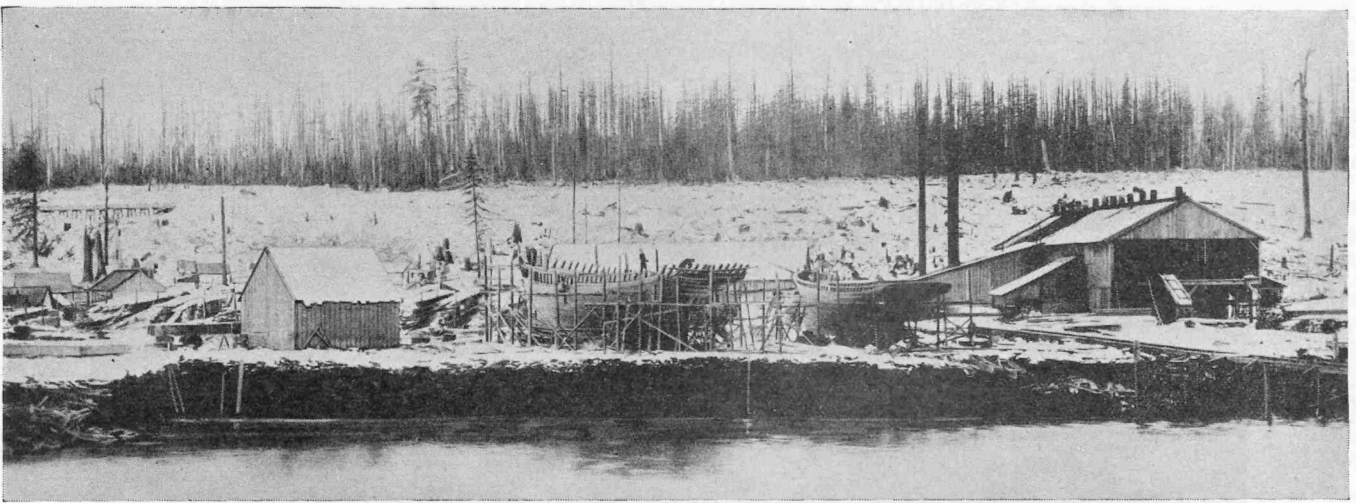


Fig. 5—Fairview, winter of 1890-91. On left, 7th Avenue Bridge. On extreme right, site of Willow Street and Vancouver General Hospital. S.S. "City of Nanaimo" and Sealing Schooner "Thistle" under construction.

of two buildings of red brick.

But "those were the days" when the Matron's salary was \$40.00 monthly, the "porter", together with his wife (the cook) drew \$50.00, while three gallons of whiskey cost the hospital \$8.25. One wonders about the manner of prescribing the whiskey, for all D.T.'s presenting themselves for treatment were re-routed to the city jail, and when the chairman of the medical staff prescribed chicken diet for a patient, the Health Committee "tut-tutted" and in consternation the prescription was "laid over". On subsequent presentation it was "filed".

In this same year mention is made of the "Ladies' Aid to the Hospital" but its origin is a dark mystery. An attempt at asepsis found its outlet in the use of "anti-septic paint" for the hospital floors and, for lack of proper accommodation, venereal cases were refused admission.

The School for Nurses

In 1898 the nurses were granted the privilege of a special bathtub and in August the Matron was authorized to engage, temporarily, a "probationer nurse". In the previous April the medical staff had strongly advocated the formation of a nursing school. Their efforts came to fruition in the following year, as is evidenced by a report (for which we are indebted to the old *Vancouver Daily World*) that, "at a very colourful ceremony" on October 15th, 1902, five graduates were awarded their pins and diplomas. In the previous year, however, only two years

after the inception of the school, three nurses were awarded diplomas. It is presumed that these three had had considerable experience elsewhere for which one year was allowed, and that they were not full graduates of the school.

The fact remains that, although the school was originated by the City Hospital the completion of its first full course is one of the early landmarks of the Vancouver General Hospital.

V.G.H. Incorporated 1902

All three hospital buildings continued under the aegis of the Health Committee of the Vancouver City Council until, by popular demand, an Act was passed by the Government of the Province of British Columbia, incorporating the Vancouver General Hospital. This Act stipulated that the first meeting of the newly-constituted Corporation should be called for July 1902, for the purpose of electing a Board of Directors. The first recorded Board Meeting was

held on Tuesday September 23rd, 1902. At a meeting on October 17th of the same year it was resolved that assumption of the "goods and chattels be effected on October 20th, transfer of accounts on November 1st and the internal management and control on Thursday November 13th, 1902". The population of the city was by this time considerably in excess of 30,000.

