

A Historic Timeline for Nanaimo

1774

Juan Josef Perez Hernandez makes the first mapping trip from San Blas in Mexico to what is now known as the west coast of British Columbia.

1790

Spain and Britain sign the first Nootka Convention on October 28, which gives both parties the right to trade in the areas of the Pacific Northwest so far unoccupied, with Nootka Sound remaining open to both.

1791

Commodore Alejandro Malaspina, an Italian explorer in the service of Spain, leads an expedition to the Pacific Coast. Francisco de Eliza and Jose Maria Narvaez explore the Strait of Juan de Fuca as far north as present day Comox. de Eliza charts the entries to Nanaimo's harbour, calling the area Winthuysen Inlet, after a Spanish Rear-Admiral. de Eliza's men suffer from scurvy, and the survey is abandoned.

1792

Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, Spain's maritime commander on the west coast, becomes Governor of the Spanish settlement at Nootka. Dionisio Galiano and Cayetano Valdez sail from Nootka in the Sutil and the Mexicana to finish Eliza's survey. They meet with Captain George Vancouver at Spanish Banks off Point Grey, then continue north. On June 15th, they anchor for three days in the sheltered lee of Gabriola Island and explore the harbour area.

1793

The Spanish and the English sign the second Nootka Convention.

1794

The Spanish agree to give up all claims to the area under revised terms of the third Nootka Convention, signed by Quadra and Captain George Vancouver.

1843

Fort Victoria is founded.

1849

Fort Rupert is established at the northwest tip of Vancouver Island by the Hudson's Bay Company after coal is discovered.

1851

Joseph Mackay, clerk for the Hudson's Bay at Fort Victoria, learns of the existence of coal at Winthuysen Inlet from Che-wech-i-kan (later known as 'Coal Chief' or 'Coal Tyee').

1852

Mackay is sent to Winthuysen Inlet by James Douglas to investigate the reports of coal deposits. He confirms the value of the coal deposits, and the Company decides to close the mine at Fort Rupert (where the coal deposits were found to be inferior) and transfer its mining operations to Winthuysen Inlet, which is commonly known as 'Nanymo'. John Muir is placed in charge of the mine operations for the H.B.C. Mackay organizes the building of houses for the workers. On September 10th the first shipment of coal leaves for Victoria.

1853

The Bastion is completed. Two natives are hung on Protection Island after a trial in which they were found guilty of the murder of a Hudson's Bay Company shepherd at Saanich the year before.

The Fort Rupert mine is closed and the miners transferred to the new settlement, now known as Colville Town in honour of the Governor of the H.B.C., Andrew Colville. H.M.S. Virago arrives in April to finish the survey of the harbour. A sawmill is built on the banks of the Millstone River. In July the first white child is born in the area, Alexander, the son of Robert Dunsmuir. Charles Bailey is sent from Victoria to be the settlement's first teacher.

1854

The barque Princess Royal arrives with twenty-four families (seventy-five individuals) after a six month voyage around Cape Horn. The new settlers are from the Brierley Hill area in Staffordshire, England's industrial 'Black Country'. They step ashore at Pioneer Rock on November 27th, joining the first settlers. Cornelius Bryant is appointed School Principal.

1856

The first regular Anglican services are held on February 15th. The Colony of Vancouver Island is divided into four electoral districts.

1857

Mark Bate, a nephew of the mine manager, arrives at the settlement and becomes cashier for the H.B.C. The first religious services in Nanaimo are conducted by Rev. E. Cridge, a Hudson's Bay Chaplain from Victoria.

1858

The mainland territory of New Caledonia becomes the Crown Colony of British Columbia.

1859

The first Methodist services are held on February 20th by Rev. Arthur Browning. The Hudson's Bay Company 'alienated one of the best town lots overlooking the harbour and fronting on a public square, for the purpose of building a church and a church parsonage; this became the site of St. Paul's Anglican Church. The 58 ton schooner Alpha is the first ship to be built in Nanaimo.

1860

The settlement officially becomes known as Nanaimo. The first Court is held in July by Captain William H. Franklyn, Resident Magistrate. The first Methodist church is built on what is today Chapel Street.

1861

The cornerstone is laid for the first St. Paul's Anglican Church on Christmas Day; Rev. R.L. Lowe is the first resident minister.

