

Mr. Jake Grauer
976 Eden Cres., Delta, B.C.

Interviewed: April 10, 1973.

"I was born on the family farm on Sea Island on February 23, 1902, the seventh child in a family of nine. I was christened John Jacob Grauer, my father's namesake and nicknamed Jake.

Father and Mother first met in Seattle, Washington, where they were married in 1885, and almost immediately migrated to British Columbia.

Father had visited parts of British Columbia, particularly the Gulf Islands on previous occasions purchasing livestock. He was so impressed with the areas in British Columbia he saw that he decided to make Canada his permanent home as soon as opportunity permitted.

He arrived in what was then called Gastown with his lovely bride of 19 years, in 1886, the year of the great fire when most of Gastown was destroyed.

In July 1886 Gastown became incorporated and renamed Vancouver. History attests to the rapidity with which the city was rebuilt and in subsequent years developed and expanded along Burrard Inlet and the banks of the North Arm of the Fraser River East to New Westminster.

Vancouver with its backdrop of snow clad mountains, its miles of rugged shoreline and waterways, is not only one of the most beautiful cities in the world, but commercially is the terminus of three railroads, two of which are transcontinental, one of the finest harbours in the world, but also by sea and air is the

Canadian Gateway to the Orient and South Pacific countries.

My father was a butcher by trade and shortly after his arrival in Vancouver he founded his own butcher shop on Main Street.

He leased a farm on the north-east part of Sea Island in 1890 on which he grazed and fattened livestock to market through his butcher shops.

There was no bridge across the Fraser River connecting Sea Island and the mainland at that time. Access to the Island was by boat and scow only. However there was a cable across the river from our farm to the north shore approximately at the end of what is now Hudson Street. A scow large enough to carry a team of horses and wagon was attached to cables and by a mechanical device you could manually crank or wind your outfit across the river.

Soon a bridge was built to replace the cable setup at the same location, and my father's headquarters were permanently established on the farm on Sea Island. Following the Eburne bridge, a bridge was also built across the Middle Arm or Moray Channel of the Fraser River connecting Sea Island and Lulu Island. Father purchased the farm at Eburne and became an owner in place of a lessee. This was about 1890.

Over a period of years he purchased additional farms on Sea Island. Also a section of farmland bordering Boundary Bay in the Delta Municipality.

When our family first settled on Sea Island a great portion of the land was covered with bush particularly along the sloughs, ditches and low swampy areas. The bush consisted largely of willows, ~~tamarack~~, alder and wild berry bushes, and bullrushes, etc. There was a substantial growth of large fir and some cedar

trees particularly on the West portion of the Island and along the river banks. Wild flowers of many varieties grew in abundance. Our meadows produced mushrooms by the bucketful.

The sloughs and swampy areas were excellent breeding grounds for muskrats, frogs, lizards and all sorts of insects and slimy creatures. My brother and I trapped muskrats because we received a ten cent bounty from the Richmond Municipality because muskrats burrowed holes in the dykes and were considered a menace. I am referring to my brother Carl who later became very active in the operation of Frasea Farm.

Many species of birds and fowl inhabited the Island in both winter and summer. In addition to the small birds who were the songsters, sports birds were present in large numbers. These included wild ducks, geese, cranes, quail, partridge, pheasants, snipe, bobwhites, whippoor-wills and crows and blackbirds galore.

When my father built the family home at the south approach to the new bridge at Eburne he provided space for a butcher shop in the front portion of the home. The meat business expanded and in due course butcher shops were established at Steveston and Vancouver. The shop in Vancouver was located on Granville Street on part of the present Hudson's Bay store site. Father also built his own slaughter house on the farm. In conjunction with the slaughtering business hundreds of hogs were fed from the by-products, together with farm grown potatoes and grains.

These were the horse and buggy days and it was all hard manual work. Meat deliveries were made on Sea Island, Lulu Island and the Marpole Area by horse and cart or buggy. Meat was hauled to Vancouver daily by horse team and wagon leaving the farm at

about 4 o'clock in the morning. No blacktop - all muddy rough roads in the winter and dust in the summer. No refrigeration - making storage of fresh products difficult.

