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II. The Gold Rush



1.
"dollars, dollars, dollars!"

Rumours that gold was to be found on the bars of the Fraser River had reached Fort Victoria as early as 1856. The following year Douglas had taken delivery of a soda-water bottle half full of gold collected by the Indians along the North Thompson. The Governor recognized the importance of the gold discoveries. Victoria, he predicted, would become a "great city." Dismissing Douglas' prediction as nothing more than an attempt to inflate the price of Company-owned town lots, residents of the colony were unprepared when they found themselves in the middle of a gold rush.

On Sunday morning April 25, 1858 parishioners were emerging from the Victoria District Church which stood on the high ground within the Church Reserve when they spotted the *Commodore*, a wooden side-wheel American steamer, entering the harbour. She carried 450 Fraser-bound miners who, when they disembarked, more than doubled the population of the town.

News that there was gold to be found on the mainland had reached San Francisco and there, just a short steamer-voyage away, were thousands of men who had gained valuable experience along California's "Trail of '49" and who planned to put their experience to use in this new, northern gold rush. Between 10,000 and 20,000 people streamed into Victoria during the last seven months of 1858. Many only paused on their way to the mainland but some chose to remain at Victoria to speculate on land or to open businesses.

The little town was swamped by this flood of humanity. Having no hotels, Victoria was soon surrounded by a sea of grey canvas tents. It became a transient city populated, some felt, by the "outscourings" of the jails of California. Many of them had arrived with no more property than the cloth-wrapped bundles they carried with them. But "dollars, dollars, dollars!" was "stamped on every face."

"Victoria," one observer noted, "was assailed by an indescribable array of Polish Jews, Italian fishermen, French cooks, jobbers, speculators of every kind, land agents, auctioneers, bummers, bankrupts, and brokers of every description."

Residents of the colony, after recovering from their astonishment at the magnitude and character of this invasion, became caught up in speculation-fever. Some cashed in quickly. One man who had purchased a horse in the morning for \$100, sold it later that same day for \$150 and considered himself a shrewd investor. Some who had the good fortune to own houses in town, rented them out for as much as \$100 a month and removed to the countryside to count their money. Others sold their town lots for what they believed to be a peak price and put on the airs they thought appropriate for persons who had all the money they could ever need. Some, swept away by the rapid growth they were witnessing, concluded that the town would sprawl over the lower Island and bought large blocks of rural property which would wait

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for some fifty years before becoming urban and valuable. But some with an eye to the main chance made solid fortunes.

James Yates, born in Scotland in 1819, had signed on with the HBC as a ships' carpenter in 1849. Assigned to Fort Victoria, Yates balked at the Company's rigid, military-like discipline and soon earned a reputation as a "cantankerous being". Eighteen months after he arrived at the fort, he had a serious falling out with Company management. Leaving his wife behind, Yates deserted the Company service and ran off to California. While Mrs. Yates, an "active agreeable pleasant little woman with auburn hair," took in washing, worked as a seamstress and was finally forced to sell her clothes to support herself, her husband tested his luck in the California goldfields. When he returned for his wife, Yates was discovered by a Company officer and thrown into the north-east bastion where he was imprisoned for a month.

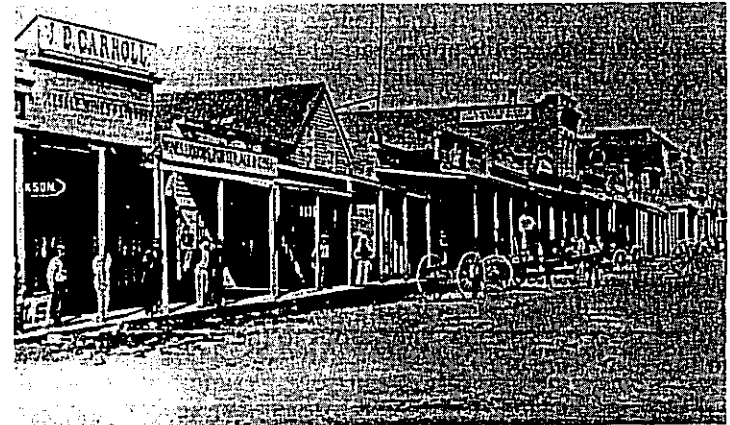


JAMES YATES AND HIS WIFE. With Amelia Douglas acting as mid-wife, Mrs. Yates gave birth to two children at Fort Victoria. Amelia insisted that she kneel down beside the bed which, Mrs. Yates reported, did her "a great deal of good."

Adamantly refusing to work for the Company when he emerged from jail, Yates was allowed to assume independent status. He purchased some of the first town lots sold by the HBC and in 1851 built his house and business premises outside the pickets of the fort. Yates who described himself as a wine and spirit merchant, was supplying a commodity much in demand when the gold rush deposited thousands of customers on his doorstep. Using the profits from his saloon, he covered his land holdings, which included all the town lots between Langley and Wharf Streets, with substantial brick and stone buildings from which he received an income of \$1000 a month. By 1860 he was believed to be the wealthiest man in Victoria. The Yates endeared themselves to those less fortunate by refusing to let their riches go to their heads. "Neither Mr. or Mrs. Yates has got any nasty pride," one admirer reported.

The HBC, which owned all the land other than the small area north of the fort which had been in the hands of private owners when the gold rush began, reacted as if emerging from a corporate fog. The Company began by asking \$50 for a 60x120 foot lot, the price that had been in effect since sales had begun seven or eight years earlier. Gradually they increased the

price to \$100, only to find that weeks later the same property, sold and resold, would fetch \$3000.



YATES STREET, during the gold rush. On Yates Street near Government, hurriedly-built wooden shanties served as hotels. For a dollar a night, a miner was given one of the cots ranged together under low attic roofs. Required to provide their own bedding, miners packed around blankets — usually dark blue, the colour least likely to show the dirt.

"Shops, stores and wooden shanties of every description, and in every direction, were now seen going up, and nothing was to be heard but the stroke of the chisel and hammer," an observer noted.⁴ In six weeks, during the summer of 1858, 225 buildings, nearly 200 of them shops and stores had been built. Annie Deans who had been in the colony since 1853 recorded her amazement at the scene.⁵ "In the morning there will be bonny green grass, at night there be a house on it." They were, Annie reported, building in the fields where carrots and turnips grew, a fact that might account for the scarcity of vegetables that summer.

The fort's bakery, located in a whitewashed log building just outside the eastern gate, had difficulty meeting the demand and when the baker ran out of flour, the populace was reduced to eating ships' biscuits and hardtack.

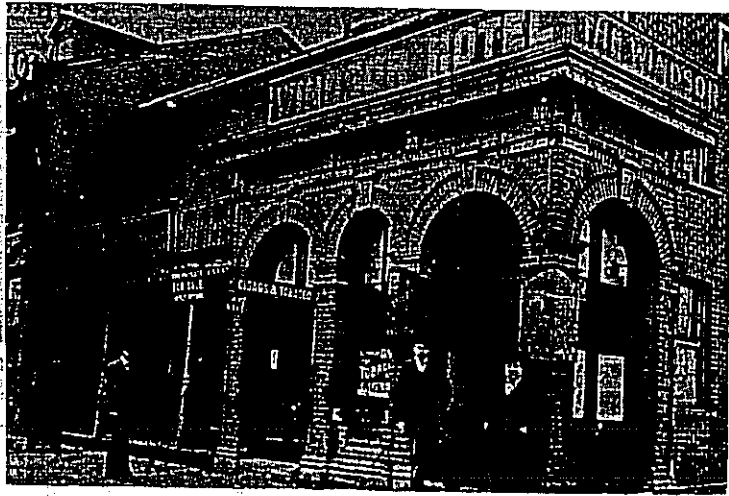
Prices of all commodities rose to reflect the demand. By the summer of 1858, bread was selling for twenty-five cents a loaf, butter was fetching one dollar per pound and a pound of tea cost an "outrageous" twenty-five cents.

