

False Starts

From the late 1880s into the middle 1890s, there was the occasional spark of interest in developing Grandview as the next expansion of the still-tiny Vancouver. However, at the same time, both Mount Pleasant and Kitsilano were beginning their development, and those two suburbs proved easier to manage in terms of geography, at least in the short term. What waves of interest did involve Grandview in these years tended to occur as a result of external forces: the offer of parkland, the development of an interurban railway, and an outbreak of smallpox.

One hopeful beginning, for example, was the offer of land for a park which might encourage travel to the district even if not actual development. In 1888, E. J. Clark, a prosperous Toronto dry-goods merchant and realtor with interests in Vancouver, “young but enterprising” as the *Vancouver World* described him, offered to donate land in Grandview for “an athletic park.” The land comprised the south half of Block 170, a total of some seven and one-quarter acres west of Trout Lake, between what is today East 14th and East 15th Avenues. The offer was accepted in November 1888, but the deal was stalled by the political stalemate that hampered all the operations of Vancouver City Council at that time, even though Clark had also offered \$1,000 towards clearing the land. After some legal wrangling – the issue being future liability – the offer was accepted and, in his New Year’s address for 1889, Mayor David Oppenheimer expressed the City’s gratitude for Clark’s “liberal” gift.

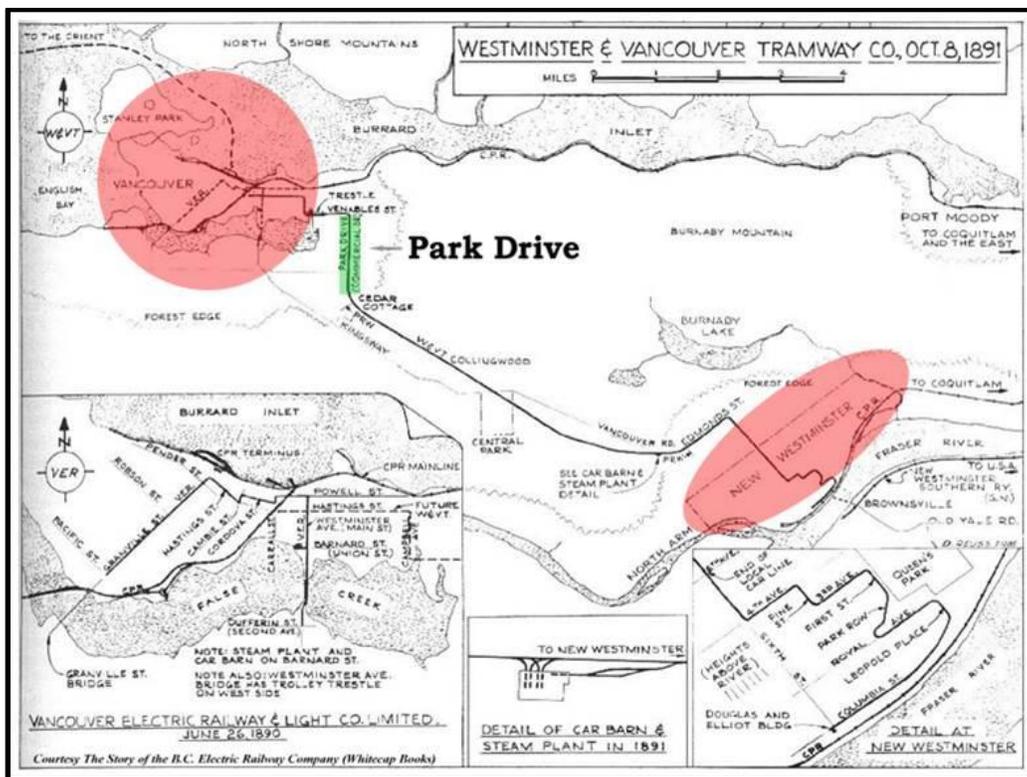
Not all the aldermen were happy with having to deal with a new park. However, even though the City Engineer estimated a cost of only \$150 per acre to clear – a sum more than covered by Clark’s cash donation -- and “a large number of people” opined the Engineer, “would be glad of the Park as a breathing space”, Aldermen Whelan and Brighthouse, in the minority, thought another park “unnecessary at present.” Eventually, the opponents were defeated and the conveyance was signed. The site, subsequently named Clark Park after its donor, was originally known as South Park. Shortage of funds available to the Park Commissioners and, perhaps, a certain lack of interest in a spot so far from the city, meant that South Park was largely neglected. However, in an end-of-1891 report in the *World*, it was noted that “the clearing in South Park has been completed and the seeding done.”¹

