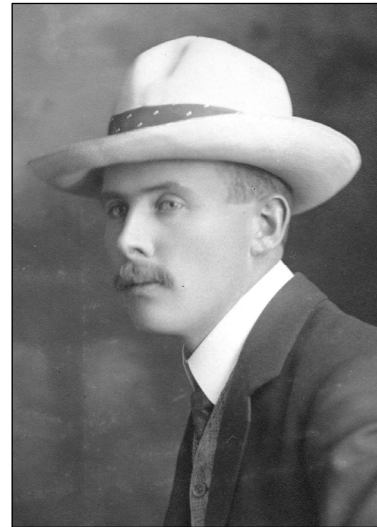


Stories From The Archives —
Count Alvo von Alvensleben and the purchase of the loco properties
Researched and written by Ralph Drew, Belcarra, BC, February, 2013.

Constantin (Gustav Konstantin) Alvo von Alvensleben was born July 25th, 1879, in Neu Gettersleben, Westphalia, Germany; the son of Count Werner von Alvensleben. He resigned from the German army and left Hamburg, arriving in Vancouver in June 1904. Alvo von Alvensleben, a tall dynamic man of aristocratic background, arrived in Vancouver almost penniless and worked at a number of odd jobs (painting barns, repairing fish nets, and shooting ducks and geese which he sold to the *Vancouver Club* for 35 cents each) before buying a seat on the new *Vancouver Stock Exchange* for \$125 in 1907. ⁽¹⁾



Alvo von Alvensleben
(CVA Port P1082)

Alvo von Alvensleben became one of the most flamboyant promoters and speculators in BC before World War One, and by 1912 his worth may have reached \$25 million (about \$500 million today). In addition to purchasing the *Wigwam Inn* in 1910, Alvo von Alvensleben is said to have “acquired” (perhaps leased) the northern portion of Belcarra Peninsula at about the same time, although this has not been substantiated. His real estate holdings included the 432-acre (175-hectare) *Minnehada Ranch* in Coquitlam which he owned from 1907 until 1913. His 20-acre (9-hectare) Kerrisdale estate, now *Crofton House School*, was staffed with 13 servants and was the centre of the city’s gay life. A busy entrepreneur, he is said to have brought \$10 million of German investment to Western Canada.

The depression of 1913 essentially wiped-out von Alvensleben. When World War One started in 1914, Alvo von Alvensleben was rumored to be a spy and Canada’s *Custodian of Enemy Aliens’ Property* seized all his assets. (It was widely rumored that when Germany won the war, Count Alvo von Alvensleben was to have become the first German Governor of British Columbia.) He fled to the United States (said to have left Vancouver in women’s clothes on a night train for Seattle), and in 1917 when America entered the war, he was imprisoned at Salt Lake City as an enemy alien. Upon his release from prison three years later, von Alvensleben moved to Seattle and resumed his activities on both sides of the border, eventually becoming an American citizen in 1939. He died in Seattle on October 22nd, 1965.

In 1911 the *Imperial Oil Company* bought the 85 acres (34 hectares) that was to become the loco Refinery from Alvo von Alvensleben for \$175,000. Little did they know that only a few years earlier the property had been sold to him by Mrs. W. Johnson of New Westminster for \$2000. ⁽²⁾ Site clearing for the *Imperial Oil Company* refinery began in 1913, followed by installation of the crude oil processing equipment in 1914. The refinery began operation in January 1915. ⁽³⁾

References:

- (1) Michael Kluckner, “Vancouver: The Way It Was”, Whitecap, Vancouver, 1984, pages 50–51.
- (2) D. M. (Dorothea) Norton, 1987, “Early History of Port Moody”, Hancock House Publishers, p.151.
- (3) Al Sholund, “The loco Townsite Story”, Focus Newsletter, September 2002.

Alvo von Alvensleben to Erect Modern Sawmill Soon
From the *Vancouver Province*, May 22nd, 1912.

The announcement is made that the *Vancouver Timber & Trading Company*, which is now controlled by Mr. Alvo von Alvensleben and German associates, had closed the purchase of one thousand feet [300 metres] of waterfront on Burrard Inlet, opposite Port Moody [loco Townsite]. The intention being to proceed at once with the erection of a modern saw mill plant, with a capacity of at least 200,000 [board] feet daily. [One board foot = 12"x12"x1" thick.] The mill will be served by the branch line the *Canadian Pacific Railway* is constructing from the main line around the head or the Inlet in order to tap North Vancouver. There is twenty feet [6 metres] of water off the beach at low tide which will render the construction of the mill wharves an easy matter. Experience has shown that teredos [a worm-like marine bivalve that bores into wooden piers and ships] do not injure piling at the head or Vancouver Harbour. [The depression that began in 1913, followed by the start of World War One in August 1914, prevented the saw mill project from proceeding.]

“C.T. Dunbar, a large property owner of this city [Vancouver], has just sold 1,000 feet of water frontage at Port Moody, 12 miles [19 km] from here, to Alvo von Alvensleben and German associates. A sawmill with capacity of 200,000 feet daily will be constructed at once.” — **From the *Financial Post*, April 20th, 1912.**
