

WELCOME TO VANCOUVER #2

In the Spirit of Things

Ah, the days slip by so quickly. My apology for this one having taken so long to assemble. I had a particular idea and the culmination has taken much longer than I had anticipated.

There are several roads here called "heritage roads." They wind there way through this area and follow the paths used by Native Americans and early settlers of what is now Clark County. I happen to live near two such roads; St. Johns Boulevard and Fourth Plain Road. The first heads north the second east and west. St. Johns runs all the way up to Ridgefield but our story is short of that.

On the way north the road runs through and around what is now called 78th Street, once a wooded area feared by the locals and forbidding enough to be known as "The Black Forest." While lacking any written recollections, folklore is replete with legends of riders lost in the forest who were guided through the trees to safety by a man who disappeared at the forest's edge. The natives of the Chinook Tribe called it the Guardian Spirit.

Alas, the forest is no more and the Guardian Spirit, no longer needed, has gone as well. But to listen to the old timers here spirit involvement in the area has gone on since then, most recently with the tale of a different spirit who appeared years later.

Clement Gridley, Physician & Surgeon leaned back in his chair in the study of his house at 5th and Rendal Streets with a contented sigh. The Northwest Territories had been good to him After graduating from Medical College of Virginia he decided he would seek his fortune in the new areas being opened up in the Great Northwest.

Clement wanted to serve in an area that needed physicians and delightedly gave up the comforts of the established cities of Pittsylvania and even Norfolk, both places where he had been offered an adequate position and more. No, instead he had ventured out reliant on his own trust in fate. He had landed in the Washington Territory and the burgeoning town of Vancouver. And so far the fates had been good to him.

His practice had grown over the past 23 years. He had full privileges at St. Fidels Hospital and had patients in town and rural and even in settlements as far as five miles away. Until recently navigating the northern areas had been difficult. About five years ago a concerted effort was made and bridges now spanned the culverts and washes that before forbade wheeled transport and made horseback slow. And with the better roads a settlement was growing. . . as was his list of patients.

It was a cold and grey November day. Typical for the Northwest this time of year, the weather had been tenuous all day. The sky darkened far more than the setting sun should have allowed and the cloud faucets opened. It seemed like buckets of water were descending when

he opened the door to see, drenched to the skin, Maggie, the eldest daughter of the Thomas's. She shoved a paper into his hand.

The vet had told him that morning that his horse had pulled a muscle and would need rest for a week. He stared at the message at the message that had just been delivered. In hurried scrawl it read, "The baby. Come quick."

Clement looked at the girl and said, "Run to the livery and tell Mr. Johansen I need a horse and buggy now. Emergency! I will be there in 20 minutes." He arrived at the stables just as Hugo Johansen was finishing. "It's a horrid night, Doc." he said as he lit the kerosene lantern and hung it on the left side of the carriage for guidance. "Careful, now," he said as the doctor climbed up. "Time is of the essence, my friend," Clement replied as he loaded his bag onto the seat, took the reins, and headed into the night.

The roads leading from Vancouver were never as good outside the town as in and soon the navigation demanded the utmost attention. He urged his horse to go as quickly as it could but between the pouring rain pelting his face and the lantern being poor for lighting the way he was having difficulty seeing the road. The urgency of the situation caused him to perhaps use the whip a bit more than wise.

78th Street is still an area of low lying areas and wetlands. And who knows if the shadows of the Black Forest were there on that night as well when Clement Gridley, Physician & Surgeon, missed a bridge and drove his frantic horse and himself into a rain swollen culvert and drowned. That was about 100 years ago. Since then and as recently as a few years back people living along St. Johns have reported seeing a horse and buggy with a lantern on the side going down the road and then disappearing. But only on a night that is cold, and dark, and wet. And only there where first there was a forest trail.

Recollection can cloud and perhaps change the past and what might have been the facts. But the accuracy of the details would still not diminish the subject, which, in this case, concerns a mayor who went missing and a stranger who disappears while crossing the Columbia River Bridge.