1862

The Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company buys the H.B.C.'s land, mines and buildings, a total of 6,193 acres. The H.B.C. remains only as a trading post. Six tons of Nanaimo and Newcastle coal are exhibited at London's World Fair. The Old Flag Inn on Bastion Street opens. St. Paul's Anglican Church opens for services on Whitsunday; the final cost of construction is \$2,500.

1864

City lots are sold by auction in Victoria. The plans for the town had been prepared by George Deverill in England from contour maps, with streets radiating out from a central point. The streets are named after officials and shareholders of the Vancouver Coal Company, including Charles Wallace, Prideaux Selby, Wentworth Fitzwilliam and Lord Milton. Harewood Mine opens. The corner stone for the Mechanic's Literary Institute on Bastion Street, a meeting place and reading room, is laid by Arthur Kennedy, Governor of the Colony of Vancouver Island, on November 15th.

1865

There is now twice weekly mail service from Victoria. Local newspaper service commences with the publication of the Gazette Tribune. St. Paul's Anglican Church is finally consecrated on August 27th. The first Presbyterian service is held in the Court House on November 26th by Rev. Robert Jamieson. The first Roman Catholic church, St. Peter's, is blessed by Bishop Demers with assistance by Rev. Charles Seghers.

1866

Vancouver Island and British Columbia are united as one Crown Colony. The Douglas Mine is closed. The first Presbyterian Church is built at the corner of Fitzwilliam and Wesley Streets.

1867

Canadian Confederation. A railroad has been built to carry the coal from the Park Head Slope to the Hudson's Bay coal jetty at the foot of Wharf Street. The school burns down, and classes are held in St. Paul's Church Hall. There are now 13 Chinese labourers in Nanaimo.

1868

The provincial capital is moved from New Westminster to Victoria.

1869

Coal is discovered at Wellington by Robert Dunsmuir.

1870

The Good Templars establish their Onward Lodge on Front Street.

1871

British Columbia is admitted to Confederation on July 20th. British Columbia's first wedding license is issued to Nanaimo residents Bruno Mellado and Mary Ann Thompson. The first Assize Court is held in Nanaimo before Chief Justice Begbie. The Chinese population is now thirty-six.

1872

Mah Hong Jang becomes the first Chinese merchant to open a store, near Pioneer Square. The Municipalities Act is passed.

1873

Nanaimo's first public school building is built on Crace Street.

1874

The Nanaimo Free Press commences publication on April 15th. The Entrance Island Lighthouse is built by the Federal Government. The Homestead Act is passed. The City of Nanaimo is incorporated on December 26th - only the cities of New Westminster and Victoria, and the District Municipalities of Langley, Chilliwack and Maple Ridge, are older.

1875

The first civic elections are held in January, and Mark Bate is elected as the first Mayor. The first Council meeting is held on January 22nd. An aerial tramway carries coal down to the docks from a mine in the Harewood district.

1876

The Earl of Dufferin, Governor General of Canada, arrives for a visit on August 25th. The vice-regal party lands at Gordons Wharf; after a presentation by Mayor Bate, the procession proceeds along Church and Commercial Streets, passing under six large arches built in their honour. After an inspection of the Harewood Coal Mine at Chase River, the party left for the north at 1 p.m. The first resident Catholic Priest, Rev. John Lemmens, arrives in September.

1877

Two handmade telephones are used to inaugurate service between the Dunsmuir Wellington mine and the loading docks at Departure Bay. A series of strikes starts with the miners demanding a pay increase; the militia is called to evict them from their homes when they refuse to return to work. St. Ann's Catholic Church is built on Wallace Street and is opened. The first hospital is opened in a row of miner's cabins on the west side of Chapel Street.

1878

The first volunteer fire department, the Nanaimo Fire Engine Company, is formed, and a Burton & Blake engine is acquired from the Portland Fire Department. A separate girl's school is opened on the site of the John Shaw school.

1879

The first fire hall is opened on Wharf Street on January 21st. The City creates three Wards - North, Middle, and South. Telegraph service is inaugurated between Nanaimo and Victoria. St. Ann's Convent on Wallace Street is opened.

