

DR. BENJAMIN BUTLER MARR, 1882 - 1939
(Fort Langley, B.C. 1907 - 1928)

Dr. Marr was born in Kings County, New Brunswick, August 10th, 1882, and educated at Sussex N.B. Grammar School and Tufts Medical School Boston, Massachusetts. In 1907 he left his home outside of Sussex and headed West with the intention of practising his profession somewhere in British Columbia. It was in the fall of that year that he visited Fort Langley for the first time.

He arrived via the C.P.R. on the North side of the river and ferried over with Johnny Taylor who had the mail contract, arriving at Towle's Hotel after dark. He often told the story of his first night in the village. After supper he went for a walk. Stepping down from the hotel verandah he turned left and soon came upon a "bridge" which he started to cross, but stopped abruptly when he noticed the stars reflecting in the water just ahead of him. He was at the edge of the wharf looking into the Fraser River. When he eventually established himself in Fort Langley, one of the first things he did as an involved citizen trying to develop his community was to push for the installation of street lights. Electricity was brought to Fort Langley in 1910, and the village was the first community outside of the city to have lighted streets.

Dr. Marr sailed for two summers with the Reverend Dr. John Antle of the Columbia Coast Mission, and helped him to establish several small hospitals at remote ports on the coast. These brought hope and relief to areas that had been thus far ignored. Constantly exploring, he was still undecided on where he would like to settle. He province was opening up rapidly as settlers poured in, medical men were in high demand, the opportunities were almost unlimited in any part of British Columbia. Dr Marr relieved several doctors for a short time, spending some time in the Kootenays, and at Corbin and Fernie in the Crowsnest Pass area.

The second transcontinental Canadian railroad, the Canadian Northern, began construction along the south side of the Fraser River in 1910. The Engineer-in-chief responsible for the building of the section between Hope and Vancouver was a twenty-six year old man named William George Swan, a person who had great impact on many developments within the province for the next sixty years. Swan advertised for a doctor needed to look after the large construction crews working in the valley. Dr. Marr replied, and settled down to begin his practise in Fort Langley in 1910.

The years that Dr. Marr spent in Fort Langley, his medical achievements, and his First War service, have been documented elsewhere. What may not be recorded is his involvement in his community. He was greatly interested in the history of Fort Langley -the first settlement on the coast of British Columbia. On his return from the Great War in 1919 he undertook an attempt to preserve the Fort at Langley, and a year or so later he formed and became chairman of the Fort Preservation Committee. This committee worked for the preservation and restoration of the old Hudson Bay Company fort built in 1840, the place where James Douglas proclaimed the birth of the crown colony of British Columbia. ^{Nov 1958} The birthplace of British Columbia. The one remaining building of this historic structure was now abandoned and in disrepair.

Through his efforts three acres of the Mavis Estates, which had fallen heir to these lands, were obtained. One acre was gifted to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and the remaining two were given to the municipality. At the time Dr. Marr owned the old Hudson Bay Co. farm below the hill, and also the property just across the road from the remaining fort building. A large portion of that land is now within the palisaded portion of the reconstructed fort. With the support of Judge F.W. Howay, Western director of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, he helped to organize a Centennial celebration on May 2nd 1925.(ref. correspondence U.B.C. special collections, Howay) On this date a cairn and a commemorative tablet were unveiled.

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It was this fore-sighted action that saved the old building and secured the land, making the subsequent restoration possible. The Fort Preservation Committee disbanded in 1930, care of the fort being passed to the Native Sons of B.C. In 1958, Her Royal Highness the Princess Margaret, sister of the Queen, did the ribbon cutting to officially open the museum to the public launching Fort Langley into the Canadian National Historic Parks system.

Dr. Marr was one of the more active members of the Fort Langley Improvement Society. This organization was originally fostered by, "The Farmers Institute," and "The Womens Institute." Dr. Marr was a prime organizer and served as a director. Almost everyone in the village and in the surrounding area belonged to this organization that worked to maintain the liveability of the community. The annual dues were \$2.00, payable in cash or kind or by a days work. A man with a team of horses received a three year membership for his days labour, a year for himself and another \$1.00 from each of his two horses. As ten years of credits entitled one to a life membership almost everyone in Fort Langley, young and old alike, were Life Members of the Fort Langley Improvement Society.

Most people turned out for the spring and fall work bees, everyone could make some contribution, and the lunch at the hall was a great event. The road and sidewalks were raked, the school-yard pruned and planted, the village hall painted and its grounds trimmed, fences were repaired, trees planted, and sometimes new goal posts erected on the playing field. Dr. Marr assigned the tasks, George Young kept the books, and everyone had a good time.

It was these public spirited men and women who built a new Fort Langley Community Hall in 1930-31. It still stands today, one of the finest in the valley in its time, a great source of community pride, and a monument to the people of Fort Langley.

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The Doctor purchased the old Hudson Bay Co. farm after the war, stocked it with cattle and arranged for a resident family to look after things. About 1923 he disposed of most of his original herd and bought Guernseys. These were fine animals. Some of them had come from the Isle of Guernsey, others had been bought in Eastern Canada, and the rest from local sources. Cattle from this herd were regularly shown at exhibitions and their offspring did much to improve the blood lines and the quality of the cattle in the valley. Through this involvement Dr. Marr became active in the local Fair Boards, the Fraser Valley Milk Producers Association, the Dykeing Commission, and other farm oriented organizations.

Dr. Marr was proud of his wartime contribution. He was the first man in Langley to offer his services and enlisted in August 1914. On his return, he was made the first President of the Langley branch of the Great War Veterans Association, and when the Canadian Legion was formed he became the first President of the Langley branch. He instigated the inauguration of memorial services in honour of the fallen soldiers. He was the mover and principle organizer in the erection of the cenotaphs that stand in the Murrayville and Fort Langley cemeteries, among the first to be built in Canada. Also achieved by his branch of the Canadian Legion during his term of office was the renaming of roads after those who gave their lives in France and elsewhere in the service of their country.

Dr. Marr and his friend of many years, Archie Payne conceived this idea of road naming. Archie was, in the war, a lieutenant with a very fine record. He followed Dr. Marr and became the second President of the Langley branch of the Canadian Legion, he was for a number of years Municipal Clerk and eventually a highly esteemed Magistrate. The two of them had a get-together in France during the closing months of the war, and they had decided that if either of them got back to Langley they would try to have the names of Langley roads changed to honour those

Langley residents who had fallen in battle. This was done. At dozens of road corners three post enclosures were erected, one post was about eight foot tall and made into a cross. On this cross was a small metal plaque with the soldier's name, the location and date of his death, and over this in bold letters, the new name of the road. A maple tree was planted in the enclosure. Unfortunately most of these trees were planted much too close to what were then little more than wagon roads and subsequent development has forced their removal, but some still grow. There are at this writing (1981) three of these maples on Glover road, the main street in Fort Langley.

Dr. Marr was a Freemason, a member of Eureka Lodge AF & AM, and he belonged to the Langley Elks Lodge. In both these and other organizations, his wisdom and judgement were admired and respected. For a short time he was also President of the Langley Conservative Association, but in this his judgement must have been suspect for he was more on the losing side of political battles than on the winning. However, he enjoyed politics and was an outspoken free enterpriser.

In 1928 Dr. Marr sold both the farm and his home in Fort Langley and moved to a new home he had built on the hill East of Langley Prairie. Here he lived until his death in 1939. In his fifty-seven years he had given freely of himself in the interests of his community and its people, a good village doctor, a leader, and a highly respected citizen. He lies buried in the churchyard in Fort Langley.