

Victoria Labour History Walking Tours

LEARN ABOUT THE WORKERS WHO BUILT THE CITY,
ONE STORY AT A TIME



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Cover photo: View of Victoria Harbour with sailing ships, 1890. Vancouver Public Library/3324

Fisherman's Wharf

1

Indigenous Labour in British Columbia, 1 Dallas Rd

Fishermen's Wharf is a common tourist attraction in Victoria, BC: a reminder of the heyday of the local fishing fleet, which was largest from the **end of the Second World War** to about **1990**. However, fishing and other resource industries in British Columbia are not a phenomenon of colonization; Indigenous people have had a strong resource industry on Vancouver Island for at least 4000 years prior to the establishment of Fort Victoria.



Old Songhees village in Victoria, date unknown
Vancouver Public Library/8644

The Songhees people fished and harvested cherry bark in this area. Early resource industries, pre- and post- colonization included fishing, lumber, fur trade, coal and gold mining. The Songhees people provided the cedar logs (from nearby Mt. Douglas) which formed the palisades of Fort Victoria, built in **1843**. They were paid one Hudson's Bay Company blanket for every 40 logs supplied.

The Songhees people established a village across the harbour from the Fort, which eventually moved to the north shore of Esquimalt Harbour.

In **1849**, an Indigenous man from the Snuneymuxw (*pronounced Nuh-Ney-Mo or Nanaimo*) band named Ki'et'sa'kun arrived in Victoria to have his gun repaired. He was intrigued by the blacksmith's forge coal which, he was told, was imported by ship from afar. He told the blacksmith that plenty of coal was available for the taking at Nanaimo. For his intelligence he was rewarded with a bottle of rum, the free repair of his gun, and the name Coal Tye – meaning "Great Coal Chief".

Within a few years, the Hudson’s Bay Company took steps to claim and develop these new resources. James Douglas sent his emissary Joseph McKay with the instructions: *“You will forbid all persons to work the coal either directly by means of their own labour or indirectly through Indians or other parties employed by that purpose except under authority of a license from the Hudson’s Bay Company”*.

This declaration was technically illegal – the Crown’s policy was to purchase land on Vancouver Island from the Indigenous people before using or reselling it, often for trade goods such as blankets. By the end of the year, 1840 tons of coal had been exported and ships were travelling regularly between Nanaimo, Victoria and San Francisco.

The Indigenous people never received any payment for the confiscation of their resources.

Victoria remained a small community of less than 1000 until the Fraser River Gold Rush of **1858** and became a trade center for the Cariboo Gold Rush when incorporated as a city in **1862**. Victoria consistently functioned as the capital of the region throughout history: first as the capital of the colony of Vancouver Island, then of the amalgamated colony of British Columbia (**1866**) and finally of the province of British Columbia (**1871**).

By the turn of the **20th century**, Vancouver took over many of the shipping, commercial and manufacturing functions of Victoria, and the capital city gradually settled into its modern role as a government, naval, tourist and retirement center.

Modern industries in Victoria include tourism, public administration, health and personal services, retail, research and development of technology.



Kí'et'sa'kun statue in Nanaimo, BC
Photo: Times Colonist

Victoria's Oldest Industry

2

Albion Iron Works & Victoria Machinery Depot, Laurel Point Path Historic Site: 25 Huron Street

One of the earliest industries in the newly formed settlement of Victoria was fabrication - including Albion Iron Works, the only foundry north of San Francisco at that time. Other local industries included sawmills, shipyards, soap and paint factories, coal, gas and turpentine plants, rice and flourmills, breweries, and a wide range of other manufactories and warehouses of importers and exporters.



Construction of the Point Ellice Bridge by the Victoria Machinery Depot, 1902: BC Archives/ C-03745

In **October 1862**, Joseph Spratt founded Albion Iron Works at the north end of downtown, on two lots located at Chatham and Discovery streets. Production expanded to railway cars, marine engines and other industrial machinery. By **1875**, 60 men worked at Albion, with a payroll of \$1000 per week – roughly \$16.67 per person. In **1878**, it started producing stoves, with Spratt vowing that local Victorians would never again need to import.

Iron moulders at the Albion Iron Works struck successfully in 1883, decided to affiliate with the International Moulders and Foundry Workers Union of North America, and were chartered as Local 144 on **Sept. 1st, 1885**.

In **1887**, Spratt began a partnership operating under the name Victoria Machinery Depot. They bought waterfront land on Work Street (now Bay Street). Joseph's son, Charles Spratt, took control of the company around **1900**. Many Albion employees moved over to Victoria Machinery Depot, which produced pre-fabricated steamers for use in the Yukon Gold Rush. Workers also fabricated and constructed the Point Ellis Bridge in **1902**. Boilermakers Lodge 191, the first in BC, was established in Victoria on **January 29, 1898**, representing stationary and marine boilermakers.

