

Ocean River Sports

The current site of ORS has been a focal point of Victoria's industry for over one hundred years. In 1880, the same year that Thomas Edison gave his first demonstration of his incandescent light bulb the stone part of the Capital Iron building was erected to store grain and rice arriving from China on massive five masted sailing ships. Through following years of growth in population the brick section of the building was added and housed Victoria's largest grain mill. The nearby area was already home to several mills, coal stores and gas plants. Raw timber and coal was transported by boat and rail, and was then barged down the Gorge to be processed. A lone stone stack marks one such site and is the oldest remaining evidence of turn of the century industry.

Rock Bay

Rock Bay was most likely named after the large rock at its mouth. Today the bay is filled so that only a small part of the rock remains visible, but at one time the bay had to be bridged to allow for rail tracks to transport processed materials to Fort Victoria and growing rural development. The namesake rock served as the centre foundation of the bridge from which Bridge Street draws its name.

Before the settlement of Victoria, a stream that meandered through farmland in what is today high Fort St fed Rock Bay. Today the stream is culverted underground and the beaches of Rock Bay are black and dead where coal dust settled one hundred years ago. In fact, the bay is so polluted it is virtually unusable and there has been talk of filling it in.

Rock Bay was also home to a hide tannery, a jam factory and for decades the shoreline opposite the big rock was the site of Victoria Machinery Depot. In early years they built steam engines for trains and boats and in the 1960's produced the original ferries that made the Swartz Bay- Tswassan run. Iron manhole covers can still be found around Victoria with the VMD stamp.

The Cement Factory

The sand factory at Ellice point once served as off-season mooring for hundreds of sealing ships that worked the west coast up to Alaska. When the seals were virtually killed off, and the industry collapsed, whaling ships took their place. They were larger and fewer but employed enough sailors to keep the debaucherious taverns at Rock and Bay St. in business.

Point Ellice Bridge Disaster

In 1885 construction was completed of the 3rd Point Ellice bridge. It was 600 hundred feet long and engineers had predicted it would last for 35 years. At the time though there were no tramcars in Victoria. Several refits were required only 10 years after its construction and despite efforts the bridge continued to age prematurely. In 1893

the central support sank four feet under the weight of a passing tramcar. The bridge was repaired yet again and returned to full use but the repairs would prove to be tragically inadequate.

On May 24, 1896 the bridge experienced heavy traffic as locals celebrating the queen's birthday flocked to Macaulay point for a military review. Tramcar #16, designed to carry 60 passengers left Government and Yates street loaded with 160 passengers. People were on the roof, hanging on the sides and shoulder to shoulder inside the tramcar. Survivors reported that the conductor remarked, "we'll be lucky to get across this time" as the tramcar rolled onto the bridge. A quarter of the way across the bridge supports began to collapse. Timber began to split and the entire span crumbled under the car. 55 people died and 27 were injured when the car ker-splashed into the water below. The Gorge filled with vessels desperately trying to save swimmers and drag debris off the wreckage. Ladders were lowered off the bridge while sealing ships joined in the effort scooping up hypothermic victims from the water. On shore, curtains were torn from windows to cover bodies washed on shore and a net was slung from beach to opposite beach, to stop corpses from floating out on the ebb current. It was the worst tramcar disaster in North American history. One of the youngest victims of the accident was the 5-year-old son of the town bridge inspector.

Point Ellice House

Point Ellice is the source of some geographical confusion. It was originally recorded of city maps at the other side of the gorge and somewhere around of the turn of the century it seems to have changed sides. Whichever side it may be Right Honourable Edward Ellice probably doesn't mind today. He made a fortune sailing Sea Otter pelt to China and was a key player in amalgamating the North West Company with the Hudson's Bay Company. He died in 1863 leaving his house in limbo for four years when an Irishman named Peter O'Reilly moved in with his family. Peter was a moneyman. He was a magistrate and Gold Rush Commissionaire. The O'Reilly family continued to live in the house until the 1970's. Three generations of O'Reilly's, over one hundred years occupied and preserved the property well enough convince the government to turn it into a museum in 1974.

The Newest Point Ellice Bridge

Locally referred to as the Bay St. bridge latest and, thus far, very sturdy bridge, was built in 1957. Its functional concrete and steel mass serves as a gateway to the noisiest part of the waterway.

There probably is no quiet way to re-process used steel so we can't fault Budget Steel for that. So far they have not returned the Adventure Centre's calls so we have only observations. Junk steel seems to conveyor into a huge inferno and come out the other

side as little chips of junk steel. The chips are loaded on barges and floated away. Amazing really.

The cement foundations on the opposite shore used to support the power lines that now go under the water just a little further up the waterway.

Two Sisters and Dead Man's Island

Journal's and newspaper's around the turn of the century referred to the twin rocks on the port side as The Sisters. The rocky island past the Sister's has an ancient history that was rubbed clean in 1860.

