

# The Vancouver Park System, 1886-1929: A Product of Local Businessmen

William C. McKee

Numéro 3-78, february 1979

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019405ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019405ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

McKee, W. C. (1979). The Vancouver Park System, 1886-1929: A Product of Local Businessmen. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (3-78), 33-49.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019405ar>

THE VANCOUVER PARK SYSTEM, 1886-1929:  
A PRODUCT OF LOCAL BUSINESSMEN

- - - - -

*William C. McKee*

The men who shaped early English industrial cities forged centres with large manufacturing districts and expanding railway and wharfage facilities for moving their products to market. They made little or no provision for facilities such as community centres and public parks, and programmes such as work safety campaigns, from which they would apparently derive little direct financial gain. In Canada, the capitalists who founded industrial Montreal during the nineteenth century adopted the same narrow attitude. While a wide range of forces, from climate, topography and relative location, to cultural traditions and even the personalities of individual leading citizens help shape the urban environment, the image of the function of a city held by those dominant in city life ultimately determined the form and function of many features of city life. Therefore, public facilities such as street networks, parks and beaches may evolve in response to the wishes of a select few rather than the relatively impotent populace.

Because most cities in North America have emerged in response to economic developments, such as the opening of agricultural or mining districts, the business community--that amorphous group who own and operate business enterprises--has normally determined the course of community development. This was certainly the case in Vancouver, which was the child of the forest industry and, later, of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and subsequently evolved under the guidance of the local real estate community, shipping interests and other businessmen. The following paper will endeavour to illustrate how that group played the key role in determining the extent, shape, and function of the local public park system, and turned that control to its benefit during the first four and a half decades of Vancouver's history.

The quiet lumber town nestled on the south shore of Burrard Inlet, which became Vancouver in the spring of 1886, was governed from the beginning by businessmen. The original town of Granville was

virtually the creation of a saw mill company. Then, in 1884, the provincial government granted the Canadian Pacific Railway extensive lands in and around the village; the company in turn made Granville the western terminus of its transcontinental rail line. Attracted by the prospect of a rising new metropolis and the attendant opportunities, a new population flooded into the area and new businesses arose overnight. By 1890, total civic assessments had reached almost \$10,000,000 and the population was 15,000.<sup>1</sup>

The citizens entrusted with the task of creating and then shaping a civic park system were drawn from the business community. City Council, the source of appropriations for parks, retained ultimate control over the direction of park development, and was dominated by merchants and industrialists. The city's first Council, for instance, was composed of three real estate agents including Mayor Malcolm MacLean and C.P.R. Assistant Land Commissioner L. A. Hamilton, five merchants, a contractor and two employees of Hastings Saw Mill. This pattern was followed with minor variation up to 1929.<sup>2</sup>

The civic Park Committee, formed by Council in September, 1888, was similarly composed. The three members drawn from Council's ranks were: R. H. Alexander, who held the prestigious and influential position of manager at Hastings Mill; Samuel Brighthouse, one of the city's major landowners; and Charles A. L. Coldwell, a civil engineer, road contractor and merchant. Council also chose three "gentlemen" (viz., men-of-commerce) from the public-at-large to serve on the committee. A. G. Ferguson, the chairman of the committee, had been a C.P.R. contractor and had built Vancouver's largest office blocks. Another appointee, H. P. McCraney, was

---

<sup>1</sup>"Vancouver's Progress," Vancouver World, Special Issue (Vancouver: McLagan and Co., 1891), p. 2. For an excellent overview of Vancouver's early history see Norbert MacDonald, "'C.P.R. Town': The City Building Process in Vancouver, 1860-1914," in G. A. Stelter and A. F. J. Artibise, eds., Shaping the Canadian Urban Landscape (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed picture of this pattern, readers are referred to William C. McKee, "The History of the Vancouver Park System, 1886-1929," M.A. Thesis (University of Victoria, 1976) Appendix 1: City Councils: A random selection, pp. 143-145.

a prosperous contractor. Finally, R. G. Tatlow had been private secretary to the Honourable A. N. Richards, Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, and was a real estate speculator, insurance agent and investment counsellor. Later, Tatlow was Minister of Finance in the provincial administration of Richard McBride. The nominal fee paid to each committee member reinforced the control of these and men of similar stations, since the less prosperous could ill afford to provide their time and services for such a meagre reward.

