

The Spencer House by Carol Howie



The Spencer house and greenhouse showing the gardens and the landscaping, 191- , 004.WVA.SPE from the West Van Archives



A portrait of Thomas Arthur Spencer, 191- , 021.WVA.SPE from the West Van Archives

The Spencer House, located at 2089 Westdean Crescent in upper Dundarave, is an early craftsman-style bungalow built in 1913 for Thomas Arthur Spencer and his wife Catherine Isabel Spencer. Thomas Arthur Spencer was the son of David Spencer, who founded the Spencer Department Store in Victoria in 1862. Spencer's retail success allowed him to expand his business and by 1948 he had department stores in Victoria, Vancouver and 6 other locations. Thomas Arthur and his brother Victor were both actively involved in the operations of the family business and were expert merchandisers.

The Spencer House was built on an estate sized lot of over 9 acres, extending from Mathers Avenue to Queens Avenue, between 19th and 21st Streets. It was extensively landscaped and contained many large greenhouses. The house featured prominently on the front cover of a 1918 publicity brochure produced by West Vancouver Municipal Council. The brochure, entitled *Visit West Vancouver*, extolled the virtues of living here: "The garden spot of Greater Vancouver --- on the sunny side of English Bay" and encouraged people to settle in the community. (see next page) The Vinson House (featured in the Spring 2012 edition of "Memories"), also appeared on the front cover. In 1939 the estate was featured on the Gardens Beautiful Tour and was described in a contemporary account as, "far famed for its beauty, comprising rolling spacious lawns, with a profusion of beautiful flowers, rare shrubs and trees" (Vancouver Sun, June 26, 1939).

Thomas Arthur Spencer was commonly known as "Dean" Spencer, and when the estate was subdivided into 33 lots in 1955, the street (Westdean Crescent) was named in his honour. The Spencer House, which now sits on a double lot of approximately 0.82 acres, has been re-built and enlarged in recent years and although the original landscaping, greenhouses and other outbuildings have not survived, the house still retains much of its original character and is an important neighbourhood landmark.

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