1881

The Hospital Society is incorporated, and a large new hospital is opened on November 17th on a lot bounded by Franklyn, Machleary and Kennedy Streets; the building is designed by the Secretary of the Society, E.B. McKay, and is built by Fletcher & McDonald, contractors. The Fitzwilliam Mine is closed. The Number 1 Mine on Esplanade opens, remaining in operation until 1938.

1882

Nanaimo's first sea-going vessel, the Nanaimo, is launched, on the Millstone River. The South Field pits are opened for production. A waterworks company is formed, and the first water is piped from wells in wooden pipes. The Marquis of Lorne, Governor General of Canada, visits Nanaimo on October 20th. Seven large arches are built in honour of the occasion, including one from the Chinese community, which reportedly cost \$750. Construction begins on the Nanaimo Post Office on Front Street, designed by Thomas Fuller, Chief Architect of the Federal Department of Public Works.

1883

One-fifth of Vancouver Island's land area, control of the coal fields on the Island's east coast, and \$750,000 are given to Robert Dunsmuir in exchange for the promise to build the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway. Dunsmuir's financial backers are the American railway magnates Huntington, Hopkins, Stanford and Crocker of San Francisco. An extension is added to the Hospital.

1884

'Coal Tyee' dies. The Middle Ward School is built.

1885

The Chase River Mine floods, and is closed.

1886

Agreements are signed between the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company Ltd. and the Nanaimo Water Works Company Ltd. to initiate local water service. The Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway is opened in March; the last spike is driven by Sir John A. MacDonald at Shawnigan Lake. Nanaimo's first High School opens in one room of the Middle Ward school building, with six boys and six girls in attendance; E.B. Paul is Principal, a position he held for 22 years.

1887

The Occidental Hotel is opened on Fitzwilliam Street; 18 hotels are in business in the City. The Nanaimo Gas Works is opened. An explosion at Number 1 Mine on May 3rd kills more than 150 miners. A portion of South End is added to the City. Commercial telephone service begins. The

Mechanics Literary Institute Building on Bastion Street is taken over for use as City Hall. Nanaimo's First Court House is constructed, a wooden structure designed by Elmer H. Fisher.

1888

The first electric light plant is opened, using steam produced by burning coal. An explosion in January at Wellington kills 77 men. Dunsmuir opens the collieries at Cumberland. The Good Templars trade their property on Front Street for the Boys School on Crace Street. The Salvation Army is organized in May at the Institute Hall.

1889

The Nanaimo Opera House, designed by Victoria architect William Ridgway Wilson, is opened. The Vancouver Coal Company opens a mine at North Field. A grand and imposing Methodist Church is built on Wallace Street at a cost of \$10,816.73, designed by Thomas Hooper, with Rev. Joseph Hall as resident minister. The City borrows \$5,000 to build the Bastion Street bridge. The first resident Judge, Eli Harrison, is appointed. The first Baptist services are held.

1890

The Nanaimo Telephone Company is incorporated. Thousands of herring are driven by dogfish into the ravine that is now Terminal Avenue. The miners start a strike in an attempt to get an eight hour day; the strike is not resolved until the following year. As a result of the violence associated with this strike, the Riot Act is read at Wellington. Construction starts on a new brick fire hall on Nicol Street. The Anglican Parish of St. Paul's splits in two with some acrimony, and a new parish, St. Alban the Martyr, is established.

1891

A shaft is sunk on Protection Island to connect to Number 1 Mine. Electric street lights appear in Nanaimo. The Haliburton Street Methodist Church is built as a branch of Wallace Street Methodist. The Bastion is moved across the street from its original location to prevent its demolition. The first Baptist Church, located on Crace Street, opens. The new Anglican church of St. Alban the Martyr is completed on a site between Nicol Road and Victoria Street, just south of the later fire hall; the church was designed by New Westminster architects R.P. Sharp and Samuel Maclure.

1892

The first underground electric trolley motor is installed at Number 1 Mine. North and South Ward Schools are built. A new site on Nicol Street is dedicated in February for the Salvation Army Citadel.

1893

The East Wellington Mines, first developed by the Chandler interests of San Francisco, are closed due to wage disputes. The cornerstone for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Fitzwilliam Street is laid on July 18th. Fire Hall #2 on Nicol Street is completed. The Fire Department acquires an aerial ladder and truck, and reorganizes as the Black Diamond Hose Company.