Between 1888 and 1928, approximately eighty per cent of the positions in the Park Committee and its successor, the Park Board, were occupied by men who listed themselves as contractors and builders, merchants, proprietors of businesses, real estate brokers and speculators, insurance brokers, capitalists and managers. A further seven per cent were professionals such as pharmacists, dentists, doctors and an engineer.<sup>3</sup> Dominant in both Council and the Park Board, the business community was, then, potentially in a position to establish the type of park system it preferred.

Civic park officials, as they embarked on the prolonged task of developing a park system, quickly encountered their first problem. When the old Granville townsite, the core of early Vancouver, had been originally surveyed by colonial authorities in 1870, there had been no provision for a village green or park. This was an understandable omission since Granville was only a lumber town of little import with none of the refined tastes of the older centres of Victoria and New Westminster. Furthermore, the village apparently had no need for such a facility, since it was surrounded by a natural park of verdant forest and streams teeming with fish.

Similarly, when the Canadian Pacific Railway townsite was laid out to the west of Granville in 1885, no provision for park space was made. Lachlan Alexander Hamilton, instructed by the firm to lay out the townsite for the future metropolis, produced a concentrated grid of north-south and east-west streets. To squeeze as much marketable land as possible from

---

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed breakdown of this data, readers are referred to ibid., pp. 146-149.

the site, he created straight streets of moderate width and made no provision for grand boulevards, plazas or public green space.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequent surveys and real estate developments in the West End, on the Fairview slopes and in Mount Pleasant south of False Creek, also made no provision for park land. The provincial government established a single park reserve on its lands on the south side of English Bay. Because most real estate developers of early Vancouver -- from small local firms to the ubiquitous Canadian Pacific Railway -- appear to have believed that providing public green space was an unnecessary extravagance, the early city landscape was almost devoid of park reserves.

Ironically, a local real estate broker, A. W. Ross, took the initiative in suggesting the acquisition of Stanley Park, Vancouver's first and largest park. Although modern mythology would have us believe that the 1000 acre forest situated at the First Narrows north-west of downtown Vancouver which is Stanley Park survived due to the profound foresight of the city's founders, such was not the case. As early as 1865, Captain Edward Stamp, who eventually erected Hastings Saw Mill and may therefore be considered the "father" of Vancouver, was granted permission by pliable colonial officials to erect a sawmill on the government reserve at First Narrows, which eventually became Stanley Park. Stamp, however, soon abandoned the site when he discovered its unsuitability.<sup>5</sup> During the next two decades the reserve was also coveted as a site for railway yards, warehouses and wharves, and used as a graveyard, picnic ground and bathing site. The

---

<sup>4</sup>The railway firm soon established the C.P.R. Park on the block immediately north of their hotel at the intersection of Granville and Georgia Streets. The park, intended only for hotel guests, was, however, gradually subdivided and sold during the 1890s.

<sup>5</sup>For a colourful interpretation of Stamp's brief sojourn in the First Narrows Reserve, readers are directed to: James Morton, The Enterprising Mr. Moody, The Bumptious Captain Stamp: The Lives and Colourful Times of Vancouver's Lumber Pioneers (North Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1977), pp. 43-47.

union of British Columbia with Canada in 1871 meant that the reserve thereafter fell under federal jurisdiction, and appears to have been protected as a source of possible naval spars and a potential site for west coast defences. Had the federal government not assumed control over the reserve, its previous history suggests loggers and perhaps even land developers might have quickly encroached upon it, especially after the C.P.R. designated Coal Harbour its Pacific terminus.

At its second meeting, on May 12, 1886, City Council received a letter from A. W. Ross requesting that the city petition the federal government to give the large and wooded reserve to Vancouver for park purposes.<sup>6</sup> Known more for a commitment to land speculation than a concern for the quality of city life, Ross had probably been motivated by commercial considerations. Since the reserve was not available for speculation, he probably believed that as a major park it would draw tourists and settlers to Vancouver, and drive up the price of West End lands, which he was no

