

HYACK SQUARE



IHP0063

- Established** 1860
Size 0.38 acres
location Columbia Strret & Eighth Street
Ammenities
- Paved square
 - Flowers and hanging baskets
 - Benches
 - Pedestrian corridor

Hyack Square is one of the oldest urban squares in the city, established in 1860 as a natural extension of Merchant Square. It was located at the city's lowest point, adjacent to a swamp that was frequently inundated with flood waters from the Fraser River. Although the city struggled to improve its economy after the collapse of the gold rush, the square remained a rough, unfinished place.

However, the building of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway was to have a profound effect on the city and Merchant Square. Excitement and anticipation greeted the arrival of the first train to Port Moody after the last spike ceremony on November 7, 1885. New Westminster's officials were fixated on the potential of securing a branch railway to connect to the main line and began negotiations with the C.P.R. In order to raise the needed construction bonus, City Council decided to request title of the numerous park reserves and squares from the Province, including Merchant Square, in order to subdivide them for sale by bylaw.

The proposed bylaw drew immediate denouncements from citizens who felt that the sales would not only destroy the beautiful design of the city, but also devalue their property. One Merchant Square property owner even took the case to the Supreme Court of B.C. in a failed bid to stop the auction.



IHP1956



IHP0190

Despite the opposition to the bylaw, it passed virtually unchanged by eligible voters 96 to 26. The subsequent public auction of the City Reserves and Gardens at the Agricultural Hall on November 27, 1886 was a financial success, realizing all the funds needed to pay off the debentures for the branch railway.

The branch line was inaugurated on April 22, 1886 with an auspicious sod-turning ceremony held in Sapperton. The branch left the C.P.R. main line at “Westminster Junction” in what would become the future municipality of Coquitlam. The line entered the city far away from the river, but upon crossing the Brunette River, followed the riverfront into the downtown parallel to Front Street.

By August, 1886 it was reported that the “whistle of the locomotive has at last been heard in our midst; the construction train with all its boarding and lodging establishment reached Laidlaw’s wharf yesterday morning. The long line of Chinamen occupied in grading, the whites laying the rails and the locomotive Kamloops with the train of section cars had a great attraction for our citizens and large numbers gathered to witness the novel scene.”

The Royal City greeted the arrival of the first passenger train from the east with another ceremony on November 1, 1886 - one year after the first train had arrived in Port Moody and seven months before Vancouver would greet their own first train.

New Westminster had achieved a tremendous victory in securing its future and it proclaimed itself the “Fresh Water Terminus” of the greatest railway in the world. The completion of the railway connection immediately spurred investment in city lands, and entrepreneurs began to transform the town with new industry, businesses and residences.

New Westminster’s Canadian Pacific Railway station site was situated at the western end of Columbia Street, adjacent what had been the former Merchant Square. Soon, a wooden station rose adjacent to some modest railway sheds. This first station was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1898, and replaced with the beautifully-designed brick station which remains near Hyack Square today as a protected heritage building.

The city retained a portion of the former Douglas Road (later Eighth Street) beside the station to connect the docks with Columbia Street. In 1909, the B.C. Electric Railway Company built its interurban station on the opposite side of the road, making this location one of New Westminster’s busiest street intersections.

Beginning in 1887, the city's Ancient and Honourable Hyack Anvil Battery gathered annually in front of Thomas Ovens' blacksmith shop on Eighth Street to salute the Queen's birthday. It was reported in 1892 that "the old-timers, not to be outdone by the younger generation, made up their mind (sic) to have a real old-time celebration, and on the spur of the moment quickly made their preparations. At noon a Royal Salute of 21 guns was fired with anvils in front of Ovens' machine shop, in old time style."

However, while the anvil salute was again witnessed by a large crowd in front of the Ovens' Eighth St. blacksmith shop in 1913, it was announced that: "It is expected that this is the last year that the salute will be fired on the old spot, Eighth Street being now, that portion at all events, too valuable and crowded a thoroughfare. But it is not the intention to let the ancient custom die out, and a new location will be sought." The salute continued in front of Ovens' new shop on Royal Avenue, but was moved to several sites in the city before finally becoming a formal tradition in Queen's Park.

The foot of Eighth Street became the scene of other civic celebrations and gatherings. The Duke of Connaught, Canada's Governor General and the son of Queen Victoria, was welcomed here in 1912.

