

Charles A. Vernon and Forbes G. Vernon

BY HILDA COCHRANE

Charles A. Vernon was born in Bedfordshire, England, 17th. January, 1840, the second son of J. E. Venables Vernon of Clontarf Castle, Ireland. They were of Norman ancestry, the first Vernon taking his name from the town of Vernon in Normandy, moving to England with William the Conqueror at the time of the conquest. One branch of the family remained in England, however the branch from which Charles A. Vernon descended went to Ireland and settled near Dublin. Several large estates near Dublin have remained in the family name for centuries.

Charles A. Vernon was educated at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, England, and for some time was a Lieutenant in the Twentieth Regiment Lancaster Fusiliers. He later resigned his commission and in June, 1863 sailed from Liverpool for New York, then through the Panama Canal to San Francisco and up to Esquimalt, British Columbia. From there he came to the vicinity of Priest Valley (later the City of Vernon) and engaged in ranching, mining, and merchandising. After several years Charles Vernon moved to Victoria, British Columbia, to reside and had a very fine residence built. He was the originator of the British Columbia Pottery Company, manufacturers of tile and all kinds of pottery, and was manager until his death.

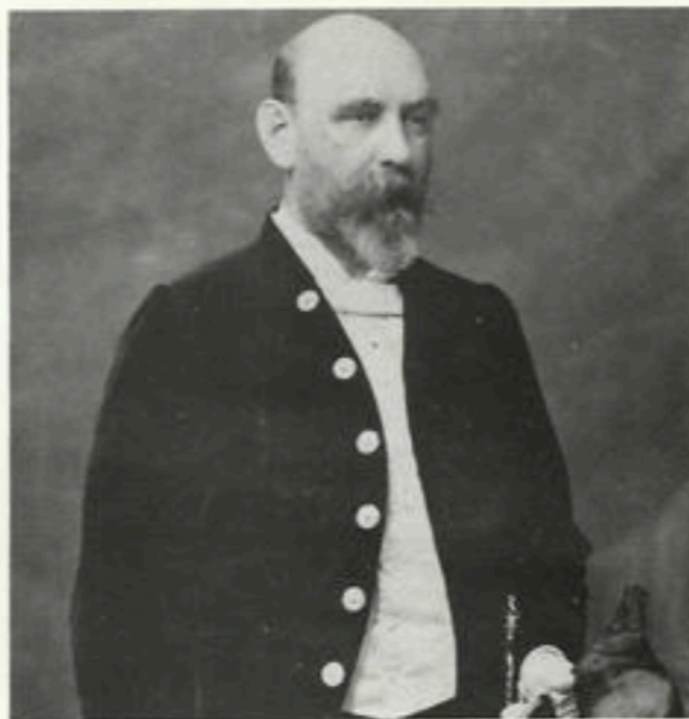
Charles Vernon never sought or desired public office, however, he served for a number of years as gold commissioner and land commissioner for the Province and was also a Justice of the Peace.

Charles A. Vernon acquired the first water record for power and irrigation purposes in the Okanagan on 15th September, 1871, the second such licence to be issued in British Columbia.

He was married in 1879 in New York to Miss Mary McTavish, a native of Argyleshire, Scotland. She was the daughter of Duncan A. McTavish, first agent of the Bank of British North America in New York City. Two sons and a daughter were born to the Vernons, Albert Archibald, Charles Henry, and Violet Mary.

Charles Vernon died in Victoria, B.C., 8th October, 1906. Mrs. Vernon continued to live in the large home there until 1909 when the two and a half acres of land and house were sold to Mr. F. Mitchener.

Forbes George Vernon was born near Dublin at Clontarf Castle on 21st August, 1843, the third son of Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Venables Vernon. He was brought up on the ancestral estate and educated



Forbes George Vernon as Agent-General for B.C., in Court Dress.

later in England. He received a Lieutenant's commission in the Twenty-first Fusiliers in 1863 but resigned it the same year to travel with his brother, Charles A. Vernon and Colonel Houghton to New York, through the Panama Canal to San Francisco, and up to Esquimalt, B.C. The same year they came to the Priest Valley area and took up pre-emptions on 30th October, 1863 between Okanagan Landing and Priest Valley. Some time later Forbes George Vernon exchanged properties with Colonel Houghton who had been given a military grant of 1,450 acres and on 3rd October, 1871 the Vernon brothers pre-empted further land which with the land received from Colonel Houghton became the Coldstream Ranch consisting of over 13,000 acres on which they raised huge herds of cattle and horses. Forbes George Vernon became sole owner of the Ranch in 1882 which he operated until 1891 when he sold to Lord Aberdeen. He then invested his money largely in real estate and buildings on the mainland and in Victoria.

It was on the 11th September, 1877 at St. John's Church, Victoria, Reverend Percival Jenks officiating, that F. G. Vernon was married to Miss Kate Branks. The ceremony was private, besides the principals and the officiating clergyman only Lieutenant-Colonel

I. W. Powell, M.D., who gave the bride away, and Mrs. Powell, sister of the bride, being present. After the ceremony the bride and groom received hearty congratulations from about 300 ladies and gentlemen at the Pavilion Rink. Mrs. Vernon died in March, 1885.

F. G. Vernon began his public career in 1875 when he was elected as a Member of the Provincial Legislature by the voters of Yale constituency by a large majority. In February of the following year he became Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works in Elliot cabinet, and on seeking confirmation in this office by the votes of the people he was re-elected by an overwhelming majority. He retained this position in the cabinet until the general election of 1878 when he was again elected by his constituency, but, as the Elliot ministry was defeated during the remainder of this term he sat among the opposition. In the election of 1882 he was not a candidate, but in 1886 he was again elected, and in 1887 on the death of Hon. Mr. Smythe, he again accepted the portfolio of Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, this time in the Davie cabinet. He continued to hold the office during the premierships of Hon. John Robson and Hon. Theodore Davie until 1894. During his long official career the Hon. F. G. Vernon proved to be one of the most capable and public-spirited men ever chosen for office by the people of British Columbia and the affairs of his department prospered greatly throughout his terms.

From 1895 to 1898 F. G. Vernon resided in London, England as agent general for the Province of British Columbia and then retired from political life. He died in London, England, in 1911 at the age of 68 years. A daughter, Beatrice, is still living in Vancouver, B.C. Another daughter died in infancy.

It was during F. G. Vernon's term of office as Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works for the Province of British Columbia that the name of Vernon was chosen when the City was incorporated in December, 1892, thus commemorating the name of two of the earliest white settlers in that part of the Okanagan Valley.

Members of the Penticton Branch, Okanagan Historical Society, who received Centennial Medals were: John Ashton, Mrs. Vera Bennett, Mrs. Hattie Brown, E. J. Chambers, Mrs. Laliah A. Cooper, Mrs. Kathleen S. Dewdney, Mrs. Mona East, Mrs. Mary Estabrooks, Otto Estabrooks, G. B. Latimer, F. P. McPherson, Mrs. Mary Meldrum, Mrs. Gertrude South, Mrs. May Swift, A. A. Swift, Mrs. Jessie Van der Burg, G. B. Watson.