

Stories from the Archives — Port Moody's First Attempt To Incorporate

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This year (2013) the *City of Port Moody* is celebrating its 100th anniversary as an incorporated municipality, but the townsite of Port Moody has been around for a much longer period of time. In fact, it was 30 years earlier in 1883 that the citizens of Port Moody first attempted to incorporate.

The early history of the Burrard Inlet area was dominated by two major events: the 1858 gold rush on the Fraser River and the 1886 arrival of the first transcontinental train. The gold rush resulted in the sudden appearance of thousands of gold prospectors in the Fraser Valley which prompted Governor James Douglas to request Britain to establish a military presence in the New Caledonia territory (today's British Columbia). As a consequence, Britain dispatched a detachment of Royal Engineers under the command of Colonel Richard Clement Moody, after whom 'Port Moody' was named, and the new colony of British Columbia was proclaimed at Fort Langley on November 19th, 1858. In 1859, however, Colonel Moody moved the capital to the planned settlement called 'Queenborough' (*sic* the original spelling), today 'New Westminster'. This settlement was on the northern banks of the Fraser River which strategically commanded all the branches of the river mouth.

Colonel Moody was concerned about protection of the new capital and developed a plan to defend the city from American attack. A primary concern was maintaining access to the ocean should the Fraser River be blocked by ice during the winter. Colonel Moody immediately directed the Royal Engineers to clear a military trail from the Royal Engineers' Camp ('Sapperton') at New Westminster, extending northward to the eastern end of Burrard Inlet (today's 'Port Moody'). This very early route antedated the 'North Road', but was soon superseded by it and fell quickly into disuse. ⁽¹⁾ In 1859 Moody also had a pack trail built through the forest from New Westminster "due north" to Burrard Inlet ⁽²⁾ — the first 'road' built in the new Colony of British Columbia. (This trail also served as a north-south 'base line survey' from which subsequent land surveys were referenced by the Royal Engineers.) In 1861 the pack trail was upgraded to a wagon road — renamed 'North Road' — to allow ships anchored in Burrard Inlet to unload military supplies and personnel if New Westminster were attacked from the south.

In the summer of 1863 orders were given for the disbanding of the Royal Engineers' Columbia Detachment, originally totalling 165 REs, and Colonel Moody and his officers, together with some 15 men, returned to England. However, many of the Royal Engineers remained in the colony as gardeners, masons, carpenters, tailors, hotel keepers, tanner, grocers, blacksmiths, architects, and surveyors — in fact, in every walk and vocation in life.

Port Moody's isolation and the state of the 'North Road' after 1869 was related by John Murray, son of Lance Corporal John Murray, RE, to city of Vancouver archivist Major J.S. Matthews in July 1934:

"After the capital of B.C. was moved to Victoria in 1869, the 'North Road' deteriorated into nothing more than a trail for Indians; a track you could not get a horse over, because all the bridges put-up by the Royal Engineers on the North Road had been burned-out. [Note: a great bush fire ran through this area about 1865.] There was no way in which a horse could be got to the Burrard Inlet end of the North Road until 1881. During Governor Seymour's residence on the Mainland [1864–1869], he kept the North Road open for the purpose of conveying the mails when the Fraser River was frozen-over; he made the North Road into a sleigh road, but after he left [in 1869], it went wild again, so that when we [John's father, Lance Corporal John Murray, RE, and the survey party] came on the scow [to Port Moody] in March 1882 ... there was no direct trail that I ever heard of from Sapperton to the present site of Port Moody." – John Murray ⁽³⁾

Development in Port Moody did not begin until 1879 when Port Moody was officially named the Western Terminus for the *Canadian Pacific Railway* (CPR). At first no more than a cluster of tents, Port Moody began to grow, spurred on by several land grants to some of the Royal Engineers. By 1880, lots were being created and sold for \$40 (inside lots) and \$50 (corner lots). ⁽⁴⁾ In 1881, the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works was petitioned to construct a road from New Westminster to Port Moody. ⁽⁵⁾ In March 1882, then discharged Lance Corporal John Murray, RE, and a survey party arrived at Port Moody by scow and began to survey the 'Port Moody Townsite'. At the time, there was neither a trail to New Westminster nor a log cabin along the south shore of Port Moody Arm, and on the north shore there was only one logger's shack located at the 'Old Orchard'. ⁽³⁾

As early as April 1881, however, the possibility that Port Moody may not be the railway terminus began to be openly discussed. ⁽⁶⁾ This prompted newspaper editorials defending the choice of Port Moody as the railway terminus, and expounding the virtues of Port Moody as a salt water port. ⁽⁷⁾⁽⁸⁾ Nonetheless, land speculation continued, and one lot of 50 acres, about half a mile from the water, was reportedly sold for \$8,000. ⁽⁹⁾ In April 1882, choice lots in the townsite were selling for \$275 each. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Port Moody was seen as an important business opportunity for the citizens of New Westminster, who felt that they should be benefitting from Port Moody's development and the construction of the railway, but the lack of road access continued to be a problem. ⁽¹¹⁾ Regardless, lots continued to be sold and cleared for building, ⁽¹²⁾⁽¹³⁾ and in April 1883 the first ships from Britain arrived with steel rails for construction of the railway. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Concurrent with this activity was the on-going debate regarding the railway terminus, ⁽¹⁵⁾⁽¹⁶⁾ and the on-going complaints about the lack of passable road access to Port Moody. ⁽¹⁷⁾