---

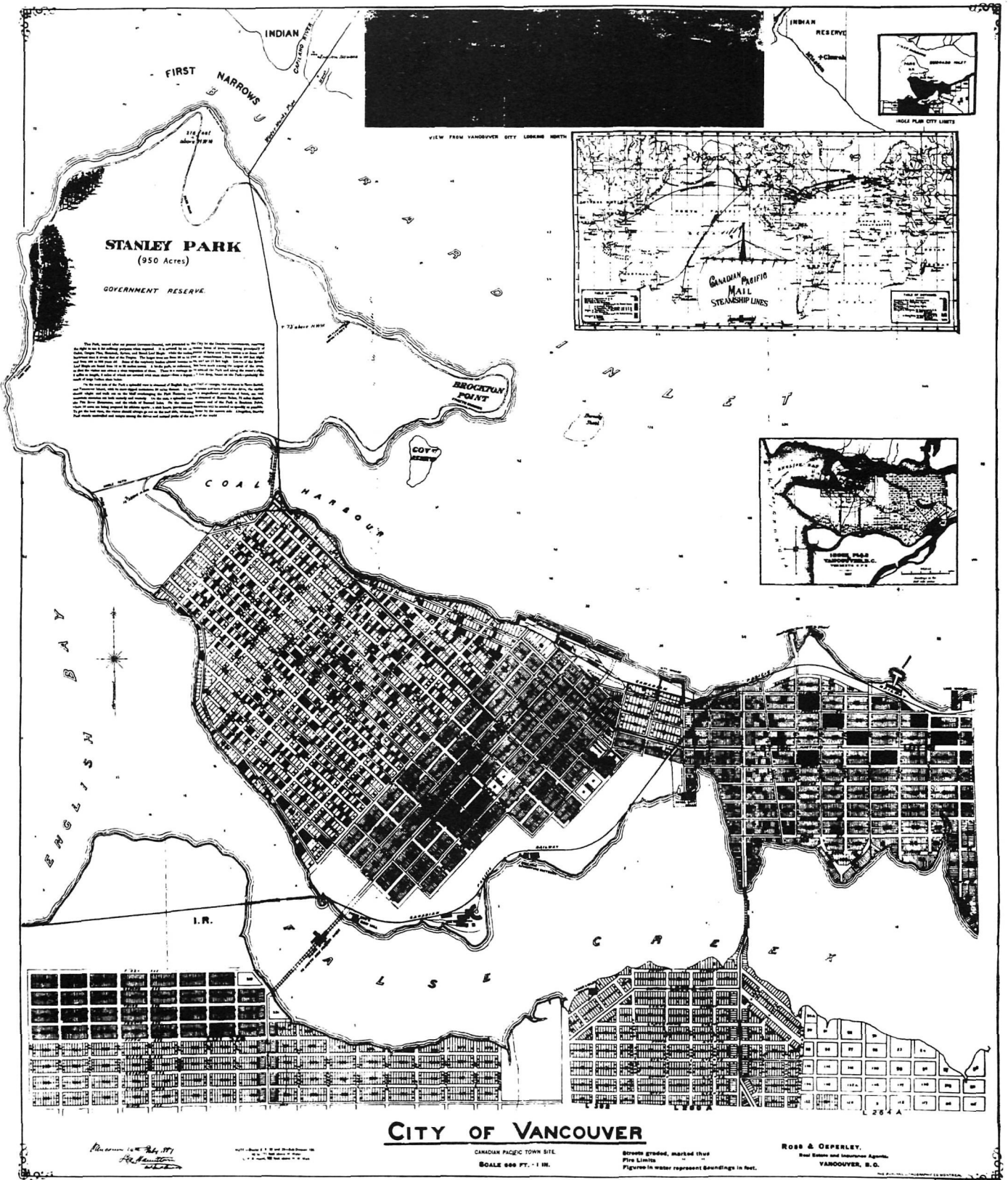
<sup>6</sup>Ross came west in 1877 and was called to the Manitoba bar the following year. He had reportedly accumulated \$500,000 in the Winnipeg land boom of 1881-82, but lost his fortune when the boom collapsed. Soon, however, he had returned to land speculation and adroitly accumulated another fortune. In 1882, he was elected as the Member of Parliament from Lisgar, Manitoba, and became such an advocate of C.P.R. interests that he was known as the "C.P.R. Member of Parliament." In 1884, he arrived in British Columbia and acquired property at Granville, believing the C.P.R. would be extending its main line to the town. Ross then worked as an agent for other speculators and took some credit for convincing the railway company to establish its Pacific terminus at Granville. In 1886, he joined H. T. Ceperley in a partnership to sell real estate and fire insurance in the growing city, which had been renamed Vancouver. In 1891, Ross sold his interest in the prosperous business and returned to Winnipeg. J. B. Kerr, Biographical Dictionary of Well-Known British Columbians (Vancouver: Kerr and Begg, 1890), pp. 280-81.