1895

Dunsmuir acquires and re-opens the mines at Wellington. Following a subscription drive by the ladies of Nanaimo to secure a hook and ladder truck and a bell, the Enterprise Hook and Ladder Company is formed.

1898

Mountain School is built.

1900

The Wellington Mine is closed. Most of the buildings at Wellington are moved down to Ladysmith by rail. An ambulance is bought by the Vancouver Coal Company, the first north of Portland. A lighthouse is established at Gallows Point on Protection Island.

1901

On November 4th Council passes a Bylaw for the regulation of Wash-Houses and Laundries, which targets the business practices of the Chinese. The Nanaimo Fire Department is formed on November 14th. Number 5 Mine floods and the South Field pits are closed. A fire at Extension kills 16 men. The waterworks is bought by the City. A long distance telephone line between Nanaimo and Victoria is connected. The first team of horses, is acquired for the use of the Fire Department; the two horses are known as Tom and Jerry, and are great favourites of local children.

1903

Nanaimo elects two Socialist Party of British Columbia M.L.A.s in the provincial election. Continuing labour difficulties cause the Federal Department of Labour to send William Lyon Mackenzie King to Nanaimo to investigate working conditions.

1904

The Brechin Mine, Number 4, is opened. A large water-driven mill on the Millstone River starts producing electricity.

1905

The Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway is sold to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

1907

The Jingle Pot Mine opens. The first St. Paul's Anglican Church is demolished, and a new, larger church constructed, designed by architect W.H. Archer of Vancouver, which opens on April 11th. The first cars owned in Nanaimo are purchased on March 2nd by Dr. Hogle and George Fletcher.

1908

The Pacific Biological Station is established; construction begins on their facility at Departure Bay. Nanaimo's third Chinatown is built by merchants and residents who pool their resources and sell shares across Canada to buy land; they move many buildings from the second Chinatown to the new site at Pine and Hecate Streets.

1909

An explosion at Extension kills 25 men.

1910

The sewage system is implemented. St. Ann's Church and Convent on Wallace Street are destroyed by fire on July 10th, but are rebuilt soon after by J. Planta. The Western Fuel Co. donates land at Machleary and Wentworth Streets for a new Fair site. The Nanaimo Agricultural Hall, designed by W.A. Owen, is built at 440 Machleary Street.

1911

Northfield School is built. The new Baptist Church opens at the corner of Albert and Prideaux Streets under the pastorship of Rev. D.G. MacDonald.

1912

The Reserve Mine is opened. A strike starts at Cumberland in September, and spreads to Extension two days later. This sparks a series of strikes over the issue of union membership that are not resolved until the following September. The Extension Mine remains shut for a further year after that.

1913

Considerable damage is done to the surface workings of the Protection Island Mine when the S.S. Oscar, a small coastal steamer loaded with 1800 kegs of dynamite bound for the Britannia Mine, catches fire and explodes; this explosion breaks most of the windows in Downtown Nanaimo, but there are no fatalities. The City's first motorized fire truck is acquired, and the Fire Department's

horses are retired. An underwater cable is laid between Newcastle Island and Point Grey to allow for long distance telephone service to the mainland. The final fall fair is held in September, and the Agricultural Hall is taken over by military authorities.

1914

Harewood School opens. World War One breaks out.

1915

A sulphur fume explosion at the Reserve Mine kills 26 men.

1917

Prohibition is enacted. The Jingle Pot Mine ceases operations.

1918

Armistice is signed on November 11th, ending the First World War. The Wakesiah Mine is opened. A hoisting rope breaks in the Protection Island shaft of Number 1, causing the cage to drop 555 feet, killing 16 men.

1919

South Wellington School is built.

1921

Lantzville School is built.

1922

The Nanaimo Agricultural Hall, which had been taken over by military authorities during the war, is acquired by the School Board, and opened as Thomas Hodgson High School. The Kanoo Pavilion opens on Newcastle Island, with a 30 foot by 60 foot dance floor.

1923

The highest year for the production of coal at Nanaimo, with over a million tons mined. 80% of the world's shipping still uses coal for fuel.

1924

The Central Sports Ground is opened.