A summer-supply of fresh, sweet water had been a problem since the establishment of the fort. A well within the fort enclosure had provided only an intermittent supply and the water from the well near the head of James Bay was of "indifferent quality." When the water became so foul as to be undrinkable, schoolboys were dispatched in a canoe to collect water from the stream that flowed into Rock Bay. None of these sources could begin to meet the demand in 1858 but entrepreneurial initiative rose to the occasion by providing fresh water at three dollars per barrel, a price that was considered exorbitant although workmen's wages had risen to the dizzying

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heights of ten to fifteen dollars a day.

Miners were attracted to the fort's well, the water in which, while it was difficult to get, had the advantage of being free. The well dropped straight for thirty feet, then hit bedrock and glanced off at an angle toward the harbour. During the summer the upper part of the well would become dry, but some three to four feet of water might remain in the lower part. On one occasion a miner was hauling up a kettleful of water when the rope broke. Wanting to get his kettle back, he paid an Indian to retrieve it for him. The Indian stood on the dry part of the well and tried unsuccessfully to reach the kettle. Deciding to help him, the miner swung himself down on a rope. When he had descended some ten feet his foot struck the rocks which lined the well and without warning the entire rock wall collapsed, crushing the Indian and killing him instantly.⁶ After his body was recovered, the well was ordered to be completely filled in and was forgotten until it was rediscovered over one hundred years later during renovations to the building which had been built on top of it. (site 16)



WINDSOR HOTEL. Built in 1858, the Windsor was the first brick hotel to appear in the city. The oldest brick building in British Columbia; it survives today, its graceful arches displaced by plate glass display windows and its bricks overlaid with neo-Tudor half-timbering.

Ship-owners in San Francisco maximized their profits by advertising cut-rate fares and then overcrowding their vessels. Most steamers outbound from San Francisco anchored at Esquimalt which had a deeper and more easily entered harbour than Victoria. Before the gold rush began, travellers along the trail that connected Esquimalt and Victoria "used to flounder through the mud without meeting a single soul." But by the summer of 1858 it was covered with pedestrians toiling along, crowded with well-laden carts and vans and with strangers of every tongue and country." And, it should be noted, the Esquimalt road had become the scene of "diabolical spectacles"

capable of shocking to the core a respectable itinerant Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.'

Matthew Macfie arrived in Victoria in September 1859 a year after the rush had reached its peak. Macfie calculated that the town had a permanent population of fifteen hundred which would soon be swelled by over-wintering miners who often remained in town until the level of mainland rivers dropped in late spring. While he dutifully made notes about the geology and topography of the place, Macfie, like other newcomers, found himself fascinated by the Songhees and their village.

"I have witnessed scenes after sunset calculated to shock even the bluntest sensibilities," Macfie wrote with the air of a man preparing to exploit vice by publicly deploring it. The fires in the village cast a "lurid glare" upon the waters, he continued. To the town came the sounds of "loud and discordant whoopings" from natives "infuriated with bad liquor." But it took more than a few noisy drunks to horrify Macfie. What he found appalling and "a scandal to the country" was Indian prostitution.

The Songhees village was located beside the Esquimalt road, easily accessible to the hordes of unattached young men who made Victoria their temporary home. Douglas and other Company men who had witnessed the strangely exaggerated effect that alcohol had on the natives had taken care to limit its availability, but now saloons abounded "vastly out of proportion to the wants of the population" and spirits were easily available provided one had the price of a drink. To raise the money to buy liquor, Indian men became procurers, selling the favours of Indian women from other tribes who had been taken in battle and who, as prisoners-of-war, became their captors' slaves.

"One cannot walk up the Esquimalt road by day or night without encountering the sight of these Indian slaves squatting in considerable numbers in the bush," Macfie noted, adding that their purpose was not difficult to imagine. Particularly discerning were the men of the Royal Navy. "The extent to which the nefarious practices are encouraged by the crews of Her Majesty's ships is a disgrace to the service they represent," Macfie chided.

If the customer didn't come to them, some Indians chose to become door-to-door salesmen. "So unblushingly is this traffic carried on, that I have seen the husband and wife of a native family canvassing from one miner's shanty to another, with the view of making assignments for the squaws in their possession," Macfie gasped.

Indian drunkenness and prostitution were to play key roles in a public drama played out a few years later.

2. "judicial murder"

Allache was a young Tsimshian who, in 1858, had come to Victoria with his wife. He was not unfamiliar with the pleasures of alcohol, but no evidence would suggest that he was an habitual drunkard or a brawler. Thomas Brown, a black American miner, unable to recognize the difference between a slave-prostitute and a respectable married woman, was attracted to Allache's wife. Allache, who couldn't speak English, had protested as forcefully as he could, when Brown began to visit their tent. In spite of Allache's repeated warnings, the man returned again and again and Allache was forced to witness daily assaults on his wife.

Finally he was able to stand it no longer. "Half maddened by drink," he fell upon Brown and stabbed him. A few days later Brown died and Allache was arrested and charged with murder.

He stood trial for his life, undefended and supplied with an Indian interpreter whose familiarity with English was poor and whose knowledge of the Tsimshian dialect was non-existent. "A lonely, helpless victim," Allache was found guilty and sentenced to hang. Attempts were made to have him pardoned but the pardon was denied. It was important to set an example. Indians must be taught to respect the law.

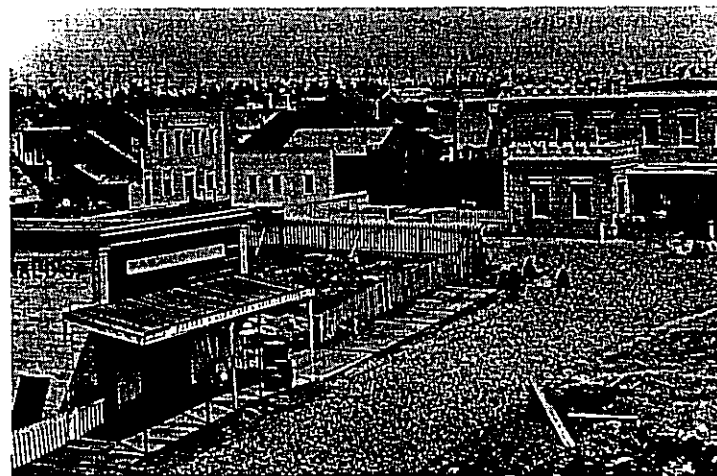
At eight o'clock on the morning of Saturday, August 25, 1860 a crowd of some three hundred Victorians had gathered around a scaffold erected in the yard beside the Police Barracks, a multi-purpose building constructed in 1859 which served as police headquarters, the jail and the courthouse and would soon function as City Hall. Allache, "his eyes streaming with tears," was brought to the foot of the scaffold. As the rope was placed around his neck, he filled his lungs and throwing back his head, he breathed forth one long, loud, lamentable wail. A thrill of horror jolted through the crowd and men began to cry. Half the spectators hurried away, unable to endure the sight any longer.*

After dangling from the rope for an hour, Allache was cut down. Placed in a black coffin, he was buried in the barracks-yard, where his bones may yet lie under the paving of Bastion Square. (site 17)

To Alfred Waddington, Allache's hanging was "judicial murder" and at his own expense he published a pamphlet condemning the "mockery of a trial" that had led to his conviction.* A champion of unpopular causes, Waddington was something of an oddity in gold rush Victoria. He was older and better educated than most other residents of the town, but what really set him apart was his liberalism and his possession of a genuinely compassionate conscience.

