

Creating Grandview

There are a great many indications that real estate and economic activity of the 1890s and early 1900s generally had by-passed Grandview: A future mayor of Vancouver could legitimately claim that, in 1901, there was still "no such place" as Grandview; Charles Goad, the urban cartographer, found nothing to map in Grandview in 1897, 1901 or 1903; in July 1903, the City Engineer submitted his report on sewer additions required for the following year. The furthest east mentioned was Vernon Street; in the Chief of Police's plan to introduce patrol box telephones in every district during 1904, none of the "Beats" include Grandview or anything close by; the City Directories list no streets in Grandview in 1901 and 1902. It is not until 1903 that a few streets are mentioned. In a major front page article in the spring of 1904 entitled "*Great Activity in Real Estate*" describing the rush to build in Vancouver as the year progresses, the *Vancouver World* doesn't mention Grandview at all. And as late as the end of March in that year, Ald. Garrett could still argue about Grandview that "streets should not be opened away in the bush when so much work still had to be done right in the City."¹

An indication of just how close to the wilderness and its dangers Grandview was came in the late summer of 1904. A serious fire raged for more than three days in Hastings Townsite, which bordered Grandview along Nanaimo Street (or Boundary Road as it was called then). The residents "appealed to the Provincial police for help in saving their homes" as they had been "fighting the fire day and night."²

Norbert MacDonald has pinpointed rapid population increase as the defining feature of Vancouver's growth in the first decade of the twentieth century. He writes:

"Unlike the boom initiated by the construction of the C.P.R. and the arrival of the first train in Vancouver, no single event announced the beginning of another expansionary phase in the early 1900's. Nor did any single organization influence development to the extent the C.P.R. had done previously. Rather, growth during these years was a diverse, pervasive process that affected all components of Vancouver's life and significantly reshaped the city and its institutions. If one factor can be said to be basic to all the changes that took place at this time, it was undoubtedly rapid population growth."³

Eleanor Bartlett records an additional spur:

"The years 1901 to 1913 were the halcyon days of the prairie wheat economy. The impact of this prosperity on British Columbia was to encourage the lumber industry, because of the increased demand for building materials, and to promote considerable construction and real estate activity in Vancouver."⁴

It is worth repeating that at the beginning of the century, there were no roads cleared in Grandview and just two dozen or so buildings. Almost the entire area was in heavy stubble from the logging operations of the previous decades, with few trails opened. However just a few years into the new century, possibly under the pressures mentioned above, the large landowners of the area, mostly financiers and monied gentlemen in the city of Vancouver, began to subdivide and offer up lots for sale and basic civic infrastructure began to be put in place.⁵

The school authorities seemed to be the most prescient about the future development of the area, choosing sites for two institutions in Grandview before much else was there. In May 1903, city voters had approved a \$125,000 debenture for school expansion in Vancouver. Recognizing that there were enough agitated families in the Cedar Cove neighbourhood, the School Board used some of that money to purchase a large lot on the corner of Victoria and Hastings for \$2,012.25. A one-room temporary school was quickly built, but had to be replaced in 1906 with a modern four-room school. The School Board named it in honour of Sir William Macdonald founder of the Macdonald Tobacco Company who had donated millions of dollars to education in various parts of Canada. In June 1903, the School Board also purchased half a block on the north-west corner of what would become First and Commercial for \$1,380.⁶

Churchmen were also early supporters of the neighbourhood. By the summer of 1904, the Methodists who were running out of space on Princess Street downtown, has erected “a bright little church” on what would later become Commercial Drive. It was standing “almost alone in the midst of what remains of a one-time huge forest. Burned and charred stumps, an undergrowth of green shoots, and a rough newly-opened road” surrounded the building. There were very few houses within shouting distance of the new church but they made it work.⁷