The importance of the South Park donation to the early history of Grandview lay mainly in the trail that city workers cut to reach the Park. The trail, and it was nothing more than that at the beginning, ran south from a point on Venables Street where a logging skid road ambled north to Burrard Inlet. The trail would be known as Park Drive which was later renamed Commercial Drive and became Grandview’s main street. The existence of the Park Drive trail was also a key factor in the route chosen for the Vancouver to New Westminster Interurban Railway, the next attempt to open up the neighbourhood.

It has often been claimed, inaccurately, that the laying of the interurban tramline between Vancouver and New Westminster in 1891 brought about the growth of Grandview. The tramline was, after all, as much a real estate boondoggle as it was a public transit utility. The *News Advertiser*, for example, strenuously opposed the line, openly suggesting that it was a real estate scam. And another contemporary observer confided that “there was a strong suspicion in many minds” that an effort to enhance real estate values was a more important factor to the original investors than was the improvement in communications. Such suspicions may have been triggered when, after some perhaps shady real estate deals were completed, Vancouver’s usual suspects – Israel Powell and David Oppenheimer and Charles Dupont – ended up with

options on the Hastings Mill land that lay in the railway's path. A. R. Ross, Walter Graveley, John Hendry, and others were also involved. And it was this same coalition of owners along with British money that took on the interurban project. Unlike the *News Advertiser*, the *Vancouver World* supported the line precisely because of their involvement. It editorialized: "The gentlemen who comprise this company are among the best and most enterprising citizens of Vancouver and New Westminster." Both points of view may have been correct and honestly held because this was a period when the conjoining of public need and private profit was a vital element in the breaking of new ground.²

The company engineers were busy from June 1890 surveying a variety of lines between the two cities. In August the following year, City Council finally approved the route into Vancouver from Cedar Cottage. The route would follow Park Drive, turning west on Venables Street, onto Campbell Avenue and thence along Hastings Street to the terminus at Carrall Street. Coming north, the line entered Grandview at Cedar Cottage, proceeded along the trail that would become Park Drive, and then turned west onto Venables Street.



Once the trains began running in the fall of 1891, the service was an immediate success, being well-filled with passengers on trips in both directions. During the 1890s, several thousand must have passed through Grandview on their way to Vancouver or New Westminster. But the line had little immediate effect on Grandview itself. There were no stops in Grandview; passengers wishing to visit would have had to walk north from Cedar Cottage, or east from the stop at Largen's blacksmith shop at Glen Avenue on Venables. Neither walk would have been comfortable, what with the stumps, and puddles, and heavy brush that wouldn't be cleared for another decade and a half.³

Although still "in the woods," blocks and lots in Grandview had been offered for sale since the late 1880s. The *Vancouver World* had declared as far back as 1888 that "The east end will be the manufacturing portion

of the city, and property there will always command a good price.” There was even a significant investment bubble in 1891 and 1892 when speculators were sure the interurban would make Grandview the next big thing. Acreages in blocks that had been marketed at \$600-\$1,000 in 1889, were being offered for \$5,000 or more in 1891. But the speculation quickly cooled and prices fell below pre-interurban levels.⁴