Printed inset on Map 1 reads as follows:

*This Park, named after our present Governor-General, was presented to the City by the Dominion Government, reserving the right to use it for military purposes when required. It is covered by an immense forest of trees, consisting principally of Cedar, Oregon Pine, Hemlock, Spruce, and Broad-Leaf Maple; while the undergrowth of ferns and berry bushes is so dense and luxuriant that it rivals that of the Tropics. The larger trees are from 30 to 55 feet in circumference; from 200 to 300 feet high, and from 400 to 600 years old. Some of the raspberry bushes almost become trees, and are 18 feet high. Leaves of the Broad-Leaf Maple are found from 18 to 28 inches across. A bridle path, as indicated, has been made among the largest of the trees, so that the visitor can obtain a close inspection of them. There is a carriage drive around the Park and along the water's edge, 9 miles in length, 3 miles of which are covered with clam shells - from a deposit 8 feet deep, found on the Park - probably the result of large Indian clam-bakes.*

*On the west side of the Park a splendid view is obtained of English Bay, the Gulf of Georgia, the entrance to Howe Sound, and Vancouver Island, with its snow-tipped mountains 50 miles distant. At the extreme northern end of the drive, the visitor should alight and walk out on the bluff overhanging the First Narrows, where a magnificent panorama of forest, sea and mountain stretches out both easterly and westerly. On the east, a splendid view is obtained of Mount Baker, 75 miles distant, the Pitt River Mountains, and the whole of Burrard Inlet. On the extreme eastern end of the Park is Brockton Point, where 10 acres are being prepared for athletic sports; a club house, pavilions and fountains will be erected as speedily as possible. To get the best view, the visitor should always go out on the west side, returning home by the eastern side. Altogether, Stanley Park stands unrivalled and unique among the drives and natural parks of the cities of the world.*

MAP 1: VANCOUVER, 1887



Provenance: *Map of the City of Vancouver, published by Ross and Ceperley, Real Estate and Insurance Agents, 1887. Reproduced courtesy of Vancouver City Archives.*



doubt selling.<sup>7</sup> Council concurred with his proposal and Mayor Malcolm MacLean -- Ross' brother-in-law -- petitioned Ottawa accordingly. By mid-1887, the Privy Council had approved the transfer of the reserve to Vancouver until such time as the Department of Militia and Defence required it.

Civic officials obviously realized that the new park would, in addition to boosting the West End real estate market, provide a site for much needed recreational facilities for Vancouver residents. By mid 1888, clearing for an athletic ground for local rugby and cricket teams had started near Brockton Point, at the eastern end of the park. Bathing beaches and a zoo were eventually also developed on the peninsula. Whether intentionally or not the park tended to serve the more prosperous. As increasing numbers of the successful moved into prestigious homes in the West End, they quickly adopted the adjacent park as their summer evening and weekend playground. When streetcar service was extended westward from the downtown to the Coal Harbour entrance to the park in 1906, increasing numbers of people from the lower income districts on the city's east and southeast sides managed to visit Stanley Park. However, tired from their long hours of labour, many would consider a trip to the park a major expedition. Inhibited by their low incomes and large families many probably also considered the nickel streetcar fare prohibitive.

Although the park was serving the more prosperous, recreational facilities which might intrude too much upon the park's lush forest were

---

<sup>7</sup>The evidence to suggest that Ross acted out of self-interest while only circumstantial, is significant. The City of Vancouver Assessment Rolls for 1886 and 1887, which would provide a record of property owners in the district adjacent to the proposed park (today's West End), have not survived. Furthermore, provincial Land Registry records, which could also provide a picture of the registered owners of West End lands, were unavailable. Therefore the writer could not prove that Ross was acting as a West End land owner.

However, he and his partner, Ceperley, published a map in 1887 advertising the advantages of buying land in the young city, suggesting the firm's interests -- either as agents or property owners -- were distributed across Vancouver including the West End.