Waddington was born near London in 1801. Educated in Paris and at German universities, he had worked in France before travelling to California. By the 1850's he was a partner in Dulip & Waddington, a wholesale grocery firm in San Francisco. Waddington came to Victoria in the spring in 1858 to open a branch of his San Francisco business. As one of the first to arrive

on the scene, he was able to buy a key piece of property between Johnson and Yates Streets. He cut an alley through his property, giving him six hundred feet of street frontage. (site 25) Dividing the land along Waddington Alley into small lots, he erected buildings of redwood he had imported from California and leased them out to a variety of tenants, including a fish market, a bakery, a blacksmith, the Sacramento Restaurant and the Bowling and Refreshment Saloon.



POLICE BARRACKS, Bastion Square. Public hangings took place in the yard beside the Police Barracks, the large castellated building on the right. The false-fronted wooden building on the left is the Boomerang Inn which provided a convivial atmosphere for the juries sent there to consider their verdicts.

Waddington became a tireless critic of the colonial administration. He called public meetings. He wrote letters-to-the-editor. He produced pamphlets which he paid for and distributed himself. Whatever the specific issue, Waddington's main theme remained the same. The Company men and the appointed officials who made up the ruling class and who, together with the officers of the Royal Navy, continued to form the colony's social elite, were adopting policies which were advantageous to themselves rather than beneficial to the colony as a whole.

Money had been spent to lay out the townsite, to fill in the ravine, to improve streets and to build bridges. Improvements which Waddington asserted, benefited only land speculators. The miners, the men who had brought prosperity to the colony, were isolated at their diggings with no wagon roads, no food, no provisions and no postal service. Meanwhile, balls and other entertainments costing as much as \$1,600 had been organized to amuse visiting naval officers.

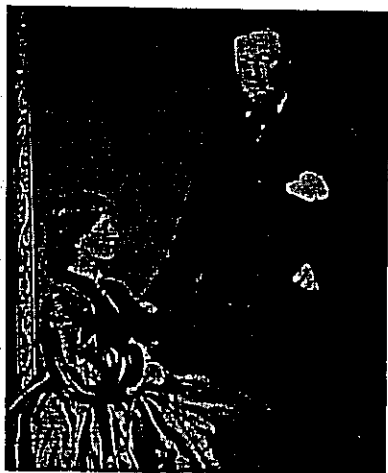
Although prepared to drive himself to exhaustion in pursuit of his goals, Waddington was not a particularly effective campaigner. A bit of a fussy-budget, he was easily dismissed as "Old Waddy" and seldom taken serious-

by the younger men who held positions of power.

His chief opponent was George Hunter Cary, the Attorney-General. Thirty years younger than Waddington, Cary had arrived in Victoria in 1859 armed with "six law books, a carpetbag and a toothbrush." Never the most stable of men, Cary's erratic and excitable temperament occasionally got him in trouble with the law for riding his horse through town at breakneck speed and along pedestrian footpaths. Cary, who would slip quickly into insanity and die in 1866 of "an overworked brain and a weak constitution," seems to have taken particular pleasure in goading Waddington to the point of delirium after the older man won election to the assembly in 1860.

"The attorney-general was ill and irritable, Mr. Waddington was old and irritable," the speaker of the house recalled. "The manner in which those two would hammer away at each other was most refreshing to outsiders who gathered at the hall."¹⁰

GEORGE HUNTER CARY AND HIS WIFE. *The Attorney-General of the Colony of Vancouver Island, Cary was described in 1861 as, "Shallow beyond belief; conceited beyond conception; untruthful and unscrupulous," and "devoid of correct governing principles." Aside from that, and his tendency to drink too much and ride too fast, there was nothing very much wrong with him.*



Unlike the Attorney-General, Waddington was something of a visionary. Waddington, who campaigned for Victoria's incorporation, was convinced that the town would become an important city — but only if the Island and British Columbia were linked by a railroad to the Canadian provinces to the east. In 1867 Waddington travelled to Ottawa — a long journey for an ailing old man which took him down the west coast, across Panama, and up the east coast to New York. After presenting his arguments in favour of a transcontinental-rail line, he journeyed to London where he hoped to interest British financiers in the idea. He returned to Ottawa and although he was suffering dreadfully from gout and was often confined to bed, he continued to argue fervently for the railroad. "Old Waddy" had no way of knowing that the Prime Minister considered him nothing more than "a respectable old fool."

In February 1872, Waddington was staying in Ottawa waiting to witness the passage of the railway bill. He had spent an uneasy few months. Smallpox had been "quite epidemic" in Ottawa that winter and Waddington had a

particular dread of the disease. One February afternoon, he was standing in the lobby of his hotel and talking, as always, about his railway scheme to a group of potential investors. An acquaintance, an Ottawa doctor, delighted to happen upon Waddington, approached him, clasped his hands warmly and, in response to a polite enquiry from Waddington, said, "I have just left the worst case of confluent small pox I have ever seen."¹¹

Waddington snatched back his hands and trembling violently stumbled to a chair. He died on February 27, 1872 — of smallpox.



ALFRED WADDINGTON. *Waddington's Fraser Mines Vindicated was the first book written and published in British Columbia.*

3

"choked with putrescent filth"

Like any boom-town, Victoria suffered from the effects of rapid, unplanned growth.

Some of the streets which had been traced on the early plans of the townsite were sold and built upon, forcing land owners to cut alleyways through their properties if they wished to have street access. (*site 21*)

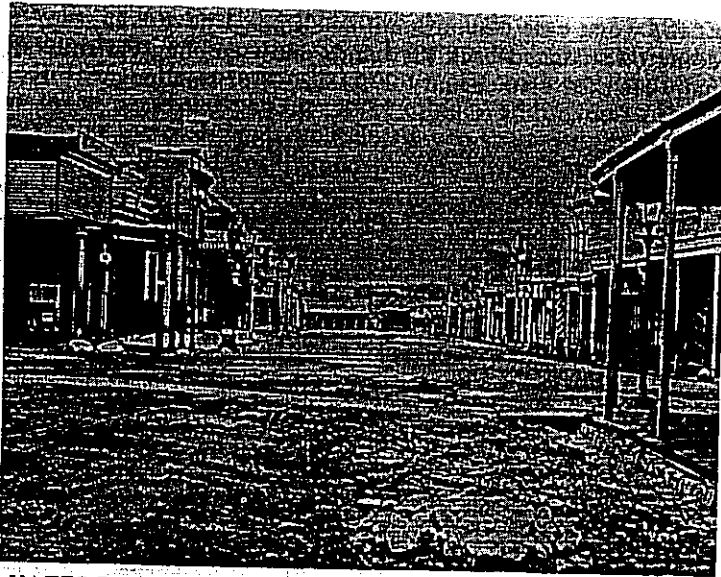
During dry summer months, swirling dust choked Victoria's streets and water was in such short supply that little could be spared for sprinkling the roadways. If the evidence of one observer is to be believed, it might have been more practical to dampen the dust with HBC rum:

"Liquor was cheaper than water," he recalled. "We remember on a hot day in July seeing a perspiring man enter a saloon on Yates street to ask for a glass of water. 'Water!' gasped the astonished barkeeper. 'Why, stranger, I'll give you a glass of rum but two bits is the price of water at this yere [sic] bar'.¹²

In winter, the situation was reversed. "In the town of Victoria the mud is so deep that it comes up to the horses' girths & foot passengers can only cross on planks laid across," one visitor recorded.¹³ The mud-filled streets

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produced legends all their own, the most common being the story of a merchant who, wanting to carry on a conversation with a friend on the other side of the street, hired an Indian with a bow and arrow to shoot letters across the quagmire.



YATES STREET, looking west from Government. The state of the streets was "simply indescribable, mud without end . . . occasional placards informed the public that no bottom was to be found."

In any season, the lack of a sewage system brought its own kind of urban blight. Outouses and privies were sited for their users' convenience with little thought given to property lines or neighbourly esthetics. Running into the street in soapy streams was the effluvium from public bath houses. Cesspools often overflowed into the drainage ditches which lined the streets.

