

# QUEEN'S PARK



IHP8056-25

**Established**            **June 13, 1887**  
**Size**                     **75 acres**  
**location**               **First Street & Third Avenue**

#### **Ammenities**

- Stadium and sports fields
- Playgrounds & Spray Park
- Concession & Washrooms
- Picnic Shelters
- Trails
- Open grassy areas, forests and flower beds
- Centennial Lodge
- Queen's Park Arenex
- Tennis
- Petting Farm
- Outdoor Stage
- Benches, picnic tables & waste bins
- Off-leash dog area
- Rose Garden
- Queen's Park Arena
- Parks Work yard & Greenhouse

The crown jewel of New Westminster's park system is Queen's Park which can trace its origins back as the very first public park created in the Colony of British Columbia upon the establishment of the city in 1859. It was in a letter to B.C. Governor James Douglas that Colonel Moody wrote: "The woods are magnificent, superb beyond description but most vexatious to a surveyor and the first dwellers in a town. I declare without the least sentimentality, I grieve and mourn the ruthless destruction of these most glorious trees. What a grand old Park this whole hill would make! I am reserving a very beautiful glen and adjoining ravine for the People and Park. I have already named it 'Queen's Ravine' and trust you will approve. It divides the town well from the military Reserve..." Later in the 1870s the larger reserve would be divided between a public park and lands for the penitentiary and asylum. Council and citizens advocated early on for the development of this park but there simply were not enough funds in the small city to accomplish the mammoth task.

In the Jubilee Year of the reign of Queen Victoria in 1887 City Council arranged for a celebration to mark the occasion and at their meeting of June 13, "It was decided to that he Mayor and Council should take possession of the park and the park should be called Queen's Park." The following day it was reported that: " Early in the morning our citizens were busy hoisting flags and decorating their places of businesses ... About 11 o'clock the bugle sounded and the rifle and artillery companies formed at the Drill Shed, and after a short drill they marched to the battery, headed by the city band. Here they fired a salute in honour of the occasion while the band played 'God Save the Queen.' The opening of the public park took place about 3 p.m. The military force, including artillery and rifles, headed to the park, where quite a number of citizens had assembled. His worship Mayor Dickinson addressed a few appropriate remarks to those present, and formally declared Queen's Park open and dedicated it to the City of New Westminster in honour of Queen Victoria. A royal salute was fired amid much enthusiasm and many congratulations."

The City had just approved a lavish \$50,000 in bylaws to spend on improvements to the city's public parks in 1889. In Queen's Park, adjacent to the growing residential district, burned stumps and brush were cleared away to create public recreation fields for sport. Council used the occasion of the visit of Canada's Governor General Lord Stanley, to mark the completion of the park's first clearing. With a ceremonial shovel Lord Stanley dug into the earth to plant the first new shade tree in the park on November 9, 1889. The Governor General would later travel to Vancouver to dedicate the famous Stanley Park. In 1890 Council appointed the park's first landscape gardener and park ranger, Peter Latham, who had designed the grounds of Ontario's government house and legislative buildings. He would move into the new Park Keeper's house beside the new conservatory and guided the way for a beautiful landscape to take shape from the roughly graded grounds.

In 1892 it was reported that: "Of the 80 acres in the park about 30 acres have been cleared. On the east (50 acres) a young growth of spruce and firs have grown up to a height of about twenty feet. Many of the unsightly monuments of past bush fires have been cut down, but still a sufficient number mar the prospect." ... "Mr. Latham has laid out and put in order a space for a nursery in which he is setting out the stock just received from France. Among the stock planted are two varieties of purple beeches, several varieties of horse chestnuts, some of the famous French *dentzia gracilis*, English and variegated holly, English and Irish yew, pampas grasses, purple maples, silver maples, silver birch, purple birch, Austrian arancarias, rhododendrens, entapias, and a score of other foreigners, all of which are in fresh condition aver their four weeks and sea voyage." These trees and shrubs were planted and nurtured to form the beginnings of a beautiful arboretum and gardens that can still be seen in the park today.

In 1890, the civic bylaw monies also allowed Queen's Park to be crowned with the Province's finest Exhibition Building, a spectacular tribute to the Queen Anne Revival style. It was designed by architect G.W. Grant and showcased the monumental versatility of British Columbia lumber. The building replaced the old 1883 structure in Market Square. It could house 5,000 visitors and was built to overlook and provide a viewing gallery for the race track surrounding the new athletic fields. This landmark structure became the new home of the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society's annual Provincial Exhibition. Application had been made to the Lieutenant Governor in 1888 for a strip of land east of the Park for what would become McBride Boulevard which was completed in 1892 at a cost of \$4,000 and separated the exhibition grounds and park from the Asylum Grounds. In 1891 the park was connected to the city's downtown by a streetcar and interurban tramline that ran up Park Row to the gates on First Avenue and continued to wind through the city to also connect with Burnaby and Vancouver.