In writing to Council, Ross may have also been a spokesman for several interested businessmen; it is clear, for example, that the park would attract more traffic to David Oppenheimer's street railway.

discouraged. In 1889, for example, the Park Committee opposed an application by the local Rifle Association for a strip of parkland twenty yards wide by up to 1000 yards long for a shooting range, as "the park is not adapted for such purposes. . . ."<sup>8</sup> The Committee was very conscious of the tourist value of Stanley Park. Twenty-two years later, in its first published annual report, the Park Board noted with pride the reactions of two world travellers to Vancouver's wilderness park. Elbert Hubbard's statement that, "There are parks and parks, but there is no park in the world that will exhaust your stock of adjectives and subdue you to silence like Stanley Park," was matched by a Lady Doughty's similarly warm appraisal, which had appeared previously in the English press.<sup>9</sup>

The businessmen who formed the Vancouver Tourist Association in 1902 also saw the park's value as a major tourist attraction. In its annual brochures, the Association repeatedly stressed the incomparable beauty of Stanley Park. A 1904 pamphlet, entitled Sunset Doorway of the Dominion, announced "The people of Vancouver are not afraid of being called boasters when they say their park is the gem of the world. The globe-trotter who has seen all the much talked and written about parks of London, Paris and New York, with all their artistic landscape beauty, feels new emotion upon entering Stanley Park."<sup>10</sup> The Board of Trade, also cognizant of the value of the forest wilderness in drawing tourist dollars to

---

<sup>8</sup>Park Board Collection, Record Group 7, Minutes. Volume 1, January 23, 1889, p. 5. Unless otherwise noted, all sources subsequently cited are located at the City Archives of Vancouver. It is significant to note that the Park Committee was also adhering to the instruction issued by the Minister of Militia and Defence in 1887 that the peninsula's natural integrity should be disturbed as little as possible. However, the term "as little as possible" was subject to interpretation and not a firm guideline.

<sup>9</sup>Park Board, First Annual Report, 1911, pp. 53, 56.

<sup>10</sup>The Sunset Doorway of the Dominion (Vancouver: Tourist Association, 1904), pp. 11-12.

Vancouver, vocally defended the park's natural beauty. In April 1910, it protested what it described as the wholesale slaughter of trees on the peninsula. The Park Board was, in fact, only clearing and underbrushing various sections of the park as a measure against the hazard of fire.

It would be incorrect, however, to contend that the city's business community always acted as a monolithic force when dealing with Stanley Park, for some believed more than others in the value of parks. One case is demonstrative. In February, 1899, the federal government announced that it was about to lease Deadman's Island, a reserve in Coal Harbour adjacent to Stanley Park, for twenty-five years to an American industrialist, Theodore Ludgate, who proposed to erect a sawmill on the island. Most Vancouverites had assumed the island was part of the original Stanley Park grant.

Reaction to the announcement was immediate and vocal. Six days after the lease had been signed, a delegation from the Board of Trade urged Council to convey its opposition to Ottawa. Campbell Sweeny, local manager of the Bank of Montreal -- and thus one of the most important businessmen in the city -- also spoke out against the Ludgate lease. A. E. Tregent, a broker, submitted a petition signed by over 3000 citizens opposing the lease and supporting the Park Board's claim to Deadman's Island. Members of Council were divided over the issue, one group contending the lease was an assault on Stanley Park itself, while the other suggested Ludgate was bringing welcome industry to the city.

As tempers rose, a public meeting was convened on February 27th, 1899, to debate the issue. After four hours of stormy discussion, the meeting overwhelmingly adopted the motion of Charles Woodward, a prominent local merchant, "That this meeting of the citizens of Vancouver heartily approves of the leasing of Deadman's Island for manufactory purposes." The following day, the Vancouver Daily News Advertiser, a vocal opponent of the Ludgate scheme, denounced the meeting as a sham, rigged by the supporters and minions of the industrialist.<sup>11</sup> The newspaper contended

---

<sup>11</sup>"Stormy Mass Meeting," Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser, February 28, 1899, p. 4.

that the City Council, Board of Trade and local Trades and Labour Council spoke for the vast majority of the citizens by opposing Ludgate.

The dispute entered the courts in 1901 and was settled in 1911 when Ludgate's title was confirmed by the Privy Council. The significance of this prolonged struggle lay in the persistence and dedication of both sides. A vocal group of businessmen successfully challenged the apparent boundaries of Stanley Park, in order to bring industry to the city. On the other hand, a vocal group of "conservationists," composed in large part of pragmatic businessmen who valued Stanley Park as a tourist attraction, joined in the defence of what they believed was part of the park. In late November, 1911, the Vancouver Province graphically summarized the discontent of the latter group with the eventual fate of the disputed property:

The last tree has been cut down on "the isle of dreams," or Deadman's Island, and desolate and pathetic it lies across the entrance to Coal Harbour, shivering in its nakedness, a monument to materialism, vandalism and stupidity; cleverness and illegality.<sup>12</sup>

In subsequent years, businessmen repeatedly proposed using the park proper for commercial gain, although no scheme ever measured up to Ludgate's assault. Those controlling the city government which resisted such schemes believed that the optimum gain -- both recreational and financial -- would be achieved by retaining the large, natural site.