By the **start of WWI**, VMD accepted orders for munitions and other war material. The minimum wage for Boilermakers and Shipbuilders during the War was 50 cents per hour. Suffering from heavy unemployment in the **early 1920s**, membership in Boilermaker's Lodge 191 dropped to the point where their Charter lapsed in 1923. During the **1930s**, staff at VMD was reduced to a bare minimum; workers would get two weeks of shifts, then took two unpaid weeks off for the company to survive. Massive hunger marches took place in **February of 1932**, with 2000 people marching to the Parliament Buildings.

Things picked up again with the **start of WWII** – the first wartime contract was awarded in **1940**, for five corvettes needed on the Atlantic. The **1940 collective agreement** for Lodge 191 indicates Boilermakers at Victoria Machinery Depot made 90 cents an hour. The Bay Street site was expanded, but another contract for nine freighters (10 000 tons each) meant the company needed to expand.

VMD purchased the Rithets piers, as well as 27 adjacent acres, in **1941**. This is where the Coast Guard station sits today – 25 Huron Street. Workers at this location produced nearly 50 vessels between the years **1941-1949**. A former employee stated in “Women of the Victoria Shipyards 1942-1945: An Oral History” that over 250 women found wartime employment at the VMD.



Women shipyard workers in line-up at Victoria Machinery Depot [VMD] to buy war bonds: BC Archives/F-09694

Early in **1945**, a rift occurred between Boilermakers Local #2 and the Canadian Congress of Labour, leading to talk of disaffiliation. The Local then petitioned the Trades and Labour Council to issue a Charter for a new organization, the Victoria Shipyard Workers Federal Union, Local #238.

In **1951**, Local 238 went on strike and, with the need of strike benefits, the Local met with the Boilermakers Brotherhood to discuss re-affiliation. On **October 4, 1951**, a special meeting was called to discuss the matter and a vote was taken. The members of the Victoria Shipyard Workers' Federal Union Local #238 made the decision to return to the Brotherhood after an absence of 21 years.

Under a new owner in 1946, workers at VMD built 11 of the first 14 BC Ferries vessels, including the Queens of Burnaby, Saanich, and Nanaimo among other major projects.

The company sold in **1981** and again in **1984**. In **1986**, the company had a new start when 23 employees pooled their resources and assumed control for about \$1.5 million – but the new incarnation didn't last. **By May 1994** it was closed for good and demolished, and Victoria's oldest industry faded into history.



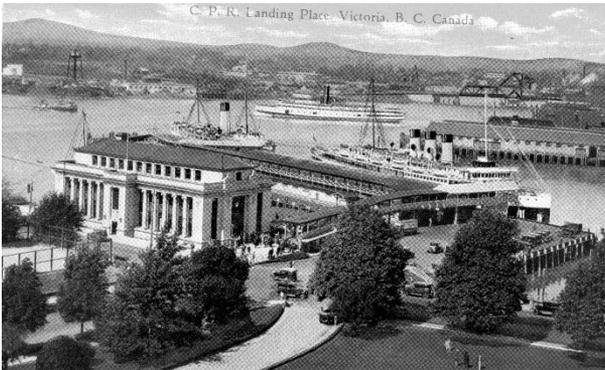
Albion Iron Works Co. Ltd., Victoria, Stoves for China, 1895: City of Vancouver Archives/137-141

CPR Steamship Terminal

3

Diversity in Victoria's labour force, 470 Belleville Street Corner of Menzies Street (unmarked on map)

One sea captain remarked that Victoria was the most diverse port he had ever seen; Hawaiians arrived in considerable numbers early in the fort's establishment, as well as Chinese immigrants, who built the first Chinatown in Canada. East Indians, Chileans, Mexicans and Europeans of all nationalities mingled in Victoria's streets. Many black people settled in the area, immigrating from the United States (where slavery was still legal) and British colonies such as the West Indies.



CPR Steamship Terminal and Landing Place, 1920:
BC Archives/ D-01228
While this terminal was not built until 1920,
steamships arrived in Victoria as early as 1860.

More than anyone, white Americans, in search of gold, dominated the area and showed their attitudes towards other races in brutal ways: one Chinese immigrant, passing by a group of five white miners on

his way to get water, was shot five times without provocation.

One of the primary concerns of this new colony was the ever-present threat of American annexation. Considering the great numbers of Americans present in Victoria and surrounding area, it would not have been difficult for them to overthrow officials and declare the land as American soil. Douglas saw an opportunity in black settlers; since the U.S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision in **1857**, slavery had been upheld and even free blacks had been denied the hope of

citizenship in their native land. Such people would certainly not feel “a hankering in their minds after annexation to the United States”.

It seems likely that Douglas himself sent the letter which Captain Nagle presented to the San Francisco black community in **mid-April of 1858**, promoting emigration to Victoria. On **Sunday, April 25th**, the steamship *Commodore* arrived in Victoria with 35 black passengers of various trades and backgrounds aboard. Some were born “free men”; others were former slaves, hoping to earn enough to purchase their family members’ freedom. They established The Pioneer Committee and wasted no time in getting to work. Many bought land in town; some formed a brickmaking company, others found work on the farms of white settlers. Augustus Pemberton hired several black men upon a week of their arrival to shear sheep, split rails, and clear acres of land.