But services even more basic than schools and churches were needed urgently. Demands for street openings in Grandview had been coming into the Board of Works since at least February 1903, but little had actually been done. In the spring of 1904, the Board of Works toured the entire city, looking to see what needed to be accomplished. Their final walk, on 2nd April, brought them to Grandview. It was obvious to all that new streets needed to be opened up, sidewalks laid, water and sewer systems dug all over town. However, as a reporter travelling with the Board members noted, “nowhere is this more noticeable than in Grand View. Here ... the clearing of these streets will not be an easy task.” But it was clearly worthwhile: It was noted that as soon as Park Drive had been graded “no less than four houses were begun in one block.”⁸

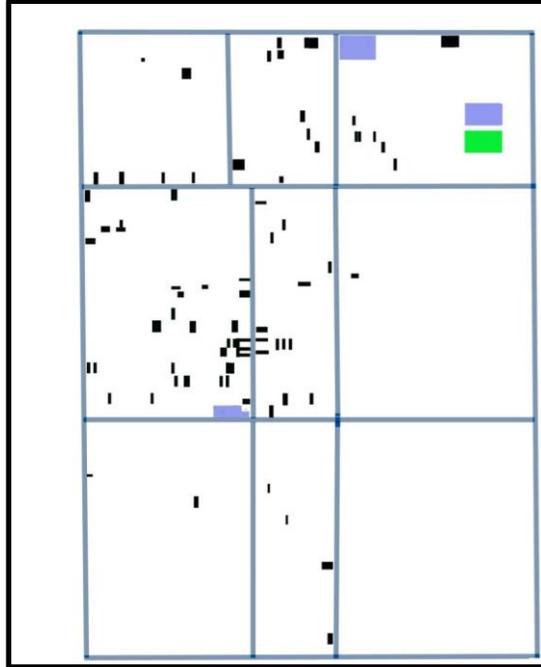
Unfortunately, the rate of Vancouver’s growth was outpacing available funds. In January 1904, the voters of Vancouver had approved \$150,000 to extend the sewer system and it was hoped that would be sufficient. However, for the provision of water, for example, the total number of water services for new properties in 1903 was budgeted at 600; by August 1904, the number for the first seven months of the year had already exceeded seven hundred with “a flood of applications ... still pouring in”. The Council committee had spent all its available funds and were overdrawn to the extent of \$12,000. A temporary halt to installations was required.⁹

Laying water mains was engineers’ and City labourers work. For much of the hard labour of brush clearing, stump removal, grading and rocking streets, and digging ditches, the City relied on the physical exertions of the chain gang. This gang was composed of short term offenders sentenced to a few days or a few weeks by the City Magistrate. They were often sailors or loggers, used to hard manual work and were generally selected for the work gang because of their strength. When the weather was fine, they were transported from the Powell Street Jail to wherever needed in a horse-drawn cart driven by the jailor, John Clough or his successor O’Grady. The City Engineer would have issued orders to have a road cleared from the brush, or some stumps taken out, and the chain gang would take care of it. They started around 8:30 in the morning, and took short breaks at 11am and 3pm. Once Clark Drive was opened south of First, it was the chain gang that started opening up 2nd and 3rd Avenues from Clark to about Woodland. They would also have been used for clean up when the City Engineer experimented in the neighbourhood by using a logging engine to clear streets and pile up the stumps and logs for burning.¹⁰

In September 1904, City Assessor George McSpadden reported that “building [activity] about Grand View and the East End is proportionately larger than any other section. Mr. W. Baxter and others are building out as far as Clark’s Park.” Application was also made to extend Park Drive south of First, and the Board of Works agreed to build a “trail suitable for wagons” as far as 4th Avenue.¹¹



And thus the neighbourhood started to grow. It was slow at first as there were still more desirable areas available closer to the city centre. The following map shows the development in the core of Grandview through 1905.¹²