"The gutters in the main streets are at times choked with putrescent filth," the *British Colonist*, one of Victoria's earliest newspapers, reported in 1861.¹⁴

With barnyard animals confined in small city pens and horses providing the only means of transportation and housed in stables throughout the business district, more than dust must have risen on the summer wind to delight sensitive nostrils.

Sensibilities of a different kind were outraged by the behaviour of prostitutes who had left the Esquimalt road and moved into town. No longer Indian-controlled, the trade had been organized by men, both black and white, who collected their squaws into brothels, in the shanties along Kanaka road.

"Hardly a day passes without fights between squaws and squawmen," the *Colonist* fumed. "Yesterday morning we observed two squaws fighting in the middle of the street and they could not be induced to desist until one had nearly denuded the other of her clothing."¹⁵

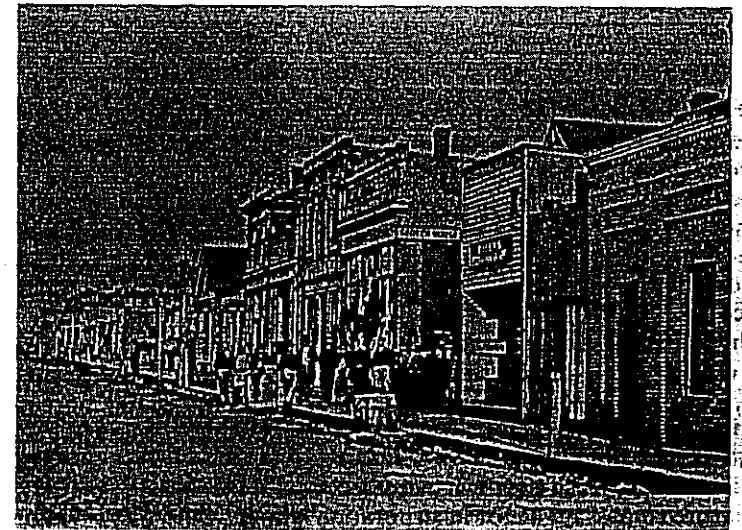
Pressured to solve the problem of the brothels, the colonial legislature decided to adopt a pragmatic approach. Businesses in the city depended on the miners who came to town for the winter and who soon became bored with nothing to do.

"They wander around and through the town in quest of a little excitement and naturally pop into every hole and corner whence a little fun is to be had," one of their number reported.¹⁶

If some form of amusement was not provided, the men might choose to overwinter elsewhere and it was an undeniable fact that many miners found their amusements along Kanaka road. So rather than abolish bawdy houses, the legislature chose instead to license them as "dance halls."¹⁷

The euphemism fooled no one, least of all Amor-de-Cosmos, bachelor-editor of the *Colonist*. "They are sinks of iniquity and pollution," he thundered. "Prostitution and kindred vices, in all their hideous deformity, and disease in every form, lurk there."¹⁸ And while less-fevered minds suggested that since it was impossible to prevent prostitution, it might be better to have a few sinks of iniquity rather than having the whole town turn into a cesspool, De Cosmos and the petitioners who insisted that the dance halls be closed represented a popular point of view.

While prostitution was a nuisance and foul smelling drains and ditches were an annoyance and a potential health hazard, the possibility of a major fire was an ever-present threat. With its straw-filled stables and with its hotels, saloons and dance halls lit by candles or gas lamps and heated by woodstoves, Victoria, like any wood-built town was particularly vulnerable to fire. Compounding the problem was the greediness of property-owners who covered every square inch of their town lots with buildings — a practice which denied



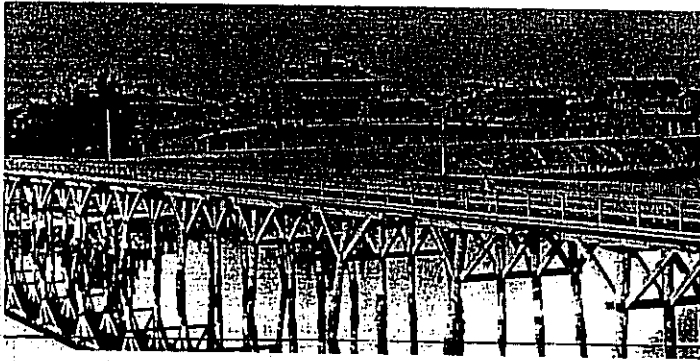
FORT STREET, looking east from Government. Fort Street extended only as far as Douglas Street. Planks bridged open gutters and crossed the street at intersections.

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fire-fighters access to the rear and sides of buildings and increased the likelihood of a fire in one spreading to its neighbours.

As early as 1858 Douglas had ordered fire-fighting equipment from San Francisco and in April of the following year the chain gang from the city jail had been ordered to build two cisterns, one on Store Street and the other on Government Street, each containing some 25,000 gallons of water. Recognizing these steps as a precaution, but not a solution, Douglas adopted other measures to ensure the safety of government buildings.

The Police Barracks built in 1859 hard by the northern palisade of the fort, was constructed of brick and deemed to be "fire-proof." The 'Birdcages,' the buildings that would house all departments of the growing colonial government, were sited away from the city across the harbour on the banks of James Bay on land adjacent to Douglas' holdings and safely removed from any civic holocaust.



JAMES BAY BRIDGE AND THE 'BIRDCAGES'. A bridge connected the James Bay district with the city until 1901 when the James Bay mud flats were filled in and a causeway was built.

Christened the 'Birdcages,' perhaps because their appearance reminded some of the ornamental birdcages popular at the time and perhaps because the road that separated the legislative precinct from Douglas' land had been named Birdcage Walk after the London street of the same name which runs from Buckingham Palace to the Houses of Parliament, the colonial buildings were designed by Berlin-born architect and civil engineer Hermann Otto Tiedemann, who had a particular talent for producing buildings which defied apt comparisons. (site 17)

The central or Administrative Building, "... resembles in its mixed style of architecture, the latest fashion of Chinese pagoda, Swiss cottage and Italian villa," one observer noted, and then, having given the matter more thought, decided that the architectural style was "Elizabethan." "More like a "Dutch Toy," others grumbled.

As the problems in the town increased, so did the pressure on the colonial legislature to pass an act of incorporation which would allow Victorians to raise money for civic improvements and to enact by-laws controlling development. The Act of Incorporation was passed on August 2, 1862 and two weeks later the first elections were held.

4. "our Falstaffian mayor"

Eligible voters, who included only British subjects who were male and who owned or leased property valued at £20 or more, gathered in the Barracks-yard to elect, by a show of hands, Victoria's first mayor. There were two candidates for office: Alfred Waddington and Thomas Harris. While Waddington received only four votes, Harris was supported by a "forest of hands." The results surprised no one. Waddington was regarded as the self-appointed conscience of the city; Harris was the very model of a small town mayor.

Born in Hertfordshire in 1817 and the son of a farmer, Harris had gone to California in 1853. Like so many others, he had seen the British Columbia gold rush as an opportunity to make the most of experience he had gained in California. He arrived in Victoria in 1858 and opened the Queen's Market, the town's first butcher shop. A three hundred pound giant of a man, he was renowned for his joviality and generosity. That he was a well-known sportsman only increased his electability.



QUEEN'S MARKET. Harris, who campaigned for office as an 'umble tradesman, operated the Queen's Market, Victoria's first butcher shop. Harris began his business by buying two sheep from the HBC and selling mutton retail from a tent.

Rather too heavy to play in the cricket games which were staged at Beacon Hill Park, Harris excelled at horse racing. A rough race-course encircling Beacon Hill had been developed several years before the 179 acres had been set aside as a park reserve in 1858. And there Harris was a well-known figure, thundering around the mile-long course. His two chief opponents were Lieutenant Commander the Hon. Horace Douglas Lascelles and innkeeper John

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Howard. "These three were inseparables, especially when horse races were in question," a fellow enthusiast recalled.¹⁹ And it is unlikely that anywhere but Victoria so disparate a threesome could have come together as friends to encourage the development of the sport of kings.