Many found great success in business – Abolitionist Mifflin Gibbs purchased and remodeled a house, renting one half for \$500 and using the other unit to host “Lester & Gibbs”.

LESTER & GIBBS,
DEALERS IN
GROCERIES, PROVISIONS,
Hardware, Boots, Shoes and Miners' Outfits,
YATES STREET,
Between Wharf and Government Sts., **VICTORIA.**

Ad from the Victoria's first City Directory, 1860:
Vancouver Public Library

The firm was the first competitor to the Hudson's Bay Company and therefore “did as they pleased” in terms of pricing. He invested in mining and trade and was elected to city council in **1867**, becoming the first black person to hold office in BC and the second in all of Canada. There is a plaque in his honour on Cook Street.



Mifflin W. Gibbs:
BlackPast.org/Public Domain image

Nathan Pointer, Gibbs' first business partner in San Francisco, opened a large clothing shop in Victoria. Wellington Moses was soon running the Pioneer Shaving Saloon and Bath Room (Private Entrance for Ladies); he and other black settlers virtually monopolized barbering in Victoria. Archy Lee, whose controversial court case had helped prompt the exodus from San Francisco,

found work as a porter and later a drayman. The best restaurant in town was Ringo's on Yates Street. The owner, Samuel Ringo, was a freed slave.

Within a very short time, black settlers were engaged in work at every level of the colony's economy, and for a few weeks in **June 1858**, even policed Victoria – appointed by Douglas himself, perhaps as a way of reminding American whites that they were on British soil. After several episodes of white settlers refusing to be arrested by black officers, they were withdrawn from service, except for Lorne Lewis – he served for several years as Constable for the Songhees Reserve outside Victoria.

Chinese settlers also had early success in business, despite racist laws and policies that aimed to limit their economic mobility. Lee Chong, a merchant from San Francisco, set up the Kwong Lee Company in Victoria. His wife and child arrived from China in the **spring of 1860**; Mrs. Lee became the first Chinese woman in Victoria. **By**



Second Chinese Arch on Cormorant Street Erected for Visit of The Earl of Dufferin, Governor-General Of Canada: BC Archives/ E-01926
The Kwong Lee & Co. sign is visible to the left of the arch.

1862, Kwong Lee was the second largest company in Victoria, after the Hudson's Bay Company. Lee Chong also acted frequently as a major leader and representative of the local Chinese community in Victoria. In 1864, for instance, "Kwong Lee" (as he became known) led a local Chinese petition to the new governor of the Colony of Vancouver Island, Arthur E. Kennedy, demanding just treatment.

On **Sept. 17, 1878** Chinese workers staged a strike in Victoria, in response to tax collection and seizure of their goods. The municipal government returned the goods, and residents of Chinatown returned to work. In **1882**, Chinese workers recruited by contractors began to arrive in Victoria en route to

construction jobs building the Canadian Pacific Railway; in the same year, the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, meaning workers who had moved from there to BC had no option to return home. Over 17 000 Chinese immigrants came to Canada over a period of 3 years. By **1884**, the population of Victoria's Chinatown was 1767. That same year, the BC government passed acts to stop Chinese residents from acquiring Crown land, prohibiting the immigration of Chinese immigrants to BC, and requiring an annual head tax of ten dollars, as well as a \$15 license fee for each Chinese miner who wished to prospect for gold. In **1885**, the Dominion government passed an act requiring Chinese immigrants pay a fifty-dollar federal head tax.

Victoria was unchallenged as the metropolitan centre of BC until the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway at Burrard Inlet in **1886**, shifting focus to Vancouver. The total population of the province in **1891** was still less than 100 000, of which 45 000 were Indigenous or Chinese. Provincial legislation in **1895-1896** stripped Chinese, Japanese and Indigenous peoples voting rights in elections in BC. Since the federal voters list came from the provincial election's voters list, the federal franchise was also blocked.

Extra Content: BC MEMORIAL TO SPANISH CIVIL WAR VETERANS, Menzie & Belleville St (near Confederation Fountain, across from front lawn of Legislature)



As you walk along Menzies to Confederation Fountain, take note of the Monument and Plaque to British Columbians who served in the Mackenzie–Papineau Battalion or “Mac-Paps”, a battalion of Canadians who fought as part of the XV International Brigade on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War (**1936 – 1939**). Most of the Canadian Mac-Paps came from the working class, motivated to oppose fascism by their experiences during the Canadian Depression.

Upon returning to Canada, the veterans were ignored and persecuted by the Canadian government.

Photo: by DrHaggis at the English language Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0

The monument was completed in **2000**.

Tough Timber

4

The 1946 IWA Strike & Trek to Victoria, Confederation Fountain

The lumber industry is one of the oldest and largest industries on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia as a whole; early on, workers in camps and sawmills alike joined unions to fight for their collective rights.