When the new Board of Directors assumed its duties there was already talk of a new site away from the now congested city area. Opposition existed on the score of difficulty of access. False Creek, which bisects the city, was bridged only by a plank affair and heads were shaken at the prospect of the horse ambulance rattling its human freight over the rough unpaved streets in the proposed location. Vision won out, however, and on January 1st, 1906, some three years later, 40 patients were transferred by cabs and ambulances—our own and St. Paul's, which was

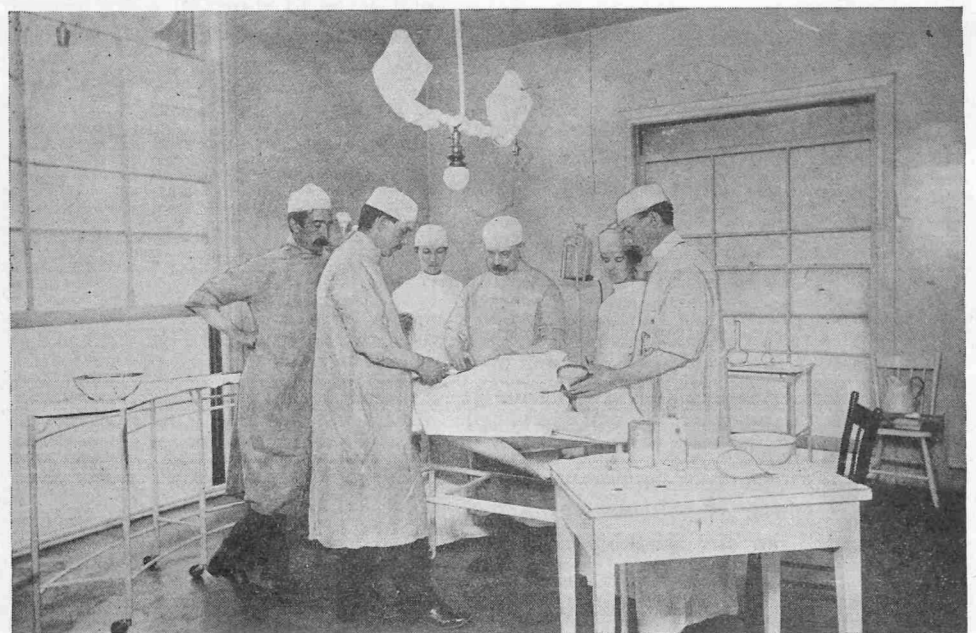


Fig. 6—Operation Room, about 1900. Operator (centre), Dr. R. E. McKechnie; assistant, Dr. A. S. Monro; Anaesthetist, Dr. Colin A. McDiarmid; Nurse at right, Miss Judge; Observer, Dr. A. P. Procter.



Fig. 7—Present appearance of the Main Building of the Vancouver General Hospital.

kindly lent—to the partially completed new hospital about two miles away. (fig. 4)

Of the 18 or 20 wards planned, only 6 were ready—those in the northern front of the main building. The rest were added over the next eight years, as well as the central wing for administration, kitchen and dining rooms. Subsequent growth over the ensuing 40 years has been steady. Buildings have been erected as temporary measures and later demolished. One was the old Military Annex on 12th Avenue. Erected in 1917 to house returned soldiers, it became a crowded Vancouver General Hospital Annex when Shaughnessy Hospital opened. In 1930, after final condemnation, it was torn down. Historical, too, were the Isolation Cottages which, erected in 1906 within the hospital grounds, were finally razed by fire in 1927 under the watchful eyes of the city's Fire Department and replaced by a permanent concrete structure half a block away.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of our "temporary" buildings are the frame "Annex" on 12th Avenue and Heather Street and the several wooden huts dotted about, remnants of the University of British Columbia's first location. These latter were left as a legacy to the Vancouver General Hospital when the students finally "trekked" to Point Grey in 1925. They left behind them their "shacks", as well as their one permanent structure, the Arts Building, which became the Tuberculosis Ward of the hospital. The "Heather Street Annex" was built, and opened for the reception of patients within two weeks from the commencement of

Right: The Semi-Private Patients' Pavilion.

	1906	1915	1925	1935	1945
Admissions to hospital	1313	6841	13,823	15,629	25,432
Live Births in hospital	25	440	1,381	1,593	3,834

the work, to house the victims of the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918. It, too, was a "temporary" measure but today it houses 90 patients.

From the six completed wards of 1906—approximately 180 beds—the hospital has grown to its present capacity of 1,100 beds and 130 bassinets, spread over seven hospital buildings which, with the laundry, power house, nurses' and interns' homes, extend over eight city blocks. In addition there is the Infants' Hospital, located in the down-town west end of the city, which was the City Creche when taken over by the Vancouver General Hospital.

The growth of any institution can be reflected in figures—if they are not too complicated. The above will serve to show 40 years' growth of the Vancouver General Hospital:

Of the ancillary forces of the hospital little need be said. They have made their mark and will continue to do so, but no history of any hospital, much less of the Vancouver General, would be complete without mention of these: the outpatient and social service departments, the medical staffs and, lastly, but equal with any, the women's auxiliaries.

As for future development—a really modern hospital, a new home for the school of nursing and a medical school—plans for all of these are carefully tucked away awaiting the "go" signal.

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Photographs used to illustrate this article are by courtesy of Mr. W. J. Moore, Vancouver, the Vancouver City Archives and the "Vancouver Daily Sun".