Appearing vaguely effeminate despite the luxuriant sideburns which curled over his jaw and met under his chin, Lascelles was the seventh son of the third Earl of Harewood. He had joined the Royal Navy in 1848 when he was thirteen and from 1862-1865 he served on the Esquimalt Station as the commander of the gun-boat *Forward*. Possessed of "an amiability of disposition which endeared him to all who knew him," Lascelles was regarded as a kind and generous man. And it was presumed that both kindness and generosity had prompted him to establish a little house on the Esquimalt road in which lived several young Englishmen who had gone broke looking for gold. Lascelles was well-liked in Victoria, partly because he was a lavish spender and partly because he "never made any virtuous pretensions, nor posed as a moral man."²⁰



HON. HORACE DOUGLAS LASCELLES, on the right. Lascelles was thirty-four when he died in his little Esquimalt cottage, alone except for his tame silver fox and his golden pheasant.

As well as spending freely, Lascelles invested heavily — in coal mines near Nanaimo and in businesses in Victoria. His investments were directed by Joseph Johnson Southgate, a former ship-master who had moved to Victoria from San Francisco in 1859 to act as a commission merchant and naval supplier, and who became Lascelles' "devoted friend." (site 14)

The third member of the racing triumverate, John Thomas Howard was not nearly so high-born as Lascelles. Originally from Manchester, he had come to Victoria by way of California where he had grubbed together enough gold to allow him to open the Royal Oak Inn at Esquimalt. Howard was a born publican. He enjoyed swapping stories with the seamen who made their way to his harbour-side establishment. He revelled in the company of the "fighting men, sharpers and that sort" who bellied up to his bar and who were as anxious as he to find something — anything — on which to

make a wager. A scrappy little man, he was prepared to draw himself up to his full five and a half feet to match his dog, his cricket bat, his fists and his horses with anyone. He imported Kentucky-bred horses for his racing stable and if the bloodlines of his horses and his own skill as a jockey were not enough to guarantee victory, he was quite prepared to cheat and to fall upon any man who suggested he was less than honest.



VICTORIA CRICKET ELEVEN, c. 1860. John Howard, standing second from right. Howard, always looking for something on which to make a wager, took space in the newspaper to announce that he was the best cricketeer in the country and to issue a \$1000 challenge to anyone who might care to prove otherwise.

Harris, Howard and Lascelles — the "Falstaffian" butcher, the diminutive innkeeper and the effete naval officer — were "kindred spirits" providing many a day's sport for the citizens of Victoria, who enjoyed witnessing the tactics adopted to insure victory as much as they enjoyed the races. With Harris' horse wheezing under his three hundred pound bulk, it was necessary to provide some form of handicapping to make the contest equal. During the races staged in 1864 to celebrate the Queen's May 24th birthday, Lascelles and Harris were the chief opponents. Lascelles, it was decided, would carry a second rider and together they would match the mayor's weight. Harris led from the beginning and Lascelles, seeing the mayor disappear in a cloud of dust, unceremoniously jettisoned his extra cargo. But too late to prevent Harris' galloping to victory.

On August 25, 1862 Mayor Harris and the six councilmen elected to serve with him, convened the first council meeting which was held in a court room in the Police Barracks since no provisions had been made for a separate City Hall. One of the first items of business was the appointment of a "Committee of Nuisances" which would guide the council in deciding which of the many nuisances should be dealt with first.

On Yates Street the committee couldn't help but notice the "very disagreeable stench" arising from the stagnant water which had reached the street by way of the drains attached to the Colonial Hotel and the Gypsy

II. The Gold Rush

House Baths. The pigs which were found within the area bounded by Government, Wharf, Johnson and Yates Street, were, the committee reported, a "great nuisance" and an annoyance to the residents of those streets. In addition to the notorious dance halls, bawdy houses continued to exist. Near the gully between Johnson and Cormorant Streets, the committee discovered "a number of houses of ill fame" which were a "disgrace to the neighbourhood." The Humboldt Street brothels continued to operate. "The neighbours complain of habitual drunkenness and disgusting language being continually made use of," the committee reported.²¹



THOMAS HARRIS. *Harris proved himself more than capable of occupying the mayor's chair. At the first council meeting, as Harris lowered his bulk into the seat of office, there came a loud crash. The mayoral chair resembled a cracked eggshell. Harris had, the newspaper gleefully reported, "alighted on the floor on that portion of his breeches which wears out first."*

5.

"an abominable botch"

The first City Ordinances suggest that the council counted the "pollution" of the dance-halls and brothels as only a minor civic nuisance and concentrated on cleaning up the town physically rather than morally.

Among the thirteen by-laws passed on September 23, 1862 were several formed to prevent the town from being buried in filth or from floating away on a sea of dirty water.²²

* No person shall sink any privy, vault, or cesspool nearer than two feet from his neighbour's premises and not less than twenty feet from the street.

* No person shall throw or deposit on any of the footpaths, side-walks, highways, thoroughfares, or any public place within the city limits, any rubbish, filth, ashes or offal of any kind.

Another by-law was so tortuously worded that its precise intention was not immediately apparent.

* Every person who in any thoroughfare shall beat or shake any carpet, rug, or mat, except door-mats, after the hour of eight in the morning, or throw or lay any dirt, litter, or ashes, or any carrion, fish, offal or rubbish, or throw or cause any such thing to go into any sewer pipe, or drain, or into any well, stream or water-course, or put the same in such a position that it may run into the harbour, or any pond or reservoir for water; or cause any offensive matter to run from any manufactory, brewery, slaughter-house, butcher's shop, or dung hill, or any uncovered place, whether or not surrounded by a wall or fence.

* Every person who shall empty or begin to empty any privy within the hours of 6 in the morning and 12 at night, and who shall move along any night-soil, soap-lees, ammoniacal liquor, or other such offensive matter, between the hours of six in the morning and eight in the evening, and who shall at any time use for such purpose any cart or carriage not having a proper covering, or who shall wilfully or carelessly slop or spill any such offensive matter in the removal thereof, or who shall not carefully sweep or clean away any such place in which any such offensive matter shall have been placed, spilled or slopped; and in the default of the apprehension of the actual offender, the owner of the cart or carriage employed for any such purpose shall be deemed to be the offender.

Other, more grammatically precise by-laws set the speed limit at eight miles per hour, prohibited the operation of slaughter houses, tanneries or distilleries within the city limits and provided for a fine of one pound for those found carrying loaded fire-arms or other dangerous weapons.

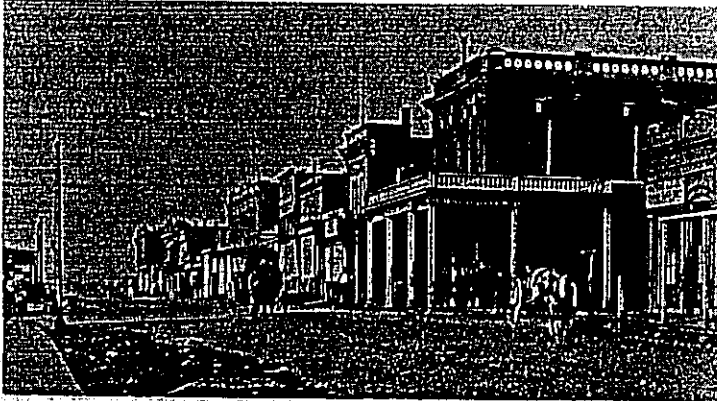
Proving that the colonial legislature was equally capable of drafting incomprehensible legislation, it was discovered that the attorney-general had made "an abominable botch of incorporating the city" and that the confused wording of the Act of Incorporation resulted in the city council lacking the authority to raise money by levying municipal taxation. Until the situation was clarified, the council was unable to proceed with civic improvements. However private initiative solved two of the city's more pressing problems: the shortage of water and the crime-encouraging blackness of night-time streets.