In **April of 1946**, the International Woodworkers of America [IWA] entered a round of negotiations with major employers. The

operators offered a measly rise of 12 and a half cents per hour - with the provision that the union would withdraw their demands for dues check-off, union security, and a guaranteed 40-hour work week. After additional consultations and meetings, the union announced to their membership that *“unless the employers consider a satisfactory settlement of the union’s demands on or before **11 AM May 15th, 1946**, the District Executive board declares a general strike in the woodworking industry.”*

The energy across the province that morning was electric; at 11 AM, reports came pouring in of workers downing tools and walking out by the thousands in mills in Vancouver, New Westminster, Mission, and out into Hope and the surrounding Fraser Valley. Vancouver Island was the same; from Cowichan Bay to Hillcrest, Nanaimo to Victoria, the camps and mills grew silent as machinery shut down and workers laid down their tools. By noon, the strike had spread through Interior BC to the foot of the Rocky Mountains. In total, 35 000 workers ground the industry to a halt. In an unprecedented show of solidarity, non-union employees joined their union co-workers on the picket line. Within a week, thirty-seven thousand woodworkers were off the job.



A speaker during the march of IWA strikers in Victoria: BC Archives/i-01405

The strike continued for 37 days, and spirits were high. There were no signs of strike-breaking, and the picketers had strong public support.



1946 March of IWA strikers in Victoria, Government Street: BC Archives/i-01404

Committees were established to organize every aspect, from publicity to picket lines to relief and everything in between. Women's Auxiliaries, comprised of workers' wives but far from a tea and crumpets organization,

bolstered picket lines, staged marches, helped fundraise and solidified support for the

union's demand for a shorter work week. "I didn't marry a meal ticket," said one Auxiliary member, "but that's what it amounts to if my husband works more than forty hours a week. We just never see our husbands when they work such long hours."

Halfway through the strike, federally appointed arbitrator Gordon Sloan handed down his contract recommendations. He proposed a wage increase of fifteen cents an hour, a limited reduction of working hours that set the union on the road to a five-day, forty-hour week and some improvement in dues check-off, though short of a complete union shop. The companies accepted Chief Justice Sloan's report. The IWA did not.

Fearing the provincial government would legislate Sloan's recommendations to end the dispute, the union mounted a mass march on the legislature in Victoria in June 1946 by 3000 strikers and supporters. They came by ferry from Vancouver and by car and bus from all over Vancouver Island. Jonnie Rankin was inspired by the sight of scores of women boarding the midnight boat to Victoria. "You know it was a wonderful thing," Rankin later told interviewer Sara Diamond. "They came from all these mills all over New Westminster and they were just ordinary working girls, and they walked on that boat singing, 'You

Can't Scare Me, I'm Sticking to the Union,' [Union Maid] and militant, you know. They just lifted the whole thing."

After bunking overnight in local armories, the demonstrators were led by a large group of women from the Lake Cowichan chapter of the Ladies' Auxiliary, carrying signs and banners backing demands for more take-home pay and particularly the forty-hour week. Cheered on by the citizens of Victoria, they marched towards the Parliament Buildings. As union leaders met inside with members of the cabinet, the protesters paraded around chanting "25-40 Union Security!" and singing union songs, their voices clearly audible to those within the legislature's thick walls. But the stirring protest failed to soften the government's attitude, and the IWA's first major strike soon came to an unexpected close.



Lake Cowichan IWA Women's Auxiliary:
United Steelworkers/IMG3656

On June 20, 1946, fearing back-to-work orders, the union leadership decided to call off the strike and accept Chief Justice Sloan's recommendations. Yet the overall results were positive. There were clear gains in the Sloan report, even if they were short of the union's hopes.

The thirty-seven-day strike solidified the IWA's position as the strongest union in BC at that time.

Site of protests, labour legislation, and more, 501 Belleville Street

Take note of the incredible masonry skills of early BC workers, visible in the



BC Legislature, 2017: BC Labour
Heritage Centre photo

Legislative building erected in 1893. In contrast to BC's early anti-Asian sentiments, the original "bird cage" government buildings that preceded the Legislature had a distinctly Chinese character to their roof lines.

There are several historic plaques and memorials inside the Legislature, including:

- Marie Grant & Cecilia Spofford Plaque - recognizing two Victoria women who campaigned for women's suffrage. Maria Grant was elected as the first female school trustee in March of 1895. She and her friend Cecilia Spofford were both active in the movement. The plaque was installed in 1987, the 70th anniversary of changes to the BC Elections Act allowing British women to vote on the same basis as men. Universal suffrage was not achieved until much later.
- 50th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage (placed in 1967) – located in Member's Lobby, adjacent to ceremonial entrance to Legislative Chamber.
- Bronze Plaque honouring BC Government workers killed in World War One
- Legislative murals – ceiling of the rotunda of the Legislature is decorated with four murals depicting workers in the natural resources of the province: Agriculture, Forestry, Mining and Fishing. These murals are of relatively recent date and replaced murals that had become controversial due to their depiction of Indigenous peoples.

