



"THE MASTER BUILDERS"

of

VANCOUVER

1886-1936

In the chronicle of human endeavor, regardless of time or place, history records no finer page of noble achievement by a people than the creation of the great metropolis of Vancouver, third city of Canada, out of a dark damp wilderness of impenetrable jungle of forest; and in the brief period of time much less than fifty years.

Granville, or "Gastown", the primitive village of 1886, a few wooden buildings framed in forest green, clustered around a crescent beach of boulders and seaweed, grew in the short spaces of half a lifetime into the great world seaport of Vancouver; in 1932-1933 the greatest grain shipping port in the world. Through the First Barrow, or "Horn's Gate", the deep narrow portal to its harbour, which Capt. George Vancouver, R. N., first saw in 1792 as he crept in with his ship's boat, there followed in 1934 no less than seventeen thousand vessels, great and small, coming from all parts of the world.

The birth of Vancouver was indissolubly linked with the confederation of Canada and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, at whose terminus in the west there arose, like a magic thing out of the forest, a beautiful city of monumental edifices and green lawns. The completion of the railway made Canada whole, linked up the loose ends of the greatest empire that has been, reoriented world travel and world trade, and redirected for all time, the footsteps of millions, born and unborn, of all nations, colors, and creeds.

Those who tread in older lands where deep in buried cities the hallowed dust of countless generations of forebears lies, will marvel,--gasp in wonder--at the youthfulness of our city. Hamilton, aged but hearty, who first entered its forest shade to shape its form, still lives in Toronto; Stewart, the young civil engineer, who took three days to cut a peephole one mile long through the silence of the trees--to level his transit and see where to put the principal street from False Creek to Burrard Inlet,--looks down from his office window, high in a towering building on that street, Granville Street, a rushing thoroughfare controlled with traffic signals blinking red and green by day; a lane of blazing brilliance by night. Gallagher, who, at the first meeting of the City Council, took a plain sheet of cheap paper and wrote "CITY OF VANCOUVER" across the top, still sits at his desk on Fender Street. Mrs. Ruth Morton, widow of the first settler, still tells of pigs rooting for clams in the sand of a vanished beach where now crosses an overhead passenger footbridge and an underground passenger tunnel. Evans, the engineer, still hale, was but twenty five years old when he brought the first transcontinental train into Port Moody; Kessler, a stripling of twenty, cut the right of way for the railway through the forest from Port Moody to Vancouver, and lives to tell of how the Indians helped him do it. There were no grey hairs in Vancouver in early days; only men and women of sound sense, full strength, and remarkable youth.

No less astounding is the truth that, in 1791, when the Spanish explorers first peered into what they named "Boca de Florida Blanca", but which we call Vancouver Harbour, and disturbed the repose of countless centuries and its scattered few--a quarter of a century after the battle of the Plains of Abraham had brought Canada under the British flag; sixteen years after the American War of Independence had taken the New England colonies away, and at a time when, to the east, five millions Americans gathered about the Atlantic coast, and, to the west, Asia's countless hordes were swarming that age old land--yet of all this great host, these unnumbered millions of yellow and white, not one single pair of eyes had peeped upon our beautiful home, nor into its port; a forgotten solitude, a hidden haven, a silent undiscovered corner in an old and densely populated world.

Columbus in 1492 made his discoveries in the east, yet, scarcely conceivable as it is to modern minds, three hundred long years must elapse before, in 1792, Capt. Vancouver burst in to the silence of the west. Since the dawn of light, and for some great unknown reason, the hand of the Almighty had been stayed; so mighty an elemental force withheld, so simple yet so tremendous, and this new land reserved to be the new home of Europeans, and a genesis of a new epoch in the story of mankind.

Who were "The Builders" of Vancouver? Not supermen, but ordinary British and Canadian sons; pioneers of hope, courage, vision; with the power of justice, and the patience of strength. No blood clot stains the escutcheon of Vancouver; of war, of strife, the tragic accompaniment of so many less fortunate colonisations, there was none; no bugle sounded, no sword was drawn. The first troops to march our streets came with goodwill, good music, and rejoicing; to join in the happy festivities of our first celebration of Canada's natal day, Dominion Day, 1887. The founders of Vancouver builded, not a fort, but a garden on the shore.

Those of Vancouver are of a modest citizenry. Neither dull nor boastful, they accept their accomplishment with complacency, perhaps too close to the event. The beauty of architecture cannot be seen by pressing the nose against a facade; design needs distance, and the perspective of time alone reveals its true form. Besides, a great incident in the story of the world, such as had rarely happened before and may never happen again, is incomplete; the task unfinished. The pioneers are resting; the younger builders are still at labor.

J. S. Matthews

CITY ARCHIVIST.

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