Where conservation could not be translated into tourist dollars, and where local political influence was weak, the result was opposite. Such was the case at Hastings, Vancouver's second-largest park, which was located outside the municipal boundaries of Vancouver until 1911. Even before the province transferred the property to the city in the late summer of 1889, City Council had considered using at least part of the park as an agricultural and industrial exhibition site. Vancouver believed that as it emerged as the great entrepôt of Western Canada, the province

---

<sup>12</sup>"Deadman's Island," Vancouver Daily Province, November 28, 1911, p. 12.

would recognize the Vancouver fair as the provincial exhibition. However, the province continued to support New Westminster's fair, arresting Vancouver's plans until the early 1900s. In spite of the setback, Council did not abandon the idea and did not transfer jurisdiction over the site to the Park Board.

An economic boom and rapid population growth after the turn of the century produced a core of businessmen, stockbreeders and farmers intent upon establishing an exhibition. After a meeting in May, 1907, resolved

That . . . the time has arrived for the establishment of an Exhibition Association for Vancouver to embrace fat stock, horses, [cattle], dogs, poultry, also horticultural agricultural and industrial interests and also for the object of maintaining the City of Vancouver in that leading position she by rights should occupy . . . ,<sup>13</sup>

the Vancouver Exhibition Association was formed. In 1909, it was granted a lease to the northern portion of Hastings Park, and the first fair was opened the following year. The decision to place the annual exhibition at Hastings Park was to result in the eventual transformation of the entire park. In 1911, the Park Board still reported that the portion of the park recently assigned to its care

. . . is a fine natural park, heavily timbered, and resembling Stanley Park in its grandeur. Driveways have been constructed and the very heart of the forest has been tapped by the opening of trails. The front facing Hastings Street East has been prepared and laid out for a future ornamental garden, while the work of clearing and grading for a playground is well under way.<sup>14</sup>

Concurrently, the Exhibition Association was razing the forest in its portion of the park, and constructing display and show buildings. The success of the annual fairs, in terms of both attendance and profit, was applauded by Council, and in 1913 the Association was granted virtually all of the balance of the park. From that moment, the forest was cut back

---

<sup>13</sup>Add. MSS 281, volume 1A, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Park Board, First Annual Report, p. 20.

further and concrete came to reign where the forest once had ruled, despite the protests of Hastings homeowners, who waited a decade for their next park.

While it concentrated its efforts developing Stanley Park and generating proposals for Hastings Park, the city paid virtually no attention to the park needs of the increasingly crowded lower income districts just east and southeast of the city centre. Those who desired park space were forced to use unoccupied property or C.P.R. lands at Beatty and Georgia which were destined for commercial use. Because of an economic recession during the 1890s, and perhaps because those who resided in the areas did not have the ear of those on Council or the Park Board, the City did not acquire the needed park lands until after the turn of the century.

Meanwhile, businessmen also played a central role in the eventual acquisition and development of many of Vancouver's smaller, district parks. Toronto realtor Ephraim J. Clark provided the first such facility, near the isolated south-eastern boundary of the city. As an experienced real estate operator,<sup>15</sup> Clark was probably motivated more by the prospect of profit than a spirit of philanthropy; owning substantial property in the vicinity, he probably believed such a park would improve the value of his land.

Most smaller parks were not, however, acquired as gifts. Local ratepayers and progress groups -- usually dominated by those in business -- took the initiative in pushing the city to purchase almost all the other neighbourhood parks. Events in Kitsilano and Grandview, shortly after the turn of the century, support this thesis.

In Kitsilano, the Improvement Association, led by real estate agents G. M. Endacott and F. Bayliss, headed the campaign to convince the city to acquire property at Kitsilano Beach for park land. When the city failed to provide sufficient funds, Endacott and his associates dipped

---

<sup>15</sup>Letter to the writer, R. Scott James, City Archivist, City of Toronto, March 19, 1976.

into their pockets for the balance.<sup>16</sup> As residents of a newly opened district, the members of the Association had been motivated by a simple concern to upgrade their area; their desire to establish a local park corresponded to their concurrent wishes to have streets opened, sewers built and a streetcar service provided in order to make Kitsilano more livable. Nevertheless, the leadership taken by local real estate promoters in particular, would suggest that some believed a waterfront park would add to the value of the adjacent neighbourhood. In subsequent years, the Ratepayers Association continued to demonstrate a concern for the "welfare" of Kitsilano, lobbying the City not to grant the licence required for a proposed carnival and to eject a religious sect which was holding services on the beach. This concern illustrated the determination by prosperous Kitsilano residents that their park reflect their aspirations for their district and contribute to the resale value of their property.