A spring, or artesian well, had been discovered in the Spring Ridge area, some two miles from town. The water was transported to the city in barrels attached to two-wheeled carts which then travelled from door to door and topped up the oak casks in which householders and businessmen stored their private supply.

In 1864 the Spring Ridge Water Company was formed and permission was sought to dig up city streets for the laying of water pipes. Running down Pandora to Government and along Government Street to the business district, the pipes — bark covered logs hollowed out and laid end to end — carried

II. The Gold Rush

water by gravity to large standpipes which were installed at several downtown locations. Water carts could now fill their barrels at these pumps, rather than making the four mile round trip to the spring. Victorians continued to rely on Spring Ridge for their water supply until 1875 when water piped from Elk Lake began to arrive in town.

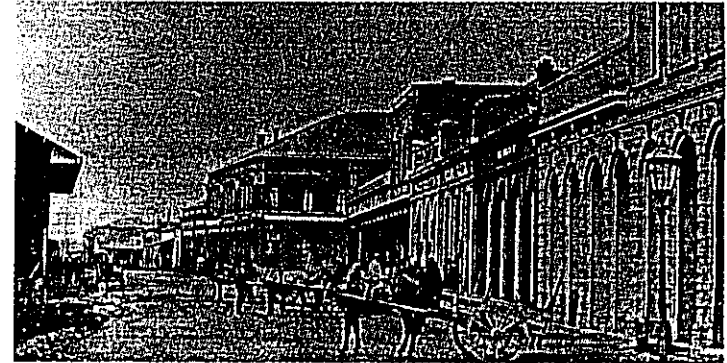


GOVERNMENT STREET, looking north from Fort Street. A water cart is filling its barrel at the standpipe in front of the Brown Jug Saloon, the building on the far right.

The Victoria Gas Company had been incorporated in November, 1860 making it almost two years older than the town. Originally the company had intended to deliver the gas, manufactured at its plant near Rock Bay, to "the house, shop, establishment or residence" of any person who should request the service. On September 29, 1862 gas flowed through the pipes for the first time, lighting the lantern hanging from Carroll's liquor store on Yates Street and within a week the *Colonist* was able to report that several stores and saloons were being lit by gas.²³ Some other businessmen followed Carroll's example and installed gas lanterns on the street facade of their buildings, but still Victoria's night-time streets remained very dark and more than a few accidents occurred when pedestrians who had ventured out without carrying their own lanterns stumbled on uneven planking or fell into ditches. The City was more than ready to listen to the proposal made by the Company in January, 1863. If the City agreed to buy lamps and lamp posts supplied by the Company, the Company would provide the manpower to light them and to keep them clean for a charge of \$40 per month, provided that the number of lamp posts installed was fewer than fifty.²⁴ And soon Victoria's streets, while they were not ablaze with light, certainly were less murky than they had been before. (site 10) The street lighting may even have had an effect on crime, but the number of potential criminals diminished for reasons that had nothing to do with well-lit streets.

No sooner had Victorians begun to take steps to correct the problems caused by rapid growth than growth stopped. By 1864 the rush of gold-seekers who had worked their way up the Fraser River and into the Cariboo had turned into an exodus of discouraged men who had spent their savings, found

no gold and, if they stopped in Victoria at all, were looking for jobs or waiting for funds from home rather than looking for places to spend their money.



WHARF STREET, c. 1864. The 1100 block Wharf Street has changed very little since this photograph was taken during the gold rush. On the far right, can be seen one of the Victoria Gas Company's street lamps.

Allen Francis, the U.S. Consul took careful note of Victoria's declining fortunes and submitted his findings in a series of reports to the American Secretary of State.²⁵ There had been "a great falling off of business during the last year," he reported in December, 1864. Buildings begun in the spring had been left unfinished. Property values were falling. There had been no immigration, in fact, the population had fallen by almost a thousand.

"The future prospects of the city are anything but cheering," Francis concluded. And he was quite right, for years would pass before Victoria again experienced anything like the heady days of the gold rush. And yet many might come to be thankful for the economic depression that hung over the town, for more than anything else it guaranteed that Victoria would remain British.



GOVERNMENT STREET, east side at corner of Bastion Street. A water cart can be seen moving up the street below one of the large gas lamps that began lighting the city in 1864. The brick building immediately behind the lamp is the home of Thomas Harris.

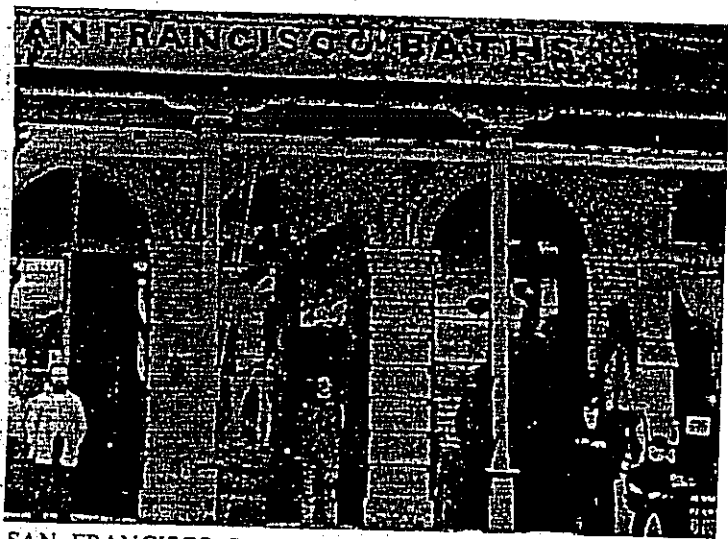
6.

“a little bit of old San Francisco”

A century later, Victoria's tourist industry would reach into the past and promote the city as a “Little Bit of Olde England.” But during the 1860's Victoria could best be described as a little bit of old San Francisco.

A San Francisco based correspondent for the *Times* of London was struck by the similarity between the two cities. “I could have written a pretty correct account of the state of Victoria without going out of my office. It is the San Francisco of 1849 reproduced; and the republication of one of my letters of that period would save me the trouble of sketching the new city. The same hurry-scurry, hurly-burly, dirt, dust, inconvenience, bad living, bad housing, cheating and lying.”²⁶

Each fall the town's permanent population braced for the arrival of the overwintering miners, most of whom were from California, Washington or Oregon. During the winter months, Americans made up the majority of the population and although Victoria was the capital of a British colony, most of them must have felt quite at home. Businesses like the California Saloon on Johnson Street and the Sacramento Restaurant on Waddington Alley lured the American miners with familiar names and the city itself with its planked sidewalks and with its false-fronted hotels and many saloons was all but indistinguishable from other gold-built towns they might have passed through along California's “Trail of '49.”



SAN FRANCISCO BATHS. Few hotels provided facilities for washing. One of the town's many bath houses, the San Francisco attracted Americans with a familiar name.

Before Victoria had its own foundry or brick-yard or a sawmill capable of producing finely finished lumber, building materials were imported from San Francisco and it was in San Francisco that John Wright, one of the city's first and busiest architects, had gained most of his professional experience. The city's first businesses were opened as northern branches of established San Francisco operations or by individuals who had benefited from Californian entrepreneurial experience.

So strong was American influence that the Fourth of July was celebrated with the same enthusiasm as the Queen's May 24th birthday. The American Civil War received detailed coverage in the *British Colonist* and the results of important battles were reported in special, rush editions. Americans whose sympathies differed, often fought it out on downtown streets, the most popular rioting place being the street outside the Confederate Saloon.

