

PREFACE

In 1865 Edward Stamp established a sawmill at False Creek which became the basis for a small community built east of Main Street.¹ Another Englishman, John Deighton, arrived two years later to erect a saloon at the intersection of Water and Carrall, streets that were soon lined with workers' lodgings. This area of the original settlement was dubbed Gastown, a reference to the loquaciousness of "Gassy" Jack Deighton, whom some regarded as its unofficial mayor.²

In 1870 Stamp's enterprise was sold and renamed Hastings Mill. In that same year the townsite was surveyed and officially named Granville. Granville was still small and unprosperous in 1885 when a visitor described it in this fashion:

... to reach this place of about 150 inhabitants, the traveller was obliged to disembark at a wharf near Hastings Mill, about a half a mile east of the village. ... This place has been surveyed ... and a few lots sold. But so little was thought of its situation and prospects that only about thirteen lots had been purchased.³

By 1886, Granville's future was ensured by the Canadian Pacific Railway's decision to extend its cross-Canada line to the coast. Granville was incorporated that April as the City of Vancouver, and described as a place of 2,000 inhabitants and 8,000 businesses. In June came the devastating fire which destroyed much of the city. But the rebuilding took place quickly. One journalist marvelled that he had "never seen so much enterprise amid so much desolation." He reported that, by July, "fourteen new hotels and hundreds of stores" (qtd. in Ormsby 297) had been constructed.

This rapid rebuilding was a reflection of the optimism that was felt about Vancouver's future. The hastily constructed wooden false-fronts in Gastown were soon replaced by brick structures in the Italianate style.

Whereas Granville's fortune had been tied to the mill, Vancouver's would be linked to Canadian Pacific Railway investment. In the summer of 1886, the CPR opened up and graded Cordova, Hastings, and Pender Streets; in 1887, Granville Street was opened from Burrard Inlet to False Creek. The first passenger train arrived that May. In June, Vancouver was tested as a deep-sea port. Because of its association with transportation, Vancouver was referred to as Terminal City. In 1887, its population was 5,000.



By 1889 Vancouver was a city of contrasts. One traveller observed that “one lot would have a grand grey granite building built in the primitive Romanesque style, costing 100,000 dollars; and the next, a wretched wooden shanty or a bit of the original bush” (qtd. in Ormsby 300). Between 1888 and 1890, however, Vancouver began to enjoy the amenities of city life — wooden paving, waterworks, sewerage, telephones and trams on the one hand; newspapers, dramatic societies and Stanley Park on the other.

But in 1900 Vancouver had a low population of 27,000 citizens and the appearance of a village. There were few buildings on a large scale and none exceeded five storeys. In the early years of the century (1904-1907), Vancouver experienced a boom. Eastern Canadian and Western European capital spurred the development of British Columbia’s mineral, lumber and fishing resources, and Vancouver plunged into land speculation and construction (Kloppenborg 49). Whereas in 1902 the city Building Inspector’s office issued only 417 permits for structures estimated at 33,609 dollars, in 1910 it issued 2,260 permits for projects totalling 13,150,360 dollars.

By 1913 the population had soared to 115,000. Between 1905 and 1920, dozens of substantial buildings with classical ornaments were constructed on West Hastings and West Pender, and on and about Granville Street, establishing a new commercial centre west of Gastown. Two of the grandest of these edifices, the Dominion Building on West Hastings and the Sun Tower on West Pender, were each in turn briefly proclaimed the "tallest building in the Dominion" (Kalman). One of the most imposing was the Courthouse which was designed by Francis Mawson Rattenbury, a leading architect of his day.

Today in 1986, the City of Vancouver's population exceeds 417,900 and that of the Greater Vancouver Regional District stands at over 1,233,000. The visual appearance of the commercial core has undergone radical transformation since the early century. The streets to the west of Granville (particularly Burrard) have been intensively developed since 1969. Curtain wall skyscrapers cluster around the classical buildings that remain from Vancouver's first period of maturity.

Rattenbury's Courthouse, however, still stands at the centre of things, its external appearance belying the changes that have occurred within. It has been recently renovated to become the new premises for the Vancouver Art Gallery, which opened in 1983. It is now part of an elaborate three block long complex called Robson Square, which contains a new courthouse, a government office block, a media centre, a food fair, a park and other amenities. This complex was designed by Arthur Erickson Architects. Arthur Charles Erickson is a leading architect of this day.

The Capilano Review has chosen to publish *Robson Square* in the year of Vancouver's Centennial not simply to document the work of two major architects, but as a celebration of the changing tastes and

methods the buildings in the Square (and their histories) suggest. In the last eighty years, architects have, on the whole, moved away from the practice of incorporating borrowed, traditional, hand-crafted ornament into their designs. While the borrowing of ideas and motifs still occurs, the typical approach to architectural aesthetics in the post-Bauhaus period is one that supports, in general, the notion that if the form of the building truly grows from its function, and if it is rendered in materials that are sensitively chosen and arranged, the result may be no less satisfactory than was the Doric temple. Some architects, like Erickson, manage to obey these general dicta and yet produce works in a highly personal style.

Further, in the last eighty years engineering has changed, and certain materials, like concrete, glass and steel, have, on the whole, replaced hand-hewn stone and brick. The bearing wall has been replaced by internal support, allowing structures with diaphanous coverings like the vast curtain wall that serves as the ceiling and main wall of Erickson's Law Courts. In the past, gardens used to surround structures, but today in the best works are integral to them.

NOTES

- ¹ For historical facts regarding British Columbia's history to 1958 consult Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History*.
- ² For basic information about Vancouver's history and for images of extant buildings consult Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver*.
- ³ For a well illustrated book full of quotations consult Kloppenborg et al., *Vancouver's First Century*. The passage reproduced here is quoted on page 8.

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5 City of Vancouver Archives.