

# GLENBROOK RAVINE PARK



IHP0622

- Established** 1980, 1991  
**Size** 13.38 acres  
**location** Jamieson Court off Richmond  
**Ammenities** Street
- An incredible pond, bridge and waterfall area surrounded by flower beds
  - Grove of mature trees with trails
  - Park benches
  - Birds and wildlife

Glenbrook Ravine Park was the first public park in the Colony of British Columbia. When the city was established in 1859, Colonel Moody wrote a letter to the Governor of the Colony of B.C: “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...”

The ravine did indeed serve as a physical division between the town and the Sapper’s Camp. High on the ravine bank, overlooking the river, Colonel Moody constructed a beautiful residence in 1860 called Government House. Moody, the colony’s Lieutenant-Governor, enjoyed entertaining at his home with his wife Mary and young family. The Moodys developed a lovely garden with pleasure walks in and around the ravine, whose paths connected to the other residences of the Royal Engineer’s Camp.

Moody left the colony in 1863. Governor and Lady Douglas took up residence at Government House briefly in 1864, where they held an official ball with over 200 guests in attendance.

The house was then occupied by newly-appointed Governor Seymour later that year, who built a large ballroom addition with a pretty tower designed by local architect J.C. White. After the capital was moved to Victoria in 1868, Seymour and his successor Anthony Musgrave rarely used the house.

In 1871 British Columbia joined confederation with Canada. The provincial government turned over the ravine lands along with the former Royal Engineers camp to the Dominion Government for use as the new Federal Penitentiary, with construction commencing in 1874.

Government House grounds and ravine continued to be used by the citizens of New Westminster as a picnic ground and park. May Day festivities were held on the old cricket grounds on the opposite side of the ravine beginning in 1871, often concluding with a picnic at Government House. When Gertrude McBride was crowned May Queen in 1877 she later recalled: "Shall I ever forget my May Day slippers with heels and blue bows, or my white kid gloves, or the drive to Government House in a carriage with two white horses ... along the shady road when the lovely old maples met overhead and the streams of clear water bubbled and rippled down on either side of their gravelly beds. ... The beautiful and expansive lawns and gardens created out of the wilderness by experienced old country gardeners in the service of the Crown. The surrounding drooping willow trees, lilacs, wild roses and the terraced slope to the river's edge."

However, a federal government penitentiaries inspector held a different view of the May Day festivities on this part of the prison grounds. He wrote in a report in 1879 that "it needs no argument to show how incongruous, how repugnant to good taste, leaving aside the incentive to breach of discipline and escape, it were (sic) to have games, music and dancing and other amusements, with all the attendant boisterous mirth, within easy earshot of convicts undergoing their allotted punishments." Despite his disparaging views, the picnics continued.

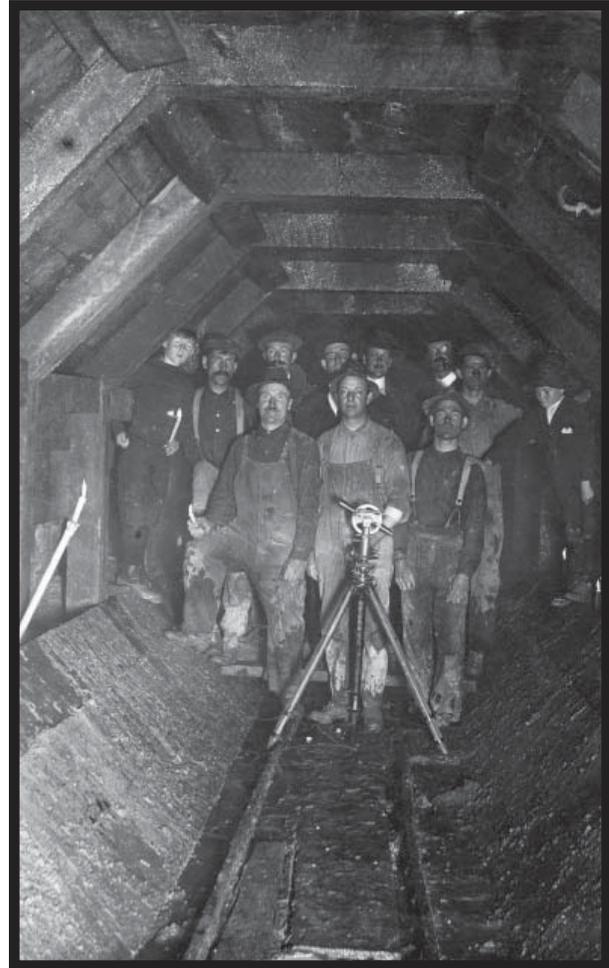
Government House was subsequently allocated to John Robson, Chief Engineer for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