The park was beautified and improved annually due to the continued financial success of the Provincial Exhibition of the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society. It had grown in recognition as one of the great fall fairs of the country. In 1905 the society was awarded the Canadian National Exhibition along with \$50,000 to fund the completion of new exhibition buildings in Queen's Park in time for this "Dominion Fair." The fair indeed was a success and more importantly left the legacy of a new Women's Building and Industrial Building which greatly improved the capacity of the Exhibition. In 1914 the group of buildings was completed with the construction of the New Westminster Arena which was intended for Horse competitions but was converted into an ice hockey rink.

During this period of time the expansion of Queens Park's attractions was aided by the construction of the No. 1 Fire Hall in the park adjacent to First Street in 1901. The firemen lent their spare time to the creation of the first zoo in the park which was established near the hall. In 1906 the zoo which included bears, coyotes, cougars and deer was expanded by its relocation below the reservoir on the eastern side of the park. Here it was reported that the "All of the cages have been fitted up with the latest improvements in drains and finished buildings, blending with the surroundings, make the Zoo worthy of Queen's Park. The deer park is also a pretty enclosure with its shelter in the centre, which adds greatly to the animals comfort. This is only the beginning of a well established Zoological gardens, an arrangements have been made for another addition in the form of an aviary."

Upon the declaration of war on August 4, 1914, New Westminster immediately felt the impact. The local 104th Westminster Fusiliers of Canada was commissioned as training unit for battalions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) and a home defense unit. The frivolity of the Provincial Exhibition was cancelled for the duration of the war and the exhibition buildings of Queen's Park became the barracks for recruits stationed in the city. Overseas recruitments began immediately and by August 11th the "Gallant First Contingent" had been selected composed of six officers and 144 men drawn from both the city and Fraser Valley. Despite the occupation of the park, the May Day festivities continued with the military providing guards of honour for the city's May Queen.

At the end of World War I the old spirit of the Royal City returned with the 1919 Provincial Exhibition. With the squatting soldiers removed from the park the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society expanded the exhibition buildings and prepared for the 50th Anniversary of the fair. Mild hysteria broke out in the city with the news that the Prince of Wales would honour the city with a visit to open the exhibition to the public. The preparations for this event were extensive and included arches of welcome and a long line of Great War veterans in the park. When he arrived in the city on September 29th thousands had lined the road route to greet him. Once the Prince's automobile cavalcade reached Columbia Street the crowd broke into "tumultuous acclaim, which ran up the line like fire through prairie grass." Over 22,000 people enter the park gates that day and the fair saw over 90,000 visitors during the week. The fair was back and was a stunning success. Queen's Park was developed beautifully in the 1920s and was the proud setting for many successful exhibitions, May Days and public events. Gardens and walks were expanded and two lagoons in the southern part of the park were especially beautiful places during this time.

In 1929, the city was preparing to celebrate sixty years of the Provincial Exhibition with a huge Diamond Jubilee celebration. Sir Winston Churchill and the Premier Tolmie were to be on hand to open this very special fair the same day as opening of the Pacific Coast Terminals. However, tragedy struck the city again in the form of fire. On July 13th the new plant of the Westminster Paper Mills on the waterfront was destroyed in a million-dollar blaze. The next morning, at six o'clock, exhausted fire crews received a new alarm that the Exhibition buildings in Queen's Park were on fire. The wooden buildings were a mass of flames when crews arrived as the flames spread so quickly that it even threatened to spread to the residential area across from the park. Low water pressure from the hydrants hampered the crew's efforts and within an hour and a half the great exhibition buildings were reduced to a pile of ashes. Everything was destroyed but the cattle sheds, banquet hall and the old fisheries building, then in use as an administration building, and which survived to later become the Vagabond Playhouse.

Once again the spirit of New Westminster was remarkable. The directors of the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society met and immediately decided to carry on with the fair. Vancouver was quick to offer its exhibition halls at Hastings Park for the event. But civic pride refused the offer and after the Provincial Government pledged \$15,000 and surrounding communities provided other commitments the exhibition was on. There was no time to rebuild so the idea of a fair under tents became the novel solution to the dilemma. The great fair opened on Labour Day, September 2, 1929, as planned and the presence of the Right Honorable Winston Churchill, the great British statesman, brought in the crowds in record numbers. The great assembly of 37,000 smashed the old record set by the Prince of Wales. Churchill inspected a column of veterans and stood before the crowd to give an "eloquent address worthy of his reputation."

But the tragic loss of the Exhibition Buildings would forever change the future of Queen's Park. In the aftermath civic officials decided to reconsider the use of the park and the new buildings. The Great Depression made any effort to revive the Great Exhibition impossible. The success and growth of the Vancouver Exhibition at Hastings Park fulfilled the regional need for a fall agricultural exhibition. New Westminster would have to reinvent the idea of the park as a community centre serving its citizens.

Insurance funds allowed for the construction in 1930 of what was termed the new civic auditorium, today known as the New Westminster Arena. It was intended to be used for a variety of purposes from athletic contests, conventions and civic events and was re-named the Arena in 1933. The introduction of ice to the Arena in 1939 coincided with the construction of the Arenex for other indoor sporting events and cultural activities. Its construction saw the loss of the old banquet hall one of the few surviving Exhibition buildings. However, these two structures, combined with the rebuilt Stadium with its stands and concessions created a new Art Deco style aesthetic for the park. The gardens too evoked the times with many of the old shrubs being cut into fanciful topiary designs of birds and squirrels.

