

SAPPERTON PARK



IHP0412

Established 1907
Size 4.98 acres
location Columbia Street & Sherbooke Street

Ammenities

- Soccer field
- Softball diamond
- Adventure playground
- Spray park

Ammenities

- Washrooms
- Picnic area

The establishment of the Sapperton Junior Lacrosse Club in 1900 was the impetus for the creation of Sapperton Park. The project was spearheaded by a group of more than 75 local residents that included Sapperton pioneer Jack Cambridge, an avid sports enthusiast who worked as the Registrar at the New Westminster courthouse.

Cambridge was the field captain for the new team, while influential Nels Nelson, who operated the Westminster Brewery, was President. The lacrosse team played on a privately-owned, makeshift lacrosse field, as there were no existing public parks in the city's east end. Despite the lack of adequate playing facilities, the new team included many talented players, and scored many victories. It not only won the city's junior lacrosse championship, but the support of nearly every resident of Sapperton as well.

However, a crisis loomed when the lacrosse club's only playing field was threatened by subdivision and sale by the land owner. At the Annual General Meeting of the New Westminster Lacrosse Club in 1901, Cambridge brought forward a resolution to request that City Council be interviewed about the matter of establishing a park for Sapperton as "...a large portion of the city will be deprived of its only available space for recreation." Action was considered urgent given that the land used as the practice field was about to be sold

The descendants of Jack Cambridge claim that he discovered the perfect new site adjacent to the home of his in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Devoy, who lived on East Columbia Street. This property was a large field cultivated by Chinese market gardeners, and was deemed the perfect site for a local park. Cambridge, in the course of his duties at the New Westminster courthouse, discovered that the land was for sale as a result of an estate closure and proposed its purchase to city council. Sapperton Park was established.

Other information contained in Council Minutes tells a different tale. At the Council meeting of March 10, 1902, Alderman Ryall stood to report on the proposed park at Sapperton. When asked by another Councilor to identify where this park was located, he garnered laughter from the gallery when he stated he had never been there before and did not know where the site was other than being somewhere south-east of Jack Cambridge's house.

The site may have been offered for donation in 1903 to the citizens of Sapperton by the landowner. Later minutes record that the park was finally established in 1907 when Council granted the funds to clear the site in time for the lacrosse season.

However the lands may have been acquired, in the early days, Jack Cambridge and the Devoy family did promote the field's use by local sport teams, providing their barn as a change room and their hose tap for a drinking fountain.



IHP0405

In 1912, when Council was considering the purchase of the land that would become Hume Park, a petition was received from local businessmen who advocated selling the property to create more commercial opportunities and raise funds to purchase the new Brunette Park. The community of Sapperton would not entertain the notion. Another petition to city council, led by Mrs. Janie R. Cameron, was signed by 143 other area residents, and the British Columbian newspaper reported: "... they objected most strongly to any disposal being made of the present playground, it being central and convenient to a majority of their young people. ...that the men who advocated the sale of the playground knew little about the subject or else had no children or ever expected to have any. Sapperton boys had done most of the work of leveling the park which had produced some of the best lacrosse players that New Westminster had ever seen. This playground was centrally located for the little tots, they could go and play there in safety; they could not do so in a park on the banks of the Brunette River. Their mothers would not let them and it would be cruel for the council to deprive the little children of the playground that meant so much to them ... that was hallowed in the memory of many a man in Sapperton." Facing the political opposition of so many voters, the Mayor vowed that "... if possible Sapperton would have both parks."

This park has long been the centre of community in Sapperton. The local Gyro Club constructing a wading pool and play area in 1921. In 1922, a grandstand to seat all sports fans under cover was built at a cost of \$305.05. Upon the formation of the city's Parks Commission in 1927 it was reported that: "Sapperton Park, opposite the Royal Columbian Hospital, has been improved by the removal of an unsightly board fence and the placing of benches for the spectators at various sporting events. The playing space has been leveled and pretty well cleared of stones and is well suited to various games. The upper portion, on slightly rising ground, is heavily timbered with small fir but the underbrush has been removed, swings erected, camp cooking stove built and a sand pile installed for the little kiddies. There is not much left of the outdoor gymnasium apparatus which was placed there some time ago." In order to remedy the deteriorated park playground the Gyro club raised the funds and a new playground opened in June, 1930. A new lacrosse box was built by the Parks Commission in 1934.

Over time, Sapperton Park expanded in size as lots on Sherbrooke Street became available for sale or non-payment of taxes in 1937 and 1940. The grandstand was in such poor condition that it was ordered demolished in 1943. In more modern times a playfield and softball diamond were added later with lighting installed for evening softball and soccer practices. In 1977 the Neighbourhood Improvement Program upgraded Sapperton Park by building the Adventure Playground, a picnic area and improved landscaping at a cost of \$48,000.

Behind the Name...Sapperton:



IHP0218

**There's only one Corps which is perfect - that's us;
An' they call us Her Majesty's Engineers
Her Majesty's Royal Engineers,
With the rank and pay of a Sapper!**

Extract from the poem 'Sapper' by Rudyard Kipling
(1865-1936)

From medieval times to the 19th century, one of the prime functions of the engineers attached to field armies was to assist in siege warfare, by either building or destroying fortifications. The term 'Sapper' originates from the act of besieging the walls of a fortress, laying mines in zigzag trenches dug by hand to breach them. These trenches, or 'saps' (an old French word) were dug progressively deeper as they drew closer to the walls. The whole process was known as 'sapping,' and the persons digging them under the authority of the engineers were called 'Sappers.' The rank of 'Sapper' was conferred onto the private soldiers of the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners on its amalgamation with the Corps of Royal Engineers in 1856.

In 1858, when the Colony of British Columbia was established and New Westminster was chosen as the capital city, the Columbia Detachment of Royal Engineers set up their camp in the eastern part of the city. Among the corps were many Sappers, or private soldiers. The camp became informally known as Sapperton for "Sappers' Town," and even after the disbanding of the corps this section of New Westminster retained this historic name.