William Shapard, the saloon's proprietor, was southern-born. He arrived in Victoria in 1858 with his wife and children and worked as a carpenter until 1861 when he became caught up with his role as the leader of the group of men and women who formed the city's Southern colony. He rented a small brick building on Langley Street near Yates and opened the Confederate Saloon which provided him with a livelihood while it furnished a focus for his activities. In front of the saloon he erected a tall flagstaff from which he flew a Confederate flag made by the Southern ladies of Victoria. Shapard's saloon, noted for its “generous free lunches,” its “excellent rye whiskey cocktails” and its all-night, high-stakes poker games, soon became infamous as a rendezvous for Southern sympathizers.²⁷

The Confederate Saloon and its proprietor were anathemas to the Northerners resident in Victoria. They appealed to the American Consul, Allen Francis, suggesting that he demand the removal of the “obnoxious flag.” Francis refused. Struggling to maintain his reputation among the Southerners as “an easy-going nobody,” he had no interest in attracting attention to himself.

“To talk with him you would think his mind on most subjects a complete blank,” recalled Canadian-born David Higgins, who as a reporter for the *Colonist* often found himself in Francis' company. “You could never apparently excite in him the slightest interest in anything concerning the plans of the Southern colony.”²⁸

Lulled by Francis' presumed incompetence and excited by Shapard's whiskey, the men who collected at the Confederate Saloon openly discussed plans to enter the war by outfitting privateers to prey on American shipping or by kidnapping the American Consul. Meanwhile, Francis who was “always on the alert—keen and watchful,” despite appearances to the contrary, was busily preparing secret dispatches for Washington.

“Congregated here . . . are some desperate men from the rebel states talking of expeditions to California and Nevada Territory for revolutionary purposes,” he reported on October 1, 1862.²⁹

Unlike William Shapard who ran his sympathies up his flagpole for all to see, the proprietor of Ringo's restaurant on Yates Street chose to appear cautiously neutral. Sam Ringo was black. A former slave, he had been freed after nursing his master through an attack of smallpox. He had no interest



AMERICAN HOTEL. Irishman Tommy Burnes, standing top-hatted in front of his hotel, chose a name which he thought would attract the maximum number of customers. In 1893, after the wooden building burned down, Burnes rebuilt the hotel in brick on the same site on Yates Street by Commercial Alley.

in having Civil War battles refought in his restaurant. On one occasion, Ringo heard the sounds of angry voices followed by a scuffle. He emerged from the kitchen to find the two combatants facing each other, pistols drawn. A huge man, Ringo threw his arms about the two and grappling them to his chest, he held them there until, gasping and choking, they agreed to drop their guns and shake hands.³⁰

Sam Ringo was not the only American black to come to Victoria to start a new life. In 1858 a thirty-five member advance party had left San Francisco for Vancouver Island. They sent favourable reports to friends and relations in California. "All coloured man wants here is ability and money . . . It is a God-sent land for the coloured people."³¹ And a few years later Victoria's black population had risen to almost 250.

7.

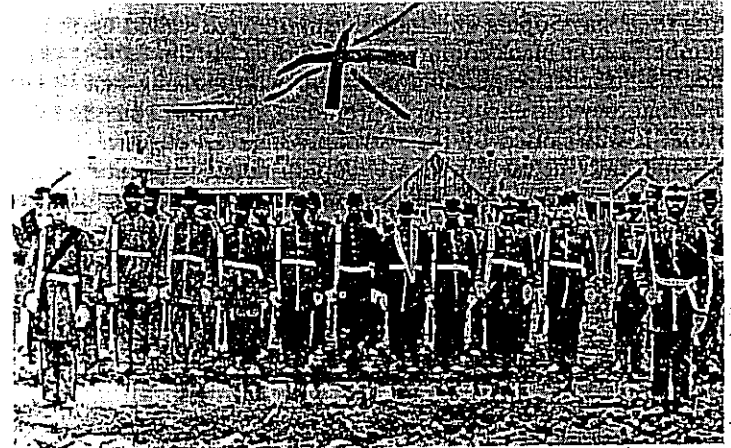
"a 'smart sprinkle' of blacks"

Technically slavery did not exist in California. However the *Fugitive Slave Act* permitted the arrest of any runaway slave found within the state and the *Civil Practice Act* disqualified blacks from testifying against whites. In March of 1858 an act was introduced that, had it passed, would have prevented further immigration of "negroes and mulattoes" to California and would have required the registration of all blacks already resident there.

Early in 1858, San Francisco blacks had begun to meet to discuss the possibility of emigrating. A letter of inquiry was sent to the governor of Vancouver Island. James Douglas, who was himself described as a mulatto, replied that they would find themselves welcomed in the colony. Galvanized by Douglas' assurances, thirty-five blacks booked passage aboard the *Comodore*. It wasn't until they arrived at the docks that they realized they would be sharing the ship with some four hundred Californians, some of whom

were the type of men they were coming to the colony to avoid.

Some blacks succumbed to gold fever and headed for the mines. But many followed their original intention of becoming permanent settlers and taking an active part in society.



VICTORIA PIONEER RIFLES. Formed in 1860, the 'African Rifles' was a militia corps composed entirely of forty-three blacks who had volunteered their services to protect the Colony.

Mifflin Gibbs, free-born in Philadelphia, grumbled about the lack of initiative exhibited by the HBC. "The business portion here is generally owned by old fogies, who are destitute of Yankee enterprise," he wrote to a friend.³² He soon provided an example of Yankee enterprise by buying a town lot and dividing the house that sat on it in two. Collecting rent from half the house, he opened Lester & Gibbs "Dealers in Groceries, Provisions, Boots, Shoes, &c." in the other. Within a few years he had become wealthy enough to hire a servant and to build a house on the five acre parcel of land he had purchased in James Bay.

Not all black men were as worthy as Mifflin Gibbs. Tom Brown had been murdered because he had repeatedly molested an Indian woman. Another black had earned public opprobrium when, losing his temper when his wagon became mired in mud, he beat his horse to death. Other black men were charged with brawling or vagrancy. The latter charge being one usually used against suspected pimps or brothel keepers. But like Gibbs and his partner Peter Lester, many of Victoria's blacks became solid citizens. Archy Lee, a former slave from Kentucky, became a porter and later a drayman. Nathan Pointer owned a clothing store on Government Street. Fortune Richard earned his living as a ships' carpenter. Wellington Moses opened the Pioneer Shaving Saloon and Bath House and by 1861 was the proprietor of a Fort Street boarding house thought sufficiently genteel to house peripatetic English gentlewomen.

Miss Sophia Cracroft travelled to Victoria with her aunt Lady Franklin, widow of the Arctic explorer. They were directed to Moses' establishment,

II. The Gold Rush

"the very best in the place & really very reasonable"."

"It is kept by a colored man & his wife," Sophia recorded. "They are very respectable people. He is a hair cutter & has a shop — the naval people especially patronise him. His wife has the reputation of being a first rate cook."

During their stay Sophia and Lady Franklin were waited upon by prominent members of the black community, including Mifflin Gibbs, who Sophia described as "a most respectable merchant who is rising fast." They told the ladies that they had encountered prejudice in Victoria but they were convinced that it was caused by the "strong American element."

"They naturally detest America," Sophia noted with satisfaction.

When they discovered that their colour would be held against them they had contemplated leaving the colony in a body, Gibbs and his fellows informed the ladies, and they would have done so had it not been for the stand taken by the Reverend Edward Cridge.

The Anglican Dean, Cridge had arrived at Fort Victoria in 1855 to replace Robert Staines as HBC chaplain. In 1856 he officiated at the opening of Victoria's first church, the Victoria District Church on Blanshard.



REVEREND EDWARD CRIDGE.