The end of the Great Depression in New Westminster was signaled with a huge celebration when it was announced that on May 31, 1939 the Royal City would be visited by the King and Queen as part of their Canadian tour. The visit created such a sensation of loyal patriotic fervor that citizens fell into a near state of delirium. Civic officials were told that time constraints allowed no more than a motorcade through the city and Queen's Park from Vancouver with a send off by train at the waterfront. But nothing would dampen the spirit of the city to ensure that its first true 'Royal Visit' would be a success.

When the royal procession entered the Royal City they were greeted by a crowd that had swelled the city's population from 22,000 to an estimated 150,000. The roar of cheers from the throngs of people lining the route could be heard throughout the city as the King and Queen made their way to Queen's Park. When they entered the stadium 11,000 school children gave them a thunderous welcome. As the royal car slowly circled the stadium track 2,700 children were performing on the field in costume which included a display of May Pole dancing. It was a historic moment for the City and Queen's Park.

The park remained a well used facility that was perhaps best known as the location of the annual May Day festival which grew in size and stature throughout the 1930s and 1940s. At the outbreak of war the park was once again commandeered for the 'good fight' with the northern half of the park being used for combat training and exercises by the local Westminster Regiment. A rifle range was established in the Arenex for the use of local cadets and Pacific Coast Rangers practicing to defend the city from any enemy attack. Austerity forced much of the plans for park improvements to be delayed.

In 1945, at the end of the war, the stadium became the setting for one of the largest of the homecoming celebrations to welcome back the troops. The largest celebration of the return of the Westminster Regiment on the evening of January 19, 1946 to a welcoming crowd of 20,000. It was an event reported in the British Columbian: "At eight-thirty the bell of the troop train was heard coming from Front Street. Slowly the train edged into view with members of the regiment standing on the steps and crowding the windows. They looked long and hard. They were home. Quickly and smoothly they disembarked from the train and ... With the command from Lt. Col. Corbould the parade moved off [to Queen's Park] to the tune of 'Colonel Bogey'. The Westminsters marched into the oval under the moonlight as a faint mist rose from the chilled grass. They tramped to a patch of cold light cast by the floodlights before the platform as, from the dimness of the stands and from the masses who blanketed the corner of the field itself, there rose a roar from 5,000 throats that drowned the trumpets and even the skirl of the ...pipe band. ... relatives had been herded into stands to sit behind family name letters and wait for the ranks to break. While the speeches were being staccatoed off, they swarmed over the field and the khaki ranks were drowned by civvies suits. With laughter and the tears of joy, wives, mothers and fathers and sweethearts were gathering to their arms the warriors who had returned."

In the post-war era Queen's Park saw many improvements. However, the connection of McBride Boulevard to the Patullo Bridge came with the addition of traffic noise and the loss of the southern edge of the park to the new interchange at Royal Avenue. New playfields and playgrounds were required to keep up with the post-war boom of kids that were suddenly swarming the City's largest park. The Vagabond Players established a theatre in the old 1906 Fisheries Building in 1951 and launched a tradition of amateur productions in the city.

Picnic Grounds and gardens were expanded in this era which also saw the loss of many landmark trees that were reaching their end of their lifespan. Horticultural crews added many new specimens and new features to augment the new expanded areas of the park. Expert horticulturalist and Parks Superintendent Gordon Sales added a new rose garden to the park with 1,000 roses in 22 varieties. Designed in a rockery the roses surrounded a new pond and fountain.

In 1960, during New Westminster's Centennial, it was celebrated with some major capital improvements. A new section of the park was renamed Centennial Grove and designed to incorporate the beautiful Centennial Lodge. A large area under the towering firs was cleared for the addition of a large bandshell for outdoor concerts. Nearby a children's playground, petting zoo and picnic shelter were developed. These improvements were the last of the major interventions to the original design of the park. In the modern era the park continues to be improved and its beautiful gardens and landscapes protected and enhanced. All of these changes continue to build upon and celebrate the tradition of Queen's Park as the centre of community and civic life in the New Westminster.

## Behind the Name...Queen's Park:



### Queen Victoria

- Born: 24 May 1819
- Died: 22 January 1901

Queen Victoria's nearly 64-year reign (1837 - 1901) was the longest in British history. She presided over a period of British industrial progress, artistic successes and political empire-building which became known as the Victorian Era. Victoria was only 18 when she became queen upon the death of her uncle, King William IV. In 1840 she married her first cousin Albert, the German son of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Victoria was shattered by his untimely death at age 42, and she went into a prolonged period of mourning. (She never stopped mourning entirely, wearing black the rest of her life.) Late in the 1860s she re-emerged into public life, and as years passed she became increasingly venerated among her subjects. Victoria celebrated her diamond jubilee -- 60 years on the throne -- in 1897. After her death in 1901 she was succeeded by her son Prince Albert, who became King.