Marches on the government buildings are so common that the grass has often been replaced over the years. One of the largest labour demonstrations held on this lawn took place not so long ago.

Front Lawn: SOLIDARITY

The Largest Political Protest in BC's History

The Social Credit Party, led by Premier Bill Bennett, was re-elected in BC in **May of 1983**. In **July**, shortly after taking office, they enacted a series of 26 bills, slashing



core social and labour rights. Within days, multiple resistance campaigns began, resulting in what was called “The Solidarity Movement”:

Sean Griffin photo, Image MSC160-865-28, Pacific Tribune Photo Collection, Simon Fraser University Library.

the combined support of Operation Solidarity (the expanded labour organization) led by Art Kube, President of the BC Federation of Labour; and the Solidarity Coalition (a broad movement of community, social action, human rights, women's, anti-poverty, and environmental groups).

On **July 27, 1983**, over 20 000 workers gathered for a rally here on the lawn of the Legislature building, with speakers uniting the crowd at the microphone – a mid-week action that was the largest in Victoria's history.

Two weeks later, 50 000 protesters filled Vancouver's Empire Stadium to capacity, including firefighters and bus drivers joining forces with government employees. Despite the pressure, Bennett refused to be moved, holding all-night sessions at the Legislature to force the bills through.

On **October 15, 1983**, 60 000 to 80 000 people met at assembly points throughout Vancouver. They marched downtown past the Hotel Vancouver, where the Social Credit Party was holding its convention, and ended with a rally at the Queen Elizabeth plaza – in effect, the largest political protest in BC's history. At the QE Plaza rally, Jack Munro representing Operation Solidarity and

Renate Shearer representing the Solidarity Coalition read “A Declaration of Rights of the People of BC”.

On **Nov. 8, 1983**, BC teachers and K-12 education workers walked off the job and joined striking members of the BCGEU on picket lines in Phase 1 of an escalating job action plan intended to get the government to back down from their regressive agenda. The province feared a General Strike was brewing and agreed to talk with movement leaders. Over the ensuing weekend, negotiations fell to Jack Munro, Vice-President of the BC Federation of Labour. The resulting agreement, The Kelowna Accord, was backed by the Federation and put workers back on the job.

However, Solidarity Coalition partners were excluded from these negotiations and did not support the deal, leading to a period of distrust of the labour movement by many community, women’s and social action groups – some of which lingers to this day.

Back Lawn: THE GARDEN OF HONOUR

100 Years of Worker’s Health & Safety in BC

Nearly 1000 people die each year in Canada because of their jobs – nearly double the number of Canadians murdered – yet workplace deaths receive far less media attention.

Of course, first responders face a higher threat of injury or death on the job than others, due to the dangerous nature and emergency situations that are part of the industry. First responders have



also struggled with their relationships to unions and organized labour over the years.

Garden of Honour, 2016:
Photo by Deborah Price

Memorials in the Garden include:

- The Last Alarm – Fallen Fire Fighters Memorial Statue, unveiled **Feb 13, 2013**.

Serious wildfires across BC in recent years have raised awareness of the dangers faced by emergency responders. Sadly, one firefighter died in **summer of 2016**.

- Fallen Paramedic Memorial, unveiled **May 6, 2015**. Funded by BC Emergency Health Services and the Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE Local 873.
- BC Law Enforcement Memorial, unveiled **Sept. 26, 2004**.

Sadly, **2017** marked the first year an officer was killed by gun violence on the job in BC in over 30 years. Constable Davidson of Abbotsford, BC lost his life while responding to a report of a stolen vehicle.

The worst accident in BC's history was the **1887** mine explosion in Nanaimo (pit number one, extending to Newcastle Island) killing 150 miners, including an



estimated 53 Chinese miners. Shamefully, it was not legally required to report the deaths of Chinese workers until **1897**, and when they did, they were unnamed – just labeled “Chinaman”.

Workers Compensation is a great example of how this issue has been

Rescue squad, Canadian Collieries Limited:
BC Archives/I-55448

complicated to handle for a long period of time. **2017** marks 100 years since the creation of the

Workmen's Compensation Board in **1917**.

Before this, workers injured on the job could sue their employers. This was extremely difficult for workers to afford, and so it was an empty threat to employers. The system was proposed after an inquiry held in Ontario. Both workers' groups and employers supported the proposition, as it avoided possible lawsuits. Rising union participation pushed for change: there was no cap on the penalties employers could pay out in court cases, and as unions became stronger, they were able to provide the funds and legal expertise necessary for workers to win their cases. Thus, the Workmen's Compensation

Board, in which employers pay premiums but are not responsible for deaths unless criminally negligent, came into being. The Board is now known as WorkSafe BC and is administered by the provincial government.

The BC Federation of Labour and other labour bodies still refer to the Board as Worker's Compensation, as "WorkSafe BC" was the result of a rebranding exercise to improve the Board's image with the employer community. The result very intentionally and visibly removed workers from the name, and with that, the original intent of the system that was born of the "historic compromise".