What pushed things forward was the change in use of the interurban line and its inclusion in the city-wide streetcar system. The Vancouver Electric Car Co had been given rights to run streetcars along Park Drive way back in 1891, but had not taken up the option because the few Grandview families of the time could hop and off the interurban as needed. The first city streetcar in the neighbourhood was an extension of an existing city line in 1902 along Powell Street east to Victoria Drive, then one block farther east on Dundas Street to Semlin Drive. This certainly helped feed the growth of the northern-most sections of Grandview around Cedar Cove. By early 1904, there were rumours that before “long the electric cars, instead of going to Mount Pleasant on Westminster Avenue [Main Street], will be divided and every other one will go straight ahead from Granville Street on Hastings to Campbell Avenue then onto to Park Drive and over Ninth Avenue to Mount Pleasant; then back over Westminster Avenue forming another belt road similar to the present English Bay circuit.” It was said that Mr. Buntzen of the streetcar company had approved the expansion.¹³

By January 1905, agitation for the Park Drive streetcar was growing louder from both residents and speculators. As an important step toward that goal, the BCER appeared before the Board in August to propose double tracking the interurban lines on Venables Street and Park Drive. The Board approved the plan subject to an inspection by the Engineer which was successfully carried out the following week. By the end of the year, two new streetcar services had come into operation: one on “a completely new 1.62mile line which ran east from Main and Georgia Street (Harris then) to Vernon Drive, north to Frances Street, and east to Victoria Drive” and the Park Drive loop which linked Grandview to Main Street.¹⁴

As Conn & Ewert have written:

“Public transit was essential, accessible and affordable, and it provided a mobility to all levels of society that was unavailable until this time. Transit vehicles were the miracle machines of the age. They ran on the magic of electric power. They brought comfort and convenience to hard-working citizens, and their craftsmanship added a dash of luxury to everyday lives.”¹⁵

More important for our history, perhaps, they gave realtors yet another advantage with which to market Grandview. By early 1904, one particular realtor — Dow, Fraser & Co. — seemed to have cornered the market in Grandview and was offering hundreds of lots in the neighbourhood. During the next couple of years, the company had a regular advertising space in the *Vancouver World* newspaper, on page 3 each Saturday. They sang the praises of the neighbourhood they were boosting, and never failed to mention the value of the tram line.

“The property has splendid location with half-hour car service night and morning. The lots are practically cleared, with good soil, and the price is so low, less than \$2 a front foot, that from the way they are selling it is evident that Vancouverites appreciate good value in a coming residential part of the city.”

“Grand View — the prettiest situation in the city that affords you the advantages of tram service, pure air, lovely scenery, high and dry, above the fogs”

“Grand View, the recognized coming district of the city ... It has the tramline, and unsurpassed view of the entire city harbor and False Creek. High above the fogs it gets all the sunshine in winter time”¹⁶



At the same time as they were trumpeting the beauty of the district and the ease of commuting, Dow and the other early realtors focused much of their attention on the benefits of speculation:

“Buy lots in Grandview, they will make you money. The district is building up; the land is the cheapest anywhere in town.”

“Grandview on the Tram. The locality to invest in if you want quick returns. We are selling lots on this tramline for \$2 a foot.”

“Every buyer here is making money. There is a quick turnover, values steadily rising and development is rapidly taking place.”¹⁷

Dow, Fraser & Co. were good at what they did, and moved a great many lots. One of their best pitches combined the desire for a home and the possibility of profit. Headlined “The Sensational Development of Grand View on the Hill”, the ad went on:

Grandview “has attracted more attention than any section of our city the past few months. It is not speculation but rather bona fide investment that is marking its progress. Homesites are chosen with care by residents for building on. Corners are being bought by merchants with a view to establishing business in this growing healthy neighbourhood ... We will be pleased to show you over the ground or have a talk on Grand View and its many advantages; no bridges to cross; no steamer travel, just the ordinary every day up-to-date streetcar transportation.”¹⁸

Just a year later they doubled down on Grandview:

*“...We have absolute faith in it, so much so that we have opened a branch office at Grand View, 1117 Park Drive, near William Street.”*¹⁹

They were joined by many others, and by the end of 1906, with a proliferation of newspaper ads from realtors offering attractive deals, Grandview had become an integral part of Vancouver's renewed rush for growth. Grandview and Park Drive were swept up in the general surge of prosperity that had begun with the Klondike Rush and was sustained in the early years of the new century by the rapid development of the B.C. Interior and the prairie provinces. These developments were now in the process of driving Vancouver's population remarkably close to its boosters' boast that “in nineteen ten Vancouver then/ will have one hundred thousand men.”²⁰