My mother was at the hub of all activities in those days. Her routine activities included supervision and participation in the domestic work, cooking for hired help and family, and operation of the meat shop at the front of our home. Fortunately she was a strong healthy woman. She could lift a quarter of beef off the hook, throw it on the block and cut it up into its component parts much to the delight of the customers waiting to be served.

Mother was a pioneer in the fullest meaning of the word. Her loving disposition and tremendous energy left a lasting influence on her family of seven sons and two daughters, also the church, and the community. She retired and lived in Vancouver with her daughters where she passed away fully compus mentus at the grand age of 96 years in the year 1963. Her whole married life of 77 years were spent on the farm and in Vancouver.

At the turn of the century the fish industry was all important in British Columbia. B.C. salmon were unsurpassed in quality and flavour anywhere in the world. The Fraser River was literally filled with these delicious fish. Fish canneries were in operation in large numbers along the shores and on the islands of the North channel of the Fraser. Still larger canneries were located at Steveston, Terra Nova and Ladner along the main channel of the Fraser. Hundreds of gillnet fishermen were everywhere to be seen. It was a sight to behold to see the river literally dotted with fish boats and their long nets strung across the width of the river

As I recall when a boy the climate in the lower Fraser Valley area was more extreme than in latter years. There was more and thicker foggy weather and more severe cold spells with heavy snowfalls during the winter months.

I can remember the North Arm of the Fraser freezing over solid from Iona Island at the mouth of the Fraser River to New Westminster. This happened on several occasions. Hundreds of people skated on the river. One year in particular the horse and wagon traffic used the river ice to travel on in preference to the deep drifted snowy roads. Also at times the bridges were declared unsafe and closed to traffic as a result of the ice jamming against the bridge piling.

The bridge tender, named Mr. Burrell, was in charge of both Sea Island and Lulu Island bridges. Horses were not allowed to trot across the bridges and by law must proceed at a walk only. Supposedly horses going at a gate faster than a walk made the bridge vibrate and shake too much. It was the bridge tenders duty to enforce this law. Mr. Burrell lived in a one-room shack located on our farm and was a special friend of mine and my young brothers. He was very kind to us. It was his duty to open up the span or draw on the two bridges to allow the many boats through towing logs and scows of gravel and so forth up and down the river. This span opening was done by hand, a very slow performance and was repeated many times a day as boat traffic on the river was quite heavy. Mr. Burrell passed away at 88 years of age. His successor as bridge tender was Mr. Edward Thomas whose son Stewart was for many years a member of the Richmond Municipal Council.

Ted Thomas was the last of the old timers to operate the bridge mechanism manually. Electrically driven apparatus opened and closed the bridge span to allow boats to pass through with modern speed and convenience thereafter.

Farmers on Sea Island and Lulu Island were obliged to build dykes along the foreshore of their farms to avoid flooding from the Fraser River particularly during the great freshet or spring runoff when warm weather melted the snow in the mountain areas.

At an early age I recall arising in the morning amazed to see our whole farm under about four feet of water. The dykes had broken and water from the turbulent Fraser rushed in and inundated the whole Island. Similar flooding occurred before and in subsequent years.

During this particular flood a substantial number of our sheep were drowned. Hundreds more would have shared a similar fate had not a fleet of fishermen in their boats rowed across our pasture fields and rescued the remaining animals. c1908

Flooding of Sea Island was eliminated when the Richmond Municipal Administration finally had a permanent dyke built around the whole island. In modern times pumps were installed to assist in draining the land. Our farms were all underdrained with miles of drains made from cedar lumber which emptied into open ditches which in turn drained into the Fraser River. These were all dug by hand with spade and shovel.

For me education commenced in 1908 when I became six years of age. I attended the little two-room red schoolhouse at the corner of what was later called McDonald and Grauer Roads. It was approximately a two mile walk down this wet muddy road full

of ruts and holes. How we kids welcomed summer when we could go barefoot in the soft powdery dust on the roads.

Later the Sea Island school was permanently closed and we students were transferred to the Bridgeport School on Lulu Island. A short time later my parents and my two sisters and we four younger boys moved to Vancouver. There we attended the Model School and I later received my Matric Diploma from King Edward High School.