The same type of leadership was assumed by local businessmen in Grandview, another new district at the head of False Creek. The local Progress Association, composed largely of merchants, campaigned for the area's first park. Once the land had been allocated, the Association advocated its development as a floral park rather than sports ground. The merchants and middle income homeowners of Grandview, like those in Kitsilano, clearly wanted the park to upgrade their district and improve property values. Despite an organized, vocal campaign by local athletes -- who pointed out the urgent need for a sports field in the area -- the Park Board adopted the proposal of the Progress Association.

Convinced of the value of a city-wide network of green space in contrast to individual, isolated parks, a large body of businessmen also assumed the leadership of a campaign to beautify the entire city. Although the "City Beautiful" philosophy, born at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, was introduced to Vancouver by the local Council of Women

---

<sup>16</sup>See City Archives photograph PHO P. 101, which provides an outline of the role played by the Kitsilano Improvement Association in the acquisition of Kitsilano Beach. Endacott and his colleagues were subsequently reimbursed by the city.

about 1911, leadership of the local City Beautiful Movement was quickly assumed by members of the Board of Trade; the first executive of the Vancouver branch consisted of J. J. Banfield, prominent real estate and insurance broker and a past president of the Tourist Association, who was President; local clothier A. E. Lees, who was Vice-President; and W. E. Payne, who acted concurrently as Secretary of the Board of Trade and City Beautiful Association. The advent of serious depression and then war, however, led to the dissolution of the Association. In the 1920s, the business dominated membership of the Vancouver Rotary and Kiwanis clubs revived the theme. Although somewhat more successful than their predecessors, these advocates of a more beautiful city achieved limited goals. The Kiwanis Club established the Stanley Park Rose Garden, and sponsored a forum on the City Beautiful. The Rotarians attempted to make Vancouver the "Rose City of Canada," a theme borrowed from the Multnomah Club of Portland, Oregon; perhaps because their scheme was not original but simply an attempt to copy another city, it did not gain the necessary widespread support and never came to fruition. The City Beautiful Movement had nevertheless prepared the way for town planning, by introducing the idea of reshaping the city into a more visually pleasing environment. The dominant position businessmen like Banfield assumed in this movement illustrated once again how business operated to ensure that the growing urban green space would serve its ends.<sup>17</sup>

The influential role assumed by the city's men of commerce in the task of building a civic park system did not produce a park system designed to serve only their needs. Political reality demanded that the park system cater, even if inequitably, to the general public. Businessmen, at times, took the initiative in providing special facilities for the public. The Vancouver Exhibition Association, for instance, constructed Vancouver's first public golf links at Hastings Park, and the local

---

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed analysis of the role businessmen played in town planning in Vancouver, readers are referred to John Bottomley, "Ideology, Planning and the Landscape ... the Business Community, Urban Reform and the Establishment of Town Planning in Vancouver, British Columbia, 1900-1940," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of British Columbia, 1977).



Gyro Club -- another service club dominated by men in commerce -- gave the city most of its earliest supervised children's playgrounds. This philanthropy was motivated by a belief that the private sector, rather than government, should provide such "luxuries" and perhaps that such largess would forestall a popular takeover of the Park Board. In the process, the more prosperous would consolidate their grip on the organizations, public and private, which were directing the development of the civic park system.

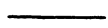
The park system which had developed by the end of 1928 (see Map 2), as Vancouver stood on the verge of a major territorial expansion, was the product of the pervasive influence of businessmen in the councils which had constructed the system. In a society controlled by men who saw the city more as a marketplace than a living place, urban green space was usually expected to produce some material return; Stanley Park attracted tourists, Hastings Park drew potential investors, while facilities like Victoria Park in Grandview improved adjacent property values and attracted settlers and perhaps customers for local merchants. The provision of district parks provided additional benefits; politicians claiming responsibility for the establishment of parks, especially in politically articulate districts such as Kitsilano and Grandview, often found a ready base of support among local residents; finally, parks were of course available for public recreation -- once again, particularly in politically organized areas. Meanwhile, the needs of the politically impotent, such as the Chinese in their crowded downtown district, were given a low priority or even ignored.