The City Directory listings for the 1906-1907 years strongly indicate (and the 1911 Census would soon prove) that Grandview was filling up primarily with working class families, often recent immigrants from Great Britain, with a good admixture of merchants and junior professionals. As Jean Barman described it, Grandview “appealed to tradesmen, shopkeepers, and workers at nearby dockside industries.”²¹

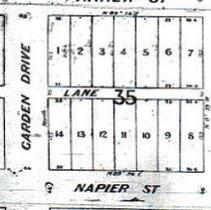
Mainly working class the neighborhood may have been, but fancy houses there would be and speculative boosters galore. Led by former City Assessor and Alderman George McSpadden, an Irish builder with a military bearing, John J. Miller, an Australian real estate magnate who wrote poetry, and former Alderman Edward Odium, a religious extremist and world-class scientist, a group of wealthy early landowners built “huge, walled and turreted mansions” for themselves in the blocks just east of the Drive, and briefly made a play for Grandview as a genteel up-market alternative to an increasingly stuffy West End. Miller's Queen Anne mansion with its massive stone retaining wall was one of the grandest homes in the city. And there can be little doubt that, in these years when Miller was putting together his syndicate of friends and associates to form the Vancouver Exhibition and negotiate the city's lease on Hastings Park, the traffic of influential and moneyed gentlemen through the Drive on their way to and from his house must have been considerable. But no matter how hard they tried to use their intricate social, commercial, financial, legislative and academic connections, they were simply no match for the two million dollars spent by the CPR on improving their Shaughnessy lands before a single house was built and the subsequent PR campaign. It was to be Angus Drive not Park Drive that would come to represent the epitome of desirable addresses in Vancouver.

Meanwhile, the realtors continued to speculate, and the “little people” continued to pour in. During a single day in September 1906, J.J. Miller sold \$5,000 worth of lots by auction. Many of those were sold as blocks, which were broken down into lots by other realtors. This ad from an East End broker was typical of the lands being offered for sale at the retail level:²²

Home Sites for Homeseekers

GRANDVIEW

Subdivision of new block right in the city. Only five minutes from car line and commanding a magnificent view of the city and harbor.



OUR PRICE

FROM

\$300.00

per lot up to

Half cash, balance 6 and 12 months

There are only 14 lots all told so act **AT ONCE**. Lots four blocks further east, are selling for from \$350 to \$400 right now.

FORBES MACKINLAY

625 Pender Street Phone B2084

The BCER continued to improve and expand the streetcar system which encouraged even more people to look at Grandview for their housing needs. In May 1907, the company announced their plans for a 15-minute service to the city limits, and realtors immediately noticed that

“demand has increased wonderfully ... people have been deterred from settling in this district on account of infrequent service. A regular half hour service did not appeal to them while the new service connecting the eastern part of the city with the downtown section by a direct route proves an attraction not heretofore considered. Working men who could not use the tram service with any ease are now calculating on leaving the crowded downtown sections where they have been living in somewhat crowded conditions and move to the hill in Grandview where an excellent site for a house can be obtained for \$700.”²³

Realtors reported there was “a decided movement in Grandview”, “steady demand”, and even “a boom.” One realtor claimed that “[w]ithout exception the sales have been for building purposes and not for speculation. However, the very same agent reported the following month that he had sold “a large number of lots” to “local investors and visitors from the east.” Quite a few buyers were said to be buying “two lots for building purposes.”²⁴

Grandview was rapidly becoming thickly populated, and local institutions of civic purpose were sure to follow. Robert McDonald has written that while the early “[r]eal estate boosters were primarily interested in profiting from the sale or improvement of land and worked towards the creation of a real estate market characterized by quick turnovers and increased property values” they also became “the leading advocate of the kind of business development that would broaden the community's service base and enhance the town's attractiveness to immigrants and capital.” They were, he writes, “the most active entrepreneurial group in the city.”²⁵