At this time my plans were to continue my studies in technology and become an electrical engineer. However, my father with his tremendous faith in the land finally persuaded me to attend Agricultural College and become a farmer.

After all the love of animals and the farms were indeed close to my heart and I enjoyed my boyhood days on the farm beyond words. However my decision to pursue a career as a farmer emanated from a much deeper reason than simply my own sentiments.

I was very grateful to my parents for the love and care I received from them during my boyhood years. I wanted to indicate my gratitude to them every way possible.

They were Christians and by word and deed instilled in me during my youth the Christian principles that meant so much to me as the years rolled by and problems and responsibilities became more pronounced. Consequently, at that time of decision, I felt that I should accede to my father's wishes and assist him in expanding his agricultural enterprises on a more scientific basis as soon as I could become involved.

My schooling was completed at the Oregon State Agricultural College and I returned to the Sea Island farm in 1920 and went to

work. At that time my two oldest brothers, George and Gus, were operating the farms.

While our farms were of the finest anywhere, composed of wonderful delta clay loam and very suitable for mixed farming, nevertheless because of continuous cropping in the past years they were greatly depleted of fertility and noxious weeds abounded. To regain the fertility and texture of the soil and control weeds, it was decided to pursue a diversified farming program. The basis of the program was a substantial herd of dairy cattle and adherence to proper modern farming methods. These included rotation of crops cultivation, use of fertilizers, lime and barn manure. By following this program, fertility was gradually restored and weeds disappeared.

A foundation herd of purebred Holstein-Friesian cattle were obtained and the first dairy unit was established by building a 50 cowbarn in 1922.

In 1927 my father formed our family company and thereafter our entire farming operations were consolidated under the name of J. Grauer & Sons Ltd. Each member of the family held shares in the company with the exception of brother R.M. Grauer who was firmly established in his own grocery and meat business and did not wish to join with the family organization. Four brothers and two sisters became actively engaged in the company's operations headed by father as President. The two youngest brothers received excellent educations and were very successful in professional careers. Both graduated from the University of British Columbia. Albert or Dal was a Rhodes Scholar and eventually became President of B.C. Electric. Fred received his Doctorate from the University of Edinburgh and practised surgery in Vancouver after serving in World War II.

The establishing of a dairy herd presented a milk marketing problem. Not being successful in negotiating a satisfactory contract to sell our milk to the then existing milk distributors in Vancouver, we decided to market our milk direct to the consumer from our farms.

Initially we sold milk in its natural raw form as the City of Vancouver ordinances did not permit milk to be sold from pasteurizing plants beyond the city limits. The Fraser River separated our dairy from the city limits.

To meet the demand for a rich creamy milk we established a Jersey herd of cattle in addition to the Holstein herd. Only the highest quality animals for both type and milk production were selected. Over a period of years a considerable number of foundation stock were imported direct from the Isle of Jersey in the English Channel where the Jersey breed originated.

Largely through natural increase and a few select purchases the two herds increased to approximately 300 Holsteins and 200 Jerseys. The herd was limited to approximately 500 head until it was finally dispersed in 1954. Surplus stock was sold for breeding purposes and gave us a very rewarding income.

Each year a show herd of both breeds was exhibited at leading exhibitions in Canada and Western United States with excellent results. Numerous trophies and awards were received and our herds became quite famous in the dairy cattle world.

With the favourable publicity we received from the show ring winnings and the high production records made by our cattle, we enjoyed a steady demand for our stock for breeding purposes. Besides the Canadian market an excellent export trade was developed

particularly in the United States and Mexico. However sales were also made in Australia, South America and the Orient.

Prior to 1925 the major crops grown were hay, oats, wheat, barley and a small acreage of potatoes and mangels, mostly sold as cash crops. Prior to around 1925 all the farm work was done with horse drawn equipment. Some sheep, swine and beef cattle were raised. We bred and raised many sheep, swine and horses, including riding horses. My two daughters rode and exhibited their registered Palominos winning a number of champion prizes.

As the dairy herds expanded, the cropping program changed very drastically. From hereon the farming operations were mechanized. Tractors and mechanical equipment came into being.