From their lofty perch, the men developing the civic park system also believed that public green space should embellish but not intrude unduly upon the predominantly private landscape in which they resided and worked; while the city developed scattered parks and some citizens even dreamed of a more beautiful community, officials did not even contemplate a great network of wide, green boulevards and massive plazas linking the park system. In Vancouver the park assumed a peripheral role in city life. To paraphrase a contemporary American politician, "In Vancouver, the business of the park system was business."

LEGEND



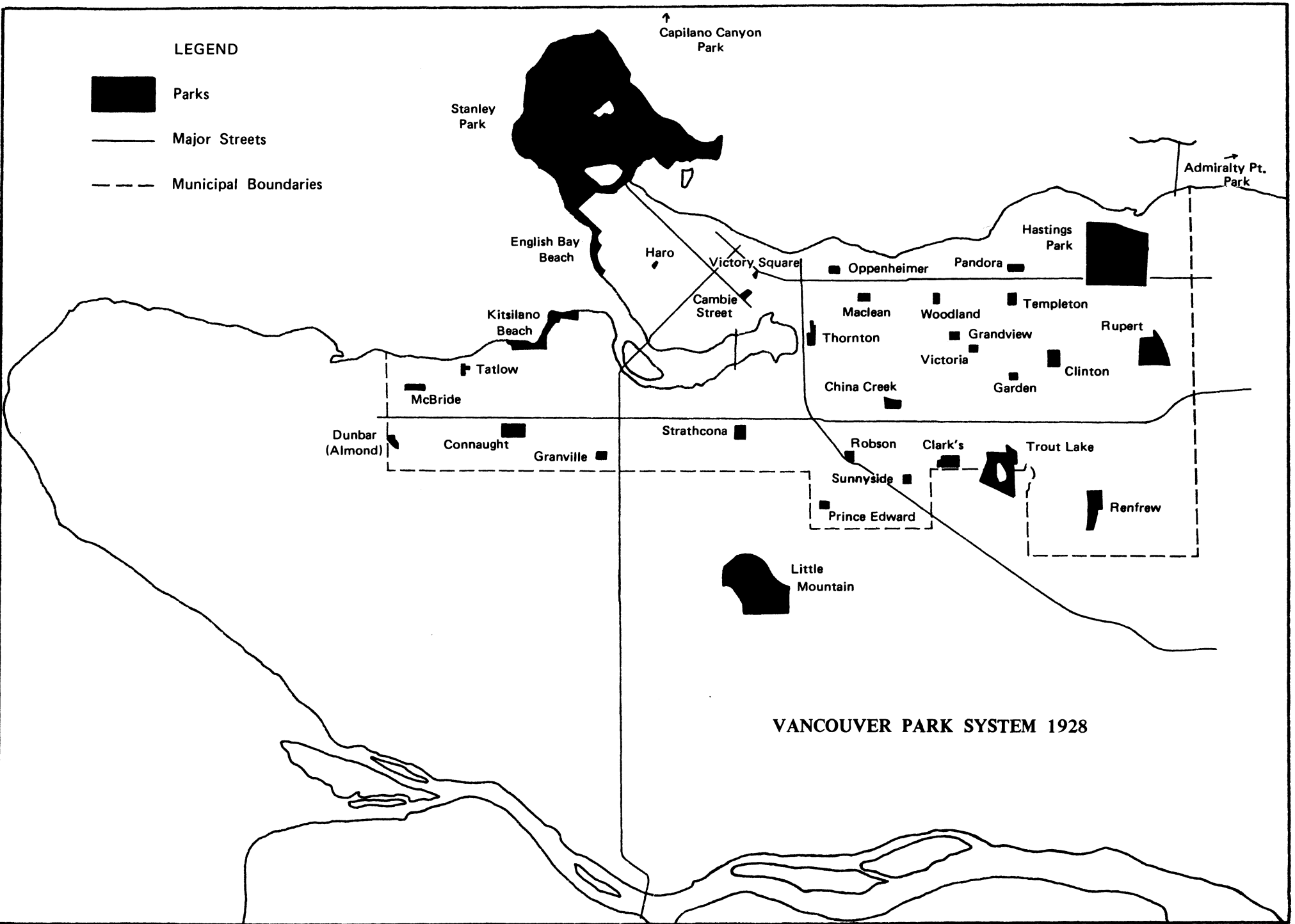
Parks



Major Streets



Municipal Boundaries



VANCOUVER PARK SYSTEM 1928