Prosperous businessmen were not far behind. As the City expanded and civic services could not keep up with the demand, the situation bred a measure of discontent. When Grandview was designated a separate

ward on January 1, 1904, the complainers and neighbourhood boosters had an institutional framework within which to demand attention. It was no surprise, then, that the Grandview Progress Association was formed soon after. Its organizing meeting took place on 20th May 1907 with developer George Miller elected Chairman, with Edward Odlum as secretary. J.J. Miller, Dr. Moody, and William Raine were other members. The meetings usually took place at Odlum's real estate office on the Drive. These were upper-middle-class professionals with the time to get involved., but they worked hard to improve the neighbourhood.²⁶

During that summer of 1907, the GPA was concerned with having the Harris Street tramline expanded eastwards. They passed motions to support the opening of Charles Street from Victoria to Lakewood, and they also asked City Council "to send a few men to put a trail through on 2nd Avenue from Park to Victoria." The GPA was also concerned with very local issues, such as William Miller's suggestion for an annual day during which Grandview residents would beautify the neighbourhood with trees and shrubs. That July, J.J. Miller gave a presentation in support of a new Second Narrows crossing.²⁷

That same summer, the "general prosperity was interrupted" when "a growing stringency in the money markets of the world began to be felt in Canada." The general stringency was caused by political problems in the Balkans which in turn had British financiers bringing their money home for safety. Vancouver's explosive growth had largely been financed with British money, and so the pullback was felt acutely in the city. Many people, not understanding the global nature of the finance system thought it was merely because BC and Vancouver had grown so fast that the financial markets simply "needed a breather." Businesses all over were shaken, and that winter the city was required to provide relief and shelter for the enormous numbers of men thrown out of work James Conley has noted that "of the twenty-five contractors listed in the city directory in 1905, only twelve were still in business in some form in 1910, suggesting that thirteen failed to weather the 1907-1908 recession."²⁸

Looking back, some would refer to it as the Panic of '07.²⁹ However, as we will discuss in the next chapter, this interruption was little more than a brief rest, a breathing space before Grandview boomed.

¹ "no such place": Thomas Neeland interview with Matthews, Vol 5, p.119; see Goad's maps in the National Archives Online collection; engineer's report: *Vancouver World* 1903 Jul 8, p.5; police beats: *Vancouver World* 1904 Mar 15, p.4; Vancouver City Directories, 1890-1903; real estate: *Vancouver World* 1904 Mar 4, p.1; Alderman Garrett: *News Advertiser* 1904 Mar 25, p.5, April 1, p.11.

² *Vancouver World* 1904 Aug 9, p.1

³ Norbert MacDonald, "A Critical Growth Cycle for Vancouver 1900-1914", in *BC Studies* 17 (Spring 1973), p.27

⁴ Eleanor Bartlett, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929" in *BC Studies* 51 (Autumn 1981), p.33

⁵ The breakup of the Bodwell Estate, for example, made available for development a wide strip of Clark Drive and the western edge of Grandview. Scores of these lots were auctioned by JJ Miller in three auctions between December 1905 and April 1906.

⁶ Debenture: *Vancouver World*, 1903 May 1, p.8; 4, p.8; *News-Advertiser* 1903 June 11, p. 9; *Highland Echo* 1962 Mar 1, p.3. A four-room brick addition was built in 1908 for a further \$24,500. First & Commercial: School Board Minutes 1903 June 15; the lots were DL 264a B63 Lots 13-24.

⁷ The story of the church and its brief history can be found at <http://grandviewheritagegroup.org/?p=2230>.