The crops grown were suitable for dairy cattle and milk production. Large acreages of clover was grown for the silos. Green clover was also cut daily and fed to the animals in preference to pasturing the fields, as we found this a more economical method.

Legume hay, victory oats, silage and mangels were all fed to the dairy cattle and marketed in the form of milk.

With the fertility of the land restored additional crops such as potatoes, peas and red clover seed were sold as cash crops. Peas were sold to the Canadian Canneries in Vancouver for canning and freezing.

In 1936 our beloved father passed away at the age of 76 years. He was the first casualty in our family group and his death was indeed difficult to accept.

1938 proved to be quite an eventful year in the progress of our business. Richmond Municipality was included in the Vancouver Metropolitan Health area. This automatically authorized us to

pasteurize milk in Richmond and market it in Vancouver. We immediately built and equipped a very modern milk processing plant on the farm and we were in the pasteurizing milk business with great enthusiasm. A subsidiary company was formed to separate the milk processing and distributing business from the farming operations as they were two entirely different types of businesses.

The subsidiary was named Frasea Farms Ltd. The name being an original one and was composed by using portions of Fraser River and Sea Island, or where the Fraser flowed into the Sea. Frasea was also used as a prefix in naming all of our purebred stock.

Our dairy was unique compared to the dairies in operation at the time and with whom we were to compete. Owning our own herds and processing our own milk through our own plant straight from the farm direct to the consumer's home by our own delivery units was not only ideal, but very attractive from a sales and advertising point of view.

The proximity of our farms and dairy to the market was of tremendous public relations and advertising value. Consequently, we encouraged school classes to visit the farm. They were treated to dairy products and cookies after being escorted through the dairy and barns. We had numerous visits from customers, women's organizations, Public Health and Nursing groups, stock judging classes - local and from the State of Washington. On one occasion we hosted the Vancouver Junior Board of Trade for luncheon in the loft of one of our barns. Basically these visits were educational. Factual literature concerning our products and the farm and dairy operations were distributed. Our motto was visitors always welcome.

1938 had to be the greatest milestone in my life. I married a lassie from Glasgow, Scotland - Margaret Downie. We went to California on our honeymoon. This was the first real holiday I had since 1920.

War clouds were beginning to form now and Bang! in 1939 our country was faced with world war number two. As the war progressed like most everyone in business, we were confronted with many vexing problems. It was not only a war of arms, but also a war of food. Farmers were called on to go all out in producing food by any means and utilizing every foot of tillable soil. Pork in particular was in great demand for export to Britain.

By now our milk sales were increasing nicely and we were obliged to augment our milk supply by purchasing milk from other dairy farmers in Richmond. We churned and sold butter and also cottage cheese.

After studying the hog raising problem, we formulated a plan. We decided to build a commercial hog feeding barn on the farm. On a ration of milk by-products from our dairy, cull potatoes and farm grown grains, we were successful in marketing hundreds of excellent Grade A Yorkshire hogs each year throughout the war. The scarcity of farm help during the war was very serious. Tires and gas were rationed severely. Finally new trucks and used trucks for milk delivery were simply not obtainable.

At this period there were no supermarkets as we have today and consequently very little milk was sold through stores. Hence home delivery of milk was very important and the children must receive their milk. Our farm being located so adjacent to our market, it occurred to us that perhaps milk delivery by horse and

wagon may prove feasible and thus relieve the milk delivery quandary. We had oats and hay but no gas. Three wagon routes were started on a trial basis and proved practical. By the end of the war we had 13 horse drawn wagon routes in operation. Number one problem was to find men who could drive a horse.

Part of our farm was used for military purposes and maneuvers during the war. The Vancouver Civic Airport on Sea Island was operated by the Department of National Defence under the War Measures Act. In the post war period the Sea Island Airport was purchased by the Federal Government and expanded to include most of the land on Sea Island. In 1954 most of our farm on Sea Island was expropriated by the Government of Canada to be included in this airport expansion.

It was at this juncture that the members of the family company decided to sell the entire assets of the company including land, herds and milk business. The sale was accomplished in that year.

So terminated the saga of one of Richmond's pioneer family farm enterprises, which participated in the early history and development of the Municipality of Richmond for almost 70 years."

D. Cleland