There were also other pressures on the City to make Grandview land more accessible for development. In March 1890, City Council received a letter from F.S. Timberlake and others petitioning for the “opening of streets between lots [DLs] 183 and 184 from Hastings Street to the intersection of Ninth Avenue, thence westward to the intersection of Westminster Avenue [Main Street].” The relevant streets to meet this request would be Victoria and Park Drives. In April 1890, during budget discussions, Alderman Fox suggested adding \$2,500 to the estimates to open up at least one of these streets. Alderman Browning noted that the Board of Works had thoroughly considered the question but that the streets ran through a forest not even slashed. The Board had decided there was no immediate need. However, Alderman Fox persisted and Alderman McLeod agreed. He said “there were many who wanted to go into 264a to improve their property, and the least that could be done was to give them a street. He seconded Ald. Fox’s motion. Next year, he said, the assessment on that property could be doubled, and the street would not really cost the city anything.” Alderman Horne chimed in that “he knew several [who] would build now if they could get material in there.” After much discussion, a motion was passed to add \$2,500 to the estimates “for the opening of the first street east of the South Park, from the southern boundary to Powell Street.”⁵

The first street east of the Park was Park Drive. However, in July the Engineers reported they were too busy to survey the street properly. Therefore, a motion was made to open up Victoria Drive instead as it had been properly registered already. However, Alderman Carroll objected, noting that “the Aldermen did not themselves know where this street was situated and none lived on it, while people were petitioning for streets to their dwellings and could not get them.” Other aldermen insisted the road was needed and finally the motion passed.⁶

Beyond that, Grandview is rarely mentioned in the newspapers or at City Council for the balance of the decade. It was a forested wilderness, forgotten in the rush to develop other suburbs. When the City needed an isolation hospital to deal with a smallpox outbreak in the summer of 1892, no-one questioned the location chosen for it at what would later become Templeton and East Georgia: the northeast corner of Grandview was as isolated as you could get within city limits.⁷

The failure of Grandview to expand rapidly in the 1890s was likely a disappointment for the land owners and realtors who had high hopes for the interurban, but they did prosperously well enough in Cedar Cottage and Central Park to allow the few intrepid Grandview pioneers who did show up to rest in the wilderness for a while longer. It is to these early settlers that we turn next.

¹ The details of Clark’s offer and the Council’s hesitations can be followed, inter alia, in the *Vancouver World*, 1888 Nov 6, p.4; Nov 28, p.4; 1889 Jan 7, p.4; Mar 12, p.4; Aug 19, p.4; Aug 27, p. 4. Clearing completed: *Vancouver World* 1891, Dec 30, p.8

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- ² “strong suspicion”: George F. Gibson interview with Matthews, CVA AM 54.013.06209; *Vancouver World* editorial at 1890 Jul 25, p.2. The *World* called the *News-Advertiser*’s views “vile and evil”: *Vancouver World* 1891 Aug 8, p.4.
- ³ Engineering surveys: The Truth quoted in *Vancouver World*, 1890 July 29, p.4; approved route and stops: Henry Ewart, “*The Story of the BC Electric Railway*” (1986, Whitecap, Vancouver), p.19-20; “immediate success”: see for example *News-Advertiser* 1891 Oct 16, p.6; Oct 24, p.6.
- The Vancouver streetcar company was given the right to operate on the section of the interurban from Cedar Cottage to the City but did not take up this right until 1905.
- Ewart is the best general account of the electric railway, but Major Matthews’ interviews with W.D. Burdis, H.P. McCrabey, and Capt. Scoular are full of fascinating detail, especially on the financing and land issues.
- The legal issues that delayed the interurban’s entry into Vancouver are outside the scope of this work but the newspapers for the first two weeks of August 1891 make for interesting reading.
- ⁴ East End as “manufacturing portion”: *Vancouver World*, 1888 Nov 28, p.4. For speculative price increases, compare R.G. Tatlow’s ad in *Vancouver World* 1889 Jan 2, p.2 with ads by H.A. Jones in *News-Advertiser* 1891 Oct 1, p.6.
- ⁵ The Council discussion was covered in detail in *Vancouver World* 1890 Apr 9, p.1,4; qv *Vancouver World* 1890 Mar 25, p.4
- ⁶ *Vancouver World* 1890 Jul 15, p.4
- ⁷ Vancouver had been using Deadman’s Island as an isolation area. However, there were legal issues that forced them to look elsewhere. They wrote to E.J. Clark asking if he would agree to using his parkland but he didn’t respond in time: *Vancouver World* 1892 June 15, p.4; July 12, p.1