The connotation of "work safe" perpetuates the age-old "blame-the-worker" bias for workplace incidents, ignoring the responsibility for employers to insure "safe work", and the systemic issues that are predominantly the root cause of workplace health and safety failures.

The **National Day of Mourning** is observed in Canada on the **28th of April** each year. It commemorates workers who have been killed, injured or suffered illness due to workplace related hazards and incidents. Started by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, it was endorsed by the Canadian Labour Congress in **1985** and became a national day of mourning with legislation passed in **1990**. It is now recognized in countries worldwide.



South Park Elementary School

6

100 Years of Teachers' Labour Struggles, 508 Douglas Street

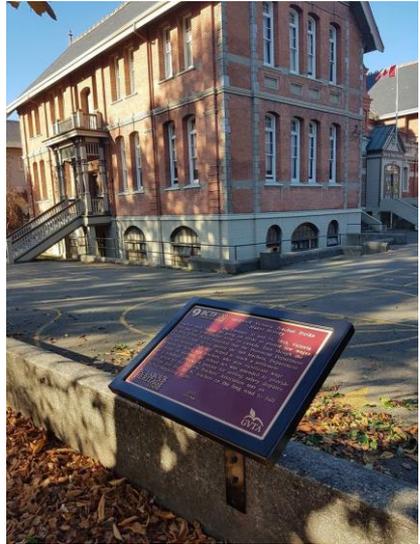
The BC Teachers Federation celebrated their 100th anniversary in **2017**, and the BC Labour Heritage Centre has installed a series of bronze plaques commemorating events that made up the long and hard-fought struggle towards collective bargaining rights for teachers, as part of our Plaques Around the Province Project. One of the plaques is located here, outside South Park Elementary School, built in **1894** and still in operation today.

South Park Elementary is a registered Historic Place of Canada, formally recognized in **1978**. It is a significant site as the first school in Victoria to be built following the Public School Act of **1891**, which transferred control of construction and maintenance of public schools to local school boards and municipalities.

The Queen Anne Style of the building is meant to represent the ideal elements of a school from that time: practicality, economy, and beauty. The South Park School Annex was originally constructed as a manual training center, indicative of the introduction of manual training to elementary public education for boys in the **early 1900s**. It was believed that teaching industrial disciplines would promote a positive perception of manual employment and encourage a healthy work ethic in the general population.

The bronze plaque outside the school was installed by the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association and the BCLHC in **2017** to commemorate the **1919** teachers' strike – the first job action of its kind in Canada. It reads:

*"On **February 10th and 11th, 1919**, Victoria teachers made history by going on strike to protest low wages. This was the first teachers strike in Canada. Even though the Victoria*



BCLHC Plaque, South Park Elementary School, 2017: BC Labour Heritage Centre photo

School Board requested that the Provincial Department of Education take action against the 169 teachers, Department officials refused. They also helped to reach a settlement between the Board and teachers, who won significant wage increases. In addition, the School Act was amended to provide for a voluntary arbitration process for settling salary disputes. This action by the Victoria Teachers' Association was an important first step for BC teachers on the long road to full collective bargaining rights."

Teachers weren't the only ones to organize collectively in Victoria schools. From **1922 – 1923**, Chinese children carried out a year-long strike when the Victoria School Board threatened to teach them in segregated schools. The Chinese Canadian Benevolence Association founded an Anti-Segregation Association to challenge the decision. In **August 1923**, the school board allowed Chinese students to return to their schools, except for 17 who needed assistance with English.

The **1919** Victoria Teacher's Strike was the first of many labour struggles for BC teachers. Another bronze plaque was installed in Langley to commemorate Connie Jervis, a young teacher who led 40 others, mostly women, in a **1939-1940** struggle with school board and other community leaders in attempt to have their arbitrated salary award implemented.

Another significant event commemorated in a bronze plaque in **2017** was the Surrey Teachers Strike of **1974**. This walk-out and protest in February of that



year saw over 1000 teachers walk off the job with less than a day's notice, travelling by ferry to Victoria, and rallying on the steps of the Legislature. This action pressured the newly elected NDP Government to reduce class sizes, not only for Surrey teachers, but across the entire province of BC.

1974 Surrey Strike: BCTF Archives

Of course, these actions and many others culminated recently, in the

Supreme Court victory won in **2016** – ending a legal battle that began in **2002**. This decision immediately restored clauses that had been stripped dealing with class size, number of special needs students in classrooms, and numbers of specialist teachers required in schools.

“The Homecoming” Statue

7

The Victoria Mutiny of 1918, 812 Wharf Street

Historic Site: Corner of Fort & Quadra Street

This statue, titled “The Homecoming” (sculptor: Nathan Scott), depicts a sailor’s return to his family after serving abroad. It was erected in **2010** to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Navy. Thousands of working-class people have served in the various branches of the Canadian Military, and labour unions have often played an interesting role in political organizing during times of war.