In 1854 Cridge was engaged by the HBC to replace Robert Staines as the fort's chaplain. Before he left his West Ham parish in London's East End, he married Joseph Hitchcock and Ann Mahoney, the grandparents of Alfred Hitchcock who became famous for his direction of suspense films and infamous for his complete lack of interest in Victoria.

As soon as Cridge learned that a party of blacks had arrived aboard the *Commodore*, he had sought them out and invited them to his church. Cridge's welcome was not extended by all members of his congregation. On August 4, 1858 a letter, from an American who used the nom de plume 'Henry Sharpstone', appeared in the *Victoria Gazette*.

"Last Sabbath was an unusually warm day," Sharpstone wrote. "The little chapel was crowded as usual with a 'smart sprinkle' of blacks, generously mixed with whites. The Ethiopians perspired! they always do when out of place. Several white gentlemen left their seats vacant, and sought the purer atmosphere outside; others moodily endured the aromatic luxury of their positions, in no very pious frame of mind."

The church, Sharpstone recommended, should be segregated. "... give the colored people a place by themselves, as is done in all respectable churches in the world . . ."

Mifflin Gibbs leapt to his own defense with an impassioned letter. He had come to Victoria, he wrote, "... to escape the tyranny and oppression of Republican, Democratic, church-going California."

"It comes with a bad grace from Americans to talk of the horrors of amalgamation when every plantation of the South is more or less a seraglio, and numbers of the most prominent men in the State of California have manifested little heed to color in their choice of companions in an amorous intrigue or a nocturnal debauch," Gibbs continued, scoring debating points but providing information not instantly recognizable as supporting the cause of black respectability.

Cridge succeeded in taking the argument off the boil by stating that he would take note of the "expressed wishes of any individuals with regard to their own personal accommodation in the church" provided that they did not conflict with the claims of the others, but the issue of integrated seating continued to simmer until 1861 when a "race riot" broke out over theatre seating."

A benefit concert, the proceeds from which were to be used to improve hospital facilities, had been planned for the evening of September 25, 1861. Several members of the black community, including Mifflin Gibbs and Nathan Pointer, were, like other Victoria businessmen, eager to support a good cause. They purchased the most expensive tickets available, tickets which admitted them to the dress circle, the best seats in the house.

As rumour spread throughout the town that blacks had purchased all the seats in the dress circle, James McCrea recognized an opportunity to have a little fun. An American auctioneer who had come to Victoria during the early days of the gold rush, McCrea became the leader of a bar-room conspiracy. The plotters, who gathered in a saloon on the evening of the performance, were determined to demonstrate to the blacks that they had taken unwelcome liberties in presuming to occupy the theatre's best seats.

McCrea began by offering fifty dollars to every performer who chose not to appear. When this tactic failed to bring about the concert's cancellation, he arranged for a bag of onions to be left at the theatre entrance, the idea being that onions hurled into the dress circle would counteract the "Ethiopian odours." If that failed to disrupt the concert or to convince the blacks to move to more humble seating, McCrea and his cohorts had another plan up their sleeves.

Mifflin Gibbs and his pregnant wife together with Nathan Pointer and his daughter took their seats in the dress circle that evening. They must have been aware that something was brewing but they were determined to ignore it. They ignored the flying onions and they ignored the loud hisses from McCrea and his friends which greeted the appearance of each performer. But by the time a bag of flour lobbed in their direction exploded on Pointer's head covering them all with flour, their blood was up.

As Pointer's daughter cried, "Oh my father, my father!" Gibbs leapt to his feet. Who did it? he demanded and then knocked to the ground the man fingered by Pointer. Pointer took a punch at another likely candidate, missed and flattened a naval officer. Before anyone was seriously hurt the police arrived to break up the melee. And to charge Gibbs and Pointer with assault.

In the days that followed the riot, the incident was debated in the pages of the *Colonist*. Emil Sutro, one of the performers who had been convinced by McCrea's munificence to cancel his appearance, explained his decision.

II. The Gold Rush

"I do not believe in any amalgamation of white and coloured people, nor that the latter should socially intermix with the former," he wrote.³⁶



THEATRE ROYAL, Government Street. Scene of the race riot of 1861, the Theatre Royal, the large building in the center of the picture, stood near the corner of Bastion Street.

Emil Sutro was an easy target. A German-born Jew he had come to Victoria to operate a cigar shop for his brother Adolph, a successful San Francisco tobacconist. "It would be well if Mr. Sutro would remember that he himself belongs to a much persecuted race . . . Remembering this, his sympathies should have been with, not against, the coloured people," a correspondent who used the pen name "An Offended Englishwoman," wrote.

"Not one respectable person took part in the assault," she continued, adding that the attack on Gibbs and Pointer was "offensive to Englishmen" and "unwarrantable in an English Colony where all classes are truly free."

Not all of her compatriots shared her outrage. Englishman Robert Shaw, an off-duty sailor, had been easily recruited by McCrea and may have been the man who threw the flour at Gibbs and Pointer. British-born clergyman, Matthew Macfie, exhibited an interest in race so consuming as to suggest obsession. He was fascinated by the "mixed population" he discovered in Victoria.

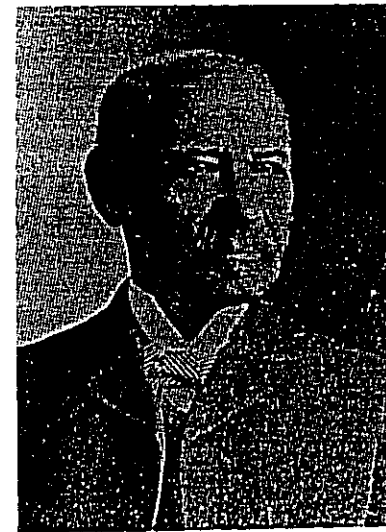
"Among the many remarkable matrimonial alliances to be met with, I have known Europeans married to pure squaws, Indian half-breeds and Mulatto females respectively," he reported.³⁷ "One case has come under my observation of a negro married to a white woman, and another of a man descended from a Hindoo mother married to a wife of Indian extraction."

His mind whirling as he contemplated the "twenty-three crosses, in different degrees resulting from the blending of the Caucasian, the aboriginal Indian and the negro," Macfie turned his attention to James and Amelia Douglas. "A gentleman of large property, reported to be of Mulatto origin, is married to a half-breed Indian," he gasped.

Blacks were well aware that not all Englishmen were without prejudice. And even those who appeared to be more fair-minded might simply be more subtle:

"In some places of public accommodation, such as barbershops, bar-rooms, restaurants and hotels, colored persons are denied the usual privileges," a black visitor reported in 1864. "But such places are invariably

run by Americans or foreigners. In many of the finest establishments, where the proprietors are Englishmen, there is no distinction; they are free from prejudices which Americans have introduced. There are, however, many Englishmen who are as full of prejudice as the lowest secesh (secessionist) American among them. They all, moreover, receive you with an aristocratic, patronizing air."³⁸



MIFFLIN GIBBS. Free-born in Philadelphia, Mifflin Gibbs was one of Victoria's most outspoken and influential blacks. He left the Colony in 1870. Three years later he became the first black man in the U.S. to be elected municipal judge.

But even if they were patronized and excluded from some social events, most blacks considered themselves better off in Victoria than they had been in San Francisco. The theatre riot would not be the last racial incident to occur in the city, but it did mark the peak of racial tensions. As naturalized British subjects they had a right to vote. Since they were not British-born, they were ineligible for election to the colonial assembly, but they had the right to run for positions on Victoria's city council. In Victoria's first civic election Mifflin Gibbs was one of fourteen candidates who sought election to the six member council. He placed seventh, losing by only four votes. Later he would try again, win a seat and be appointed to serve as chairman of the important finance committee.

Mifflin Gibbs and many other blacks would join the flood of Americans deserting the colony in the last years of the 1860's. And with the departure of Americans, both black and white, Victoria's Englishness would become the city's most noticeable characteristic.