By completion of the railway in 1886, the house was looking sad and neglected. It was commandeered by citizens to host a celebration for the visit of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald. But sadly,

after this event the house remained vacant, and was in such poor repair that cows wandered through the French doors into the ballrooms to escape the heat of the summer and bitter gales in the winter.

Finally, in 1889, the building was demolished. Government House grounds became the new location of the Warden's House, constructed in 1890. May Days were now exclusively held in the much improved fields of Queen's Park, and the beautiful Glen Brook was closed to the public and incorporated into the prison lands.

The ravine slowly became absorbed by the expanding federal penitentiary, and enveloped by fences to keep the public out and prisoners in. The wild state of the ravine became front page news after August 8, 1907 when it enabled the escape of notorious train robber Bill Miner, followed by a continent-wide manhunt for his recapture.



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Some prisoners would never escape this gaol. Behind the prison staff homes on the opposite side of the ravine, a small cemetery was cleared for the burial of prisoners, the first of which took place in 1912. The cemetery site remains today as a protected vestige of the former penitentiary; in modern times it has been dubbed "Boot Hill".

The ravine was also transformed by a huge sewage project in 1912. The Glenbrook Sewage Scheme enclosed the stream in a pipe to serve the city's growing suburbs and East Burnaby.

Further changes came to the ravine landscape in 1929, after the Warden's House was destroyed by a suspicious fire, rumoured to be started by the arsonist responsible for the destruction of the Provincial Exhibition buildings. The loss of the building enabled the B.C. Penitentiary to build an impressive new front entrance to the prison. This huge project required the excavation and destruction of the beautiful terrace and ravine on the old Government House grounds fronting Columbia Street. The land was reshaped to a low lawn hill and the ravine was kept cleared in order to spot any other prisoners who tried to escape.

The ravine changed very little for decades. In the 1950s the area became the temporary location of a prison camp for the hundreds of Doukoubors arrested in the B.C. interior. The 'Sons of Freedom' sect was known for its acts of arson in protest against the government's insistence that their children attend public schools. The camp buildings were also the subject of many arson fires; eventually the camp was demolished entirely.

When the Penitentiary closed in 1980, the ravine lands were permanently turned over to the City for parkland by the Fraserview Development Corporation, part of the rezoning of the site for a new housing development. The park lands returned to a natural state, with paths connecting the ravine to the Wood-lands site and further north to the Centennial Community Centre. The lower part of the ravine was transformed into a beautiful horticultural garden and recreation passive area for the new residents of Fraserview, and rededicated in 1991. The impressive original Penitentiary Bell was preserved and located here to commemorate the fascinating history of this site.

## Behind the Name...Glenbrook:



Colonel Moody referred to the ravine that separated the Sapper's Camp from the Royal Marines Camp as the 'Glen' as early as 1859. A glen is defined as "a small secluded valley." Prior to its enclosure in 1912 as part of a sewer plan, the valley also included a beautiful stony brook: hence the name Glenbrook. The name glen is derived from the Scottish Gaelic word glean, from the old Irish word glenn.