

SIMCOE PARK



IHP1530
Established 1972
Size 3.79 acres
location Royal Avenue & Eighth Street

Ammenities

- Two tennis courts
- Adventure playground
- Soccer field
- Benches
- Trails & greenways
- Planters, trees & grass
- Community Garden



Simcoe Park was intended to be a major civic square at the intersection of Royal Avenue and Eighth Street. Known as Toronto Place in the historic city plan, it was part of the suburban extension to the original city blocks laid out by Colonel Moody and the Royal Engineers in 1863.

The square originally included the diagonal street and parklands of Simcoe Park adjacent to John Robson School. It was created to mirror its twin at the east end of Royal Avenue, which now comprises Clinton Place and Park Row leading to Queen's Park.

Grand public squares like this one were intended to signal the Royal City's role as the capital city of the colony of British Columbia. It was located at the crest of the hill to take advantage of the sweeping views of the Fraser River delta.

Toronto Place and the adjoining Simcoe and Ontario streets were named to honour British Columbia's entry into the Dominion of Canada in 1871. Toronto was the largest and oldest city of Ontario (originally known as Upper Canada) and Lord John Graves Simcoe served as that colony's first governor.

Some lots on Royal Avenue acquired by the city in 1884 were subdivided, and sold in 1886 to fund New Westminster's connection to the Canadian Pacific Railway, while two larger parcels of land on both sides of Simcoe Street were retained by the province to construct the provincial gaol in 1885.



IHP7096

This imposing Victorian prison was completed at a cost of \$35,000: “It commands a splendid view of the river and delta, and is one of the most prominent objects that meets the eye of persons coming up the river. It is built of brick with a stone foundation. The main building...includes the apartments of the governor of the gaol (Mr. William Moresby), the visitors room, office, chapel, kitchen, pantry, work rooms, women’s ward etc.” The institution was notorious for the public hangings of murderers in the prison yard - 22 by 1913.

After the Great Fire of 1898, the city constructed a firehall at the corner of Queen’s Avenue and Eighth Street on land leased from the province, initially on a 10 year lease. Change came slowly for this site, which remained essentially unchanged for decades. Finally, in 1917, it was announced that the provincial gaol would be closed, and the main population of provincial prisoners would be moved to Oakalla Prison Farm (established in Burnaby in 1911).

The prison was leased by the School Board for a renewable 20 year lease in 1919. The building was substantially renovated for its conversion into the Trapp Technical School and, in 1928, the new school building was constructed on Eighth Street. In 1944, the lands were granted to the city by the provincial government. When the senior high school opened on Eighth Street in 1955, “Trapp Tech” became John Robson Elementary School, and the old prison building was demolished to become playing fields.

The school and park playgrounds were combined in 1972 by closing off the diagonal street. \$100,000 was spent to create the park, designed by the well-known landscape design firm of Justice and Webb. The new park featured three tennis courts, junior soccer and sports fields, and an adventure playground. Ornamental landscaping included large Red Oak trees which lined the former Simcoe Street right of way at the corner of Eighth Street and Royal Avenue.

In 2009, Simcoe Park became host to a community garden operated by New Westminster Community Gardens. It complements the Port Royal Community Garden established in 2002.

Behind the Name...Simcoe Park:



Lord Simcoe was the first lieutenant governor of Upper Canada (Ontario) from 1791 - 1796 and the founder of Toronto. He was instrumental in introducing institutions such as the courts, trial by jury, English common law, and freehold land tenure, and for abolishing slavery long before it was abolished in the British Empire.