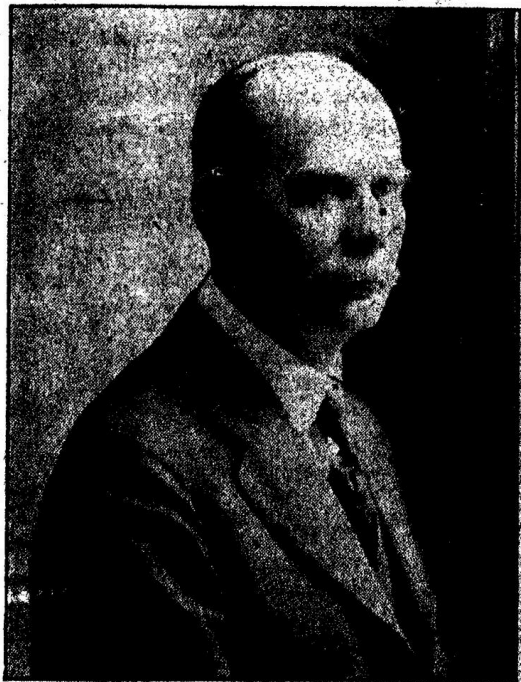
In the days of World War I aircraft were made primarily of wood. Spruce was the preferred wood. And therein was the problem. Spruce has a tendency to grow with a crooked grain and aircraft production required no more than 20 inches of deflection in the 20 to 24 foot length beams needed for the wings. So strong was the need that the U.S. Army took over the old polo grounds at Fort Vancouver and built the "Vancouver Cut Up Plant," the largest government-run sawmill in the history of the United States and staffed it with the Spruce Production Division. It was also the largest sawmill in the world. Lumbermen were recruited for the specific duty. There was even a railroad built into the Olympic National Forest for the harvesting and transportation of the massive spruce there.

The war effort brought thousands of recruits to Fort Vancouver. In 1917 a regiment of engineers and the 44th Infantry Regiment were assigned for overseas. By mid-1918 there were about 9,500 men at the fort and its ranks rose to 11,000. The Cut Up Plant had a cadre of 5,000 at the plant and in the forests.

Saloons and brothels populated both sides of the Columbia River and were frequented by the soldiers. Businesses were coming to Vancouver and commercial traffic between the two cities was causing major congestion as it strained the limited forms of transport. Passengers from Portland could take an electric streetcar as far as Hayden Island, mid-river, but then had to board a ferry to reach Vancouver. The military, in an effort to appease, the city built a Red Cross Building and Serviceman's Club in 1918.

The Great War, as it was known, ended in November of 1918. It was considered a time of promise and Vancouver began to see itself connected to the interior and as far south as California. It began considering itself a commercial center for the Northwest as ships plied the Columbia River. And although there was great industrial prosperity there was also a movement to organize workers and a strong fear of Communism. Tensions ran high.

The anti-communism sentiment and "redbaiting" began during WWI and continued on strong after the war's end. The Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) was founded on June 27, 1905 in Chicago, and by the second decade of the century has reached the Seattle area. Vancouver schools quit teaching German during the war and in 1919 established "Anarchy and Sabotage" statutes, primarily at the urging of the timber industry and commercial businesses as an effort to stop the I.W.W.



G. R. PERCIVAL

It was in this time that Grover Reed Percival flourished. He had come from Ohio in 1902 with his wife and two children. According to some he arrived and set up a legal practice. Others say he opened an insurance office. By 1917 he was a member of the Vancouver City Council and highly regarded for his ability to recruit businesses to the city. When the acting mayor resigned in 1917 to seek employment in Oregon the council made Percival the acting mayor. Percival handily won election in 1918 beating his opponent by a large margin.

Vancouver was seeing prosperity it had never seen before and Percival was a part of the reason. He, along with business man and mayor John P. Kiggins, and former newspaper publisher Robert Lewis "Lloyd" DuBois worked with their counterparts in Portland in 1912 to set plans for a bridge across the Columbia. They passed bond measures of

\$500,000 for Vancouver and \$1,500,000 for Portland. Construction started in 1915. When finished in February of 1917, it was the first automobile bridge to cross the Columbia and only the second bridge to ever span the river. By 1920 Vancouver began to bill itself as the "Automobile Port of Call" for the Northwest because of the 5000 cars a day that would cross the bridge.

On October 17, 1920, Percival told his wife that he was going to go for a long walk around the town, as was his custom. When he did not return by evening his wife sounded the alarm. Some say he wandered north of town and was seen returning. Some say he was seen walking through town and tipping his hat to the ladies. There were reports that he had been seen crossing the Columbia on the bridge he helped secure. The following day 300 businessmen and fellow citizens went out and combed the town from the river and north. Then the river was searched. Bodies were found downstream on the Columbia but Percival was not found.

Over the next few weeks his sons and friends responded to every lead they could get but always came up empty handed. Then a month after his disappearance a hunter found a man hanging from a tree on Hayden Island.

Some sources say that Percival was in good spirits and his business was doing well. Others say a wrongful death lawsuit against the city and failing health in a business downturn had been vexing him for weeks. Each report stresses it's accuracy.

According to the sheriff's report, Percival was found having hung himself with his own handkerchief. He left no note and made no communication about committing suicide. But considering that he had his wallet and jewelry on him the hanging, though hinted as possibly political, was ruled suicide and not investigated.

It was not long thereafter that reports began to come in about a tall, dark figure of a man dressed in a long coat and a hat who could be seen crossing the bridge. . . and disappearing about halfway across, above Hayden Island. The reports were recorded up through the 1950's and he became known as the Interstate Bridge Ghost.

There is an occasional rumour of the tall, dark stranger but it has been years since the missing mayor who stood five foot nine and managed to hang himself with his own handkerchief from a tree has been seen.