1925

The cornerstone is laid for the new hospital on August 20th, but construction is delayed, and the facility is not opened until three years later. The United Church of Canada is formed on June 10th through the merger of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches.

1927

The Hotel Malaspina is opened, built by money raised in a community fundraising drive; Sharp & Thompson of Vancouver are the architects for the hotel. The Fairview District is added to the City. North Cedar and Brechin Schools are built.

1928

The new hospital finally opens on October 10th.

1929

Departure Bay School is built. The crash of the Stock Market heralds the beginning of the Great Depression.

1930

The Wakesiah Mine is closed. The second St. Paul's Anglican Church, and a number of other Downtown buildings, are destroyed by a fire on July 19.

1931

The Extension mine workings are closed. Newcastle Island is purchased from the coal company by the Canadian Pacific Railway for use as a pleasure resort served by C.P.R. steamers. The cornerstone for the third St. Paul's Anglican is laid on August 24.

1933

Nanaimo's first zoning bylaw is passed.

1936

The Nanaimo Vocational School opens.

1937

The new Bastion Street Bridge is opened by Mayor John Barsby on April 30th; the contractor for the project is the Dominion Construction Company.

1938

The Number 1 Mine, including the works on Protection Island, is closed.

1939

Outbreak of the second World War. The Reserve Mine is closed.

1942

Harewood Mine is closed.

1945

The Second World War ends with the Allied victories in Europe and Japan. The abandoned mine buildings on Protection Island are set on fire to celebrate the victory in Europe, causing a tailings fire that sends smoke out over the harbour for several years.

1946

The remainder of South End and the 'Daisy Field' are added to the City.

1947

Harewood is added to the City.

1948

Pauline Haarer School is built.

1949

Haliburton-Chase River and North Field are added to the City. The corner stone for the legion at 345 Wallace Street is laid by Major-General G.R. Pearkes, V.C., M.P., on May 24th.

1950

The White Rapids Mine is closed.

1951

Nanaimo City Hall is opened on February 17th by the Hon. Clarence Wallace, C.B.E., Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. Work begins on June 4th on the first Mormon church, located at Morpeth and Begbie.

1952

Brechin and Acacia are added to the City. Ferry service to Horsehoe Bay commences under the Black Ball line. Number 10 Mine is closed. The Greater Nanaimo Water District is formed.

1953

The headquarters of Canadian Collieries are moved to Union Bay, effectively ending coal mining operations in the Nanaimo area.

1954

The first Town Planning Commission is formed.

1955

B.C. Telephone introduces the busy signal in Nanaimo.

1956

The Vancouver Island Gas Company Ltd. is formed, and begins underground gas service.

1957

Direct dialing service is initiated by B.C. Telephone. The old Nanaimo Agricultural Hall at Wentworth and Machleary Streets, used as Thomas Hodgson High School since 1922, is demolished for a Gyro Playground.

1958

The Advisory Planning Commission succeeds the Town Planning Commission.

1959

The Crescent Hotel is demolished. Nanaimo Realty purchases Protection Island for \$130,000, and subdivides it into 344 lots.

1960

Nanaimo's third Chinatown is destroyed by fire on September 30th. Mount St. Peter's Church is established beside the old Catholic cemetery on Machleary street; 'Big Frank' - the clock from the old Post Office - is installed in the spire.

1961

The Nanaimo Harbour Commission is formed. All local telephones go on the direct dialing system. The new Library building opens on Fitzwilliam Street.

1962

The Nanaimo General Regional Hospital is opened in the Woodlands area.

1966

St. Ann's Convent is closed, and the pupils are integrated into the Nanaimo School system.

1967

The Nanaimo Centennial Museum opens. A new Fire Hall is opened at the corner of Milton and Fitzwilliam Streets.

1968

The old Nanaimo Centre School is demolished.

1969

Malaspina College opens on September 8th.

1972

The Mechanics Literary Institute Building on Bastion Street, used for decades as City Hall, is demolished.

1974

Protection Island is added to the City. The Nanaimo Heritage Advisory Committee is established.

1975

The Great National Land Building becomes the first building in Nanaimo to receive Municipal Heritage Designation, on March 3.

1977

Haslam Hall, Nanaimo's most elaborate surviving Late Victorian residence, burns in a mysterious fire on Christmas Eve.