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- ⁸ 1903 request examples: Board of Works Minutes 1903 Feb 26, April 30, CVA, MCR-36 Roll 2; see May 1904 for repeat requests; Board of Works: *News Advertiser*, 1904 Apr 3, p.6; *Vancouver World* 1904 April 4, p.5
- ⁹ Sewer debenture: *Vancouver World* 1904 Jan 11, p.4, Jan 15, p.1; water service: *Vancouver World* 1904 Aug 11, p.3
- ¹⁰ Matthews, Vol 7, p.96-97; see also Edith Trites interview at Vol 5, p.68. The chain gang was eliminated in 1907; logging engine: *News Advertiser* 1905 Jan 6, p.2. The City Engineer declared the engine to be a practical and economical method, cutting the cost from 45c to 15c per foot length of 66' wide road. Image below is of unknown provenance.
- ¹¹ McSpadden quoted in *Vancouver World* 1904 Sep 30, p.1; "wagon trail": *Vancouver World* 1904, Aug 23, p.3; Sep 2, p.6; Board of Works Minutes, 1 Sep 1904, CVA, MCR-36 Roll 2
- ¹² In each of the maps in this chapter the blue lines are major roads: the outer rectangle is made by Clark, Hastings, Nanaimo, and Broadway. The north-south roads are Commercial (left) and Victoria. The east-west roads are Venables (upper) and 1st Avenue.
- ¹³ "rumours": *Vancouver World* 9 Mar 1904, p.6; "Buntzen": *News Advertiser* 1904 May 1, p.6
- ¹⁴ "agitation": Ewert 1986, p.61-62; "double track": Board of Works Minutes, 3 Aug 1905 and 17 Aug 1905, CVA, MCR-36 Roll 2; extensions: Ewert 1986, p.66
- ¹⁵ Heather Conn & Henry Ewert, "*Vancouver's Glory Years: Public Transit 1890-1915*" (Whitecap, Vancouver, 2003), p.94
- ¹⁶ The three ads are from *Vancouver World* 1904 Mar 9, Aug 24, and 1905 Jan 23
- ¹⁷ The "Lots in Grandview" image is from an ad in *Vancouver World* 1905 Sept 22; the three text ads are from *Vancouver World* 1905 Jan 7; Jan 16, and Oct 12
- ¹⁸ *Vancouver World* 1905 Mar 6
- ¹⁹ *Vancouver World* 1906 Feb 10
- ²⁰ See Bruce MacDonald, "*Visual Vancouver*" (Vancouver, 1992) for the city's growth in this period; this early stage of second growth is tracked through the listings in the "*Henderson's B.C. Directory*" volumes for 1903-1907.
- ²¹ Jean Barman, "*Vancouver Past: Essays In Social History*" (UBC, 1986), p.101
- ²² Miller's auction: *Vancouver World* 1906 Sept 15, p.2; ad is from *Vancouver World* 1907 July 6, p.10
- ²³ *Vancouver World* 1907 May 11
- ²⁴ *News Advertiser* 1906 Mar 11; *Vancouver World* 1907 May 11, p.21, June 8, p.13, June 15, July 13, p.11
- ²⁵ Robert McDonald, "*City Building in the Canadian West: A Case Study of Growth in Early Vancouver, 1886-1893*" in *BC Studies* 43 (Autumn 1979), p.14. McDonald's study of the links between finance, real estate and politics in Vancouver is a vital source for this period.
- ²⁶ Grandview Progress Association Minutes 1907-1910, CVA, AM190, Odlum Fonds, Box 513-D-10 folder 1; See William C. McKee, "*History of the Vancouver Park System, 1886-1929*", MA thesis in History, University of Victoria, 1976, p.80, for a similar view of civic activism. It is also important to note that individual property owners had been badgering the Board of Works since as early as March 1901.
- ²⁷ "tramline": GPA Minutes, 18 June 1907; Charles Street: GPA Minutes, 1907 June 4, July 2, 17, Sep 24; 2nd Avenue: GPA Minutes, 1907 July 30; William Miller: GPA Minutes, 1907 June 18; JJ Miller: GPA Minutes, 30 July 1907
- ²⁸ "interrupted": Bartlett 1981, p.33; "breather": quotation in *Westward Ho* 1907 Sept, p.3; contractors data: James Conley, "*Open Shop Means Closed To Union Men*" in *BC Studies* 91-82 (Autumn-Winter 1991), p.132
- ²⁹ "panic": *News Advertiser* 1910 Jan 1