The Homecoming statue, 2012:
LoveVictoriaBC photo

On **December 21, 1918**, a mutiny occurred in downtown Victoria, BC, among working-class conscripts in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia). The soldiers, many of whom were from Quebec, were inspired by anti-war organizing within the Victoria Trades and Labour Council and affiliated unions.

Several mass meetings took place in local theatres in the weeks leading up to the mutiny, organized by the labour council and local longshoreman Joseph Taylor, a vice-president of the council. These protest meetings were attended by hundreds of soldiers from the Siberian Expeditionary Force, who were undergoing training in the suburban neighbourhood of Oak Bay while awaiting deployment to the Russian Far East to participate in the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War.

Many Victoria trade unionists believed Canada should have no role in the Russian civil war, opposing interference in the internal affairs of Russia, with the intervention perceived to be a one-sided response to the political crisis in Russia that would bolster the forces of property, privilege and authoritarianism and undermine working-class interests in the country. At these protest meetings, labour speakers invoked the demand “Hands Off Russia”.



Hands Off Russia mass meeting,
Columbia Theatre, 13 December 1918:
Sidney Rodger Collection/ID1633

Influenced by this labour organizing, a contingent of working-class conscripts from the 259th Battalion mutinied on the morning of **Saturday, Dec. 21st**, when

they were marching from the Willows Camp to the troopship SS Teesta on Victoria's Outer Wharves. The mutiny began at the intersection of Fort Street and Quadra street, only a few blocks northeast from this site. The mutiny was suppressed after the commanding officer ordered obedient troops to whip the mutinous troops back into line, and they mustered a guard of honour consisting of 50 troops armed with rifles and bayonets to herd the dissenters down to the wharf. It took 21 hours to get the soldiers aboard the Teesta.

Early in the morning of **December 22nd, 1918**, the Siberian Expeditionary Force sailed for Vladivostok, Russia. The ringleaders were shackled together in the ship's hold and would later be convicted at court-martial of "joining in a mutiny while on active service in His Majesty's armed forces", receiving sentences between 6 months and 3 years imprisonment with hard labour. Many more ships full of soldiers were sent overseas from Victoria to fight in the Russian Civil War. The Troopship SS Protesilaus left for Vladivostok days after the SS Teesta with no reported disturbances, with police monitoring soldiers as they boarded at the docks.



Leaving for Siberia. Dec 26th 1918.

Soldiers marching towards the SS Protesilaus,
26 Dec 1918: BC Archives/Elkington-I78247

Of course, this event occurred the same year as the death of union activist and BC Federation of Labour Vice-President Ginger Goodwin, who was shot by a provincial officer after fleeing conscription in WWI. His death prompted Canada's first one-day general strike on **Aug. 2, 1918**, as thousands of workers put down their tools in protest.

Other acts of political intimidation occurred thereafter. The Victoria Labour Council newspaper, *The Week*, and the Socialist Party paper, *The Clarion*, were suppressed. Workers caught with books published by the Charles Kerr Company, the major publisher of socialist literature on the continent, were given prison sentences. Joe Naylor and another unionist were arrested on charges of assisting draft evaders, shortly after Goodwin's death.

In **1919**, the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council proclaimed a general strike referendum on the issue of free speech, which was supported by 16 out of 17 unions replying. The Victoria Council joined Vancouver in favouring a general strike in support of the release of political prisoners. Following the Winnipeg General Strike beginning **May 15th** of that year, the Victoria Council passed a resolution supporting the general sympathy strike, pending support by affiliated locals. On **June 23rd, 1919**, 4811 Victoria workers joined that general strike.

The Bakers of Victoria

8

British Columbia's First Unions, Assemblies & Associations Historic Site: Corner of Wharf Street & Johnson Street (unmarked on map)

We're finishing our tour on Wharf Street, site of the first meeting of British Columbia's first union. **January 20, 1859**, less than a year after gold miners began to arrive, The Victoria Gazette printed:

"At a meeting of the practical Bakers of Victoria, held at the Royal Hotel on Monday evening, January 17th, they resolved to form themselves into a society for the protection of their trade, together with regulating the Wages of Journeymen; so that they may have a just compensation for their Labour, and doing away with Sunday work. They hope to merit the approbation of the public by their endeavours to do justice to the men who have served to apprenticeship in the trade. The following officers were elected for three months:

*Samuel Nesbitt,
President
Simon Nershfelder,
Treasurer
Patrick Kelly,
Secretary"*

The **1860** City Directory shows the Royal Hotel was located on the east side of Wharf St (near the corner of Johnson) and had its own theatre – the perfect place for a meeting. The brick building still stands today.

A local printers' union was formed by Bob Holloway, later printer of the Cariboo Sentinel. The Constitution and By-Laws of the Victoria Typographical Union says the union was organized in **1863**, though it was possibly a successor to an earlier organization. The initial membership was 23, with C.D. Mattocks as President.