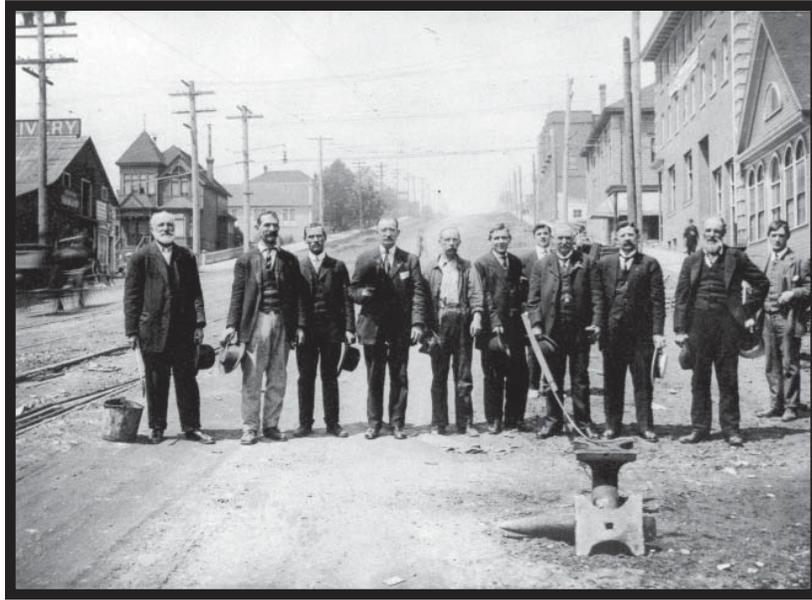
The square was also the destination of the gallant contingent of New Westminster's war volunteers, who marched to the B.C. Electric Railway station on August 22, 1914 and transferred to Vancouver to board C.P.R. trains for their long trip to the frontlines. On that day it was said that the air of the Royal City was "...full of martial spirit. Flags were flying... thousands of citizens cheered and shouted fond farewells and hearty good wishes. ... Many eyes were wet as fond mothers and wives clasped their dear ones in what they felt might be their last embrace on this earth, and the voices of strong men shook with emotion as they bade their sons god speed."

During World War II this site was a place of more tearful goodbyes, with troops marching to the station and government docks to be transported to the front. This scene was famously captured by Vancouver Province photographer Claude Detloff in an image popularly known as "Wait for me Daddy," featured in Life Magazine.

In 1986, one hundred years after the arrival of the first C.P.R. train, the City of New Westminster reclaimed this historic location by closing Eighth Street between Columbia and Front streets and creating a formal urban public space to connect the revitalized downtown and the Westminster Quay with a pedestrian overpass. It was formally named "Hyack Square" by Council in recognition of the unique civic history and tradition at this location.

The City of New Westminster, with support from the Provincial Government's BC Spirit Squares program, upgraded Hyack Square at Eighth Street & Columbia in 2009. The revitalization will include many new features such as: new decorative paving, street furniture, lighting, decorative screens, historical features, children's water feature, ornamental plantings, lawn areas, a raised landscaped amphitheatre stage with seating walls and public art. Parks and Recreation staff, in partnership with the businesses and resident community, will utilize the space for a wide range of entertaining performers that will delight all in performances throughout July and August.

Behind the Name...Hyack Square:



New Westminster has honoured Queen Victoria on her May 24th birthday since 1859. The first royal salutes by cannon or rifle fire were carried out by the Royal Engineers and then continued by the Volunteer Rifles. When Governor Seymour received a salute on his arrival in 1864, he was surprised that it was “simply loud explosions of gunpowder placed between two anvils, one of which on each occasion was blown into the air.” In 1866 the Seymour Artillery Company was formed, and in October 1867 they received two old-fashioned 24-pound howitzers on wheeled field carriages from the British Army. The first proud and proper royal salute using these imperial guns took place in May, 1868.

However, the old guns provided by the Seymour Artillery Company were often in a terrible and even dangerous state of repair. It was reported in 1887: “Application had been made to the local authorities at Victoria for permission to use the cannon here in firing a salute in honour of Her Majesty’s Birthday. And the answer was – no cannon, the salute will be fired in the capital. It is high time to give the Island of Vancouver a good wholesome dose of home rule. Everything is reserved for that barren island. Our citizens were indignant when they heard of the refusal to let them use their own guns in saluting Her Majesty, but Chief Bonson and a crowd of loyal citizens got possession of an anvil and with twenty-one rounds they waked the echoes far beyond the Fraser. In the Royal City it is a strange sight to see loyalty packing anvils to be used as heavy guns in celebrating Her Majesty’s birthday. But Canadian loyalty is very strong. The refusal to permit our volunteer officers to use our own guns on this occasion was a most disreputable proceeding”

The Ancient and Honourable Hyack Anvil Battery was formed by loyal

residents to continue the proud and unique salute to Queen Victoria. Many members were part of the Hyack Fire Brigade, the city's first fire fighters. They lent their honourable historic name to the battery, which in Chinook, the trade language of the west coast, means "hurry up!"

May 24, 1901 was the only year the battery remained silent, out of respect for the sovereign following her death. Since 1859, Queen Victoria's birthday has defined the city's spirit as an annual celebration of its proud heritage, imbued with both the pageantry of the past and optimism for the future.