The island called Halkett by indigenous people earned its scary name because it was a burial ground. Coffin like boxes hung from trees and several fenced burial sites cluttered the small island. In 1911 Edgar Faucett came clean to the local paper recounting how he and some friends had democratically elected (3:1) to burn the island down after a day of swimming and bon firing. Fearing the reaction of the local native population and at the advice of his parents, Faucett said he "layed low" for some time after the tragic fire.

The Trestle

Against a major opposition from the local community, the creosote soaked timber trestle was built in 1917. Residents complained that the structure would be ugly and congesting but functionality prevailed. Flat deck trains came from the north island and Saanich to have their logs were rolled off into the Gorge. The entire section of the Gorge in front of "Mill Point" was boomed with logs in convenient location to be milled.

Past the Trestle

The Gorge trestle marks the line where early industry stopped and recreation began. "The Narrows" was the most fashionable area to live in when Victoria boomed between 1885 and 1905.

In 1850 Hudson Bay Company men began buying huge idyllic tracks land

The exodus of the gorge area can be largely attributed to WW 1, which saw most British Citizens returning home. In 1915 Gorge Rd. became the Island Highway and the increase of traffic also added to repudiation of the area. Many of the larger houses were converted into boarding houses for the gold rush miners and to this day Gorge Road clings to its hotel industry stigma.

Pestilence

In the late 1950's the West Coast gold rush was in full swing. The quiet trading post called Fort Victoria became a popular stop for prospectors in search of provisions and prostitutes. In one year (1859) the population jumped from 300- 5000. As important as

the gold rush was in the growth and establishment of Victoria it was also serve as the greatest vehicle of death in the provinces history.

Spring, 1862. A steamship loaded with miners and supplies arrived in Victoria Harbour from San Francisco. Small pox had been present in San Fran for several months already and on March 18 the Daily British Colonist reported the first known case of the disease in Victoria. Small pox was not unknown to the European settlers of Fort Victoria. It had already plagued Europe, killing tens of thousands, including five reigning Monarchs of Europe during the 17th century. In fact Small Pox is believed to have killed more people than any other infectious disease in the world, and it instilled terror in the people of Victoria.

Small pox is highly contagious. It is transmitted through the air as a victim speaks or merely breathes. Inhalation of even a single particle of small ox can result in contraction of the disease. There is a ten-day incubation period where the victim feels completely normal, but as the virus multiplies in the body, the illness hits with high fever, backache and vomiting. A bit later tiny red spots, much like chicken pox, begin to appear all over the body. The spots however grow and turn into blisters. They continue to enlarge into pustules filled with pressurized opalescent pus. The skin does not break under this pressure, as the pustules get hard on the outside. The skin instead rips horizontally away from its under layers and the entire body becomes encased in pus. The pain of the splitting is extraordinary. People loose their ability to speak; their eyes squeeze shut under the pressure become the mind remains alert. Breathing arrest, shock or heart attack are usually the cause of death. This is how one third (20 000 people) of the native population died in 1862.

Natives traditionally lived communally in longhouses. This made them particularly susceptible to communication of smallpox. They also resisted western medicine, did not understand viral infection, and refused immunization. While the white population lined up for vaccinations, infection rose in the native community and it became clear that some action would needed to be taken. In 1862 there was hardly a government ministry responsible for health, and with Governor James Douglas out of town the responsibility fell on the superintendent of police. Media induced panic and lack of government direction led to the natives being exiled from Victoria under escort of two gun ships. After their forced departure their villages were burnt to the ground. These decisions were probably responsible for the spread of the disease and decimation of native population through out BC.

The Empress Hotel

Conceptualized by George Barnard and financed by the CPR the Empress was Victoria's first manmade tourism attraction. Barnard's idea was to build a causeway where the James Bay Bridge stood, dredge the Harbour bottom to fill the Bay, backfill the new mud flats with gravel and then drive piles 125 ft into the muck to support the foundation. His idea was not received well by council. Barnard decided to run for mayor, was elected and during his tenure the city decided to go ahead and build the hotel.

The CPR at the time was looking for ways to entice traveler to their steam ship and train routes. What better way than a string of luxury hotels to attract aristocrats and ex-colonial elites. In 1903 Western Canada staff architect of the CPR, Francis Rattenbury, drew up plans styled after the Chateau Fontenac in Quebec City. The building was completed in 1908 and naming of the hotel was put to vote. Alexandra, Camosun and Van Horne were all nominated, as titles for the new luxury hotel but in the end the hotel would share its name with the CPR luxury liners that had been coming to Victoria since 1891.

House of Parliament

An Empire wide contest was held to come up with the best plans for the Parliament Buildings. The prodigy from Leeds, Francis Rattenbury came up with the winning drawings and more than one hundred years later his vision still dominates Victoria's inner harbour.

Built of limestone and granite and with neo-Romanesque flavours, its roof is done in copper and distinctly oxidized. The gold plated man on the roof is George Vancouver: midshipman on discovery and later credited for mapping most of Vancouver Island.

In 1897 when the building was completed it was the tallest North of San Francisco, and the first in Canada with electric lighting.