Royal Hotel, front cover of the first Victoria City Directory, 1860:
Vancouver Public Library

Shipwrights in Victoria also began to organize “to protect their rights, regulate the number of hours of work, and the amount of wages they shall accept.” They first met in **December 1862**, and two months later, on **Feb. 16th, 1863**, 34 members adopted a constitution and elected officers for The Journeymen Shipwrights’ Association of Victoria and Vancouver Island. Thomas Smalfield was the first president.

The first international union to appear in British Columbia was Local 48 of the American Brotherhood of Carpenters (later the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners) in Victoria, formed on **July 25th, 1883**. Less than a year later, in **March of 1884**, the 125 members of the carpenter’s union began the fight for the nine-hour work day by striking against the eighteen building contractors in the city with the full backing of “the very dynamic branch of the Knights of Labour”. The union apparently won its demands with most of the contractors but, it is reported, it was unable to enforce the conditions on the job, and the union disbanded shortly afterwards.

Meanwhile, local iron moulders at the Albion Iron Works, who had struck successfully in **1883**, decided to affiliate with the International Moulders and Foundry Workers Union of North America, and were chartered as Local 144 on **Sept. 1st, 1885**.



8 Hour Day International
Typographers Union button:
David Yorke collection

The other early international union in the capital city was Local 201 of the International Typographical Union which received its charter on **April 18th, 1884**. However, it appears that this was merely a continuation of the local printers’ union which had formed in **1863** and had affiliated with the international.

By the end of the **1880s**, a few more unions had emerged in Victoria: The Carpenters Local 354 and the Cabinet Makers and probably a local bricklayer’s union. All were involved in the nine-hour day agitation. Some, like the Cabinet Makers in **1889**, followed the carpenters’ example and resorted to strike action. In fact, it was the nine-hour day movement that first brought all the unions together into any form of collective organization, the city labour councils.

VICTORIA TRADES ASSEMBLY

According to the Labour Gazette, the Victoria Trades Assembly was first organized in June of 1889 but, if so, this must have only been a preliminary meeting, for the assembly proper was formed in **January of 1890** by the Typographical Union, “Ship Carpenters” (shipwrights and caulkers), Local 2 of the Bricklayers’ International Union, Local 354 of the Carpenters and Local 144 of the Moulders. Seven new unions appeared in Victoria by **1892**, after the Council was formed – Painters, Musicians, Stonecutters, Tailors, Cigar Makers, Plasterers, and Coast Seaman and Sealers.

The Labour-Gazette reported the formation of Local 44 of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or “Wobblies”) in Victoria in **1906**. It was probably the old American Labour Union Garment Workers reaffiliating.



Various union ribbons, pre-1900s:
David Yorke collection

THE WORKINGMAN’S PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION

In Victoria in the late **1870s**, the low wage competition prompted unrest and discussion among many workers – with the result that on **Sept. 1st, 1878**, a general union called the Workingman’s Protective Association was formed in the province’s capital. Apparently, this organization was not very concerned with collective bargaining, but rather with:

“the mutual protection of the working class of BC against the great influx of Chinese; to use all legitimate means for the suppression of their immigration; to assist each other in the obtaining of employment; and to devise means for the amelioration of the condition of the working class of this Province in general.”

The next few months saw considerable activity for the new organization, which attracted several hundred supporters in Victoria. It expanded to open a branch in New Westminster with another forty members. It was avowedly “anti-political”, aside from what they called “the oriental issue” but broke up due to political infighting and personal rivalries after less than one year. It serves as a reminder that some forms of labour organizing have perpetuated historical wrongdoings, while others fought for the rights of all workers.

About this Project

Since 2013, the BC Labour Heritage Centre has provided walking tours of Vancouver, exploring the rich labour history that city has to offer. These tours were developed from a project originally titled *Labour, Work, and Working People: A Working Class and Labour History Walking Tour, Vancouver, BC*, written by SFU graduate co-op student Juanita Nolan. The success of our Downtown, Central and Eastside Vancouver Labour History Walking Tour routes has encouraged us to explore expanding these tours to other topics and locations around British Columbia.

We would like to thank the BC Federation of Labour for prompting the creation of this tour as part of their 2017 Union Renewal Conference, held in Victoria in October 2017. Their support also allowed for the design of the route map featured in this booklet, so that we can share this tour with the public for years to come. This route and booklet were designed and created by Bailey Garden, Project Manager at the BC Labour Heritage Centre.

About the BC Labour Heritage Centre

The BC Labour Heritage Centre Society preserves, documents and presents the rich history of working people in British Columbia, Canada. We are a registered non-profit society. Founded by Jack Munro, the Society engages in partnerships and projects that help define and express the role that work and workers have played in the evolution of social policy and its impact on the present and future shaping of the province.

We would like to acknowledge that all the sites in this booklet, as well as the labour done to research them took place on Unceded Coast Salish Territories.

For more information, visit our website:

www.labourheritagecentre.ca

WORKING PEOPLE BUILT BC

Victoria has a rich and diverse labour history. This booklet invites you to visit sites of significance to workers' heritage and working-class struggle that commemorate the importance of labour unions, individuals, collective actions and much more.