It was during the frenetic activity of 1883 that the citizens of Port Moody petitioned the Provincial Government to incorporate as a municipality. The Attorney-General of B.C. responded by letter refusing the incorporation of Port Moody: "No reason was adduced; the applicants were treated as a parcel of mendicants [beggars] who can be kicked from the door without rhyme nor reason." The editorial went on to speculate that: "...the Provincial Secretary is one of the Coal Harbour ring and, of course, opposed to anything connected with Port Moody." ⁽¹⁸⁾ The implication was that others within the 'circles of power' were working behind the scenes to have the railway terminus moved to Coal Harbour. Undeterred, the citizens of Port Moody again petitioned the Provincial Government to incorporate, and again were refused: "Their rightful request was not acceded to; and, moreover, they were — every man of them — treated with insult and assumed contempt." ⁽¹⁹⁾

Clarke's Road connecting Port Moody to the North Road was finally completed in December 1883, ⁽¹⁾ and in early 1884 Sir Charles Tupper declared in the House of Commons that "Port Moody was the terminus for all future time". ⁽²⁰⁾ But by the time the first transcontinental train arrived in Port Moody on 4th July 1886, the CPR had decided to move its western terminus from Port Moody to 'Granville' — renamed 'Vancouver' later that year. The railway's executives had determined Port Moody's narrow shelf of land between water and hillside to be insufficient for expansion. There was amazement and anger when the decision became known, and unsuccessful lawsuits were launched. The near-ecstasy of the first train's arrival in Port Moody soon faded, and Port Moody's population remained static at 250 for nearly 20 years.

It wasn't until April 7th, 1913 — 30 years after the first attempt to incorporate — that an elected Council finally met for the first time in the *City of Port Moody*.

References:

- (1) Thomas R. Weir, 1945, "Early Trails of Burrard Peninsula", *BC Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 4, October, 1945, pages 273–275.
- (2) W.N. Draper, 1945, "Some Early Roads and Trails in New Westminster District", *BC Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 1, January, 1945, pages 25–35.
- (3) Major J.S. Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3, 1935, City of Vancouver Archives, Conversation with John Murray of Port Moody, son of Lance Corporal John Murray, RE, July 12th, 1934.
- (4) "Sale of Port Moody Properties", *British Colonist*, November 30th, 1880.
- (5) "Petition for a Wagon Road to Port Moody", *British Colonist*, February 8th, 1881.
- (6) "Another Terminus", *Mainland Guardian*, April 6th, 1881.
- (7) "Our Terminus", *Mainland Guardian*, April 6th, 1881.
- (8) "The Railway Terminus", *Mainland Guardian*, June 18th, 1881.
- (9) "Port Moody Land Sales", *British Colonist*, July 24th, 1881.
- (10) "Port Moody Property", *British Colonist*, April 28th, 1882.
- (11) "Port Moody Road", *Mainland Guardian*, November 8th, 1882.
- (12) "Port Moody - Clearing & Building", *Mainland Guardian*, February 3rd, 1883.
- (13) "Port Moody - Land Clearing", *Mainland Guardian*, June 6th, 1883.
- (14) "Port Moody - Arrival of the first steel rails", *Mainland Guardian*, March 8th, 1883.
- (15) "Port Moody - Removal of the terminus debated", *Mainland Guardian*, April 7th, 1883.
- (16) "Port Moody - Terminus of the railway", *Mainland Guardian*, May 5th, 1883.
- (17) "Port Moody - Roads & Trails", *Mainland Guardian*, December 1st, 1883.
- (18) "The Refusal of the Act of Incorporation to Port Moody", *Mainland Guardian*, June 6th, 1883.
- (19) "Port Moody Again Insulted", *Mainland Guardian*, November 11th, 1883.
- (20) "Port Moody", *Mainland Guardian*, February 27th, 1884.

Astonishing Official Statement of Port Moody's Population

Source: British Colonist, Thursday, September 13th, 1883.
Source: British Columbian, Wednesday, September 12th, 1883.

“One of Mr. [William Norman] Bole’s charges against the present government was that they refused to grant the petition for the incorporation of Port Moody; and he put forward the untruthful statement that the enumeration had been made on Dominion Day [July 1st, 1883], when the citizens of the terminus [Port Moody] were absent. Last week, we showed that Mr. Bole’s plea was implausible, because the letter giving instructions for an enumeration was not written until July 10th. Constable Sharpe, who made the count, was in the city [New Westminster] last Wednesday, and from him we learn that the count was made on the evening of July 12th and verified on the 13th, and that the number returned by him (18) includes everyone who could possibly claim, on any pretense whatsoever, to be eligible for incorporation. But Constable Sharpe says that if the people are not satisfied with the count made by him on the 12th and 13th of July, they had better make a new count now. There are, he affirms, just 9 residents now in Port Moody who could legally sign the petition for incorporation! This number includes Capt. Clarke, whose family were then residing in this city [New Westminster], and could not be fairly counted a resident of Port Moody. The rest of the 18 have all gone away. Now, if Mr. Bole and his friends had any just conception of promoting the interests of Port Moody, they would have left this matter rest quietly where it was. It requires at least 5 persons to form a municipal council, and in a community of 9 there would be 5 councillors to represent 4 constituents; that is, each councillor would represent a little less than on vote! And it is for refusing to create such a corporation as that, Mr. Bole stood up and arraigned the government.”



British Columbia Archives (BCA A-04592).

Port Moody, circa 1882 — Note the trees still standing on the North Shore.



City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Out P30).

Port Moody, 1883 — Note the recently logged hillside.



British Columbia Archives (BCA I-30834).

**C.P.R. Dock at Port Moody, July 1882 —
Note the recently logged hillside with the absence of new tree growth.**



British Columbia Archives (BCA I-30793).

Port Moody, *circa* 1885.