



## Vancouver's Hastings Mill

*As I went down by Hastings Mill I lingered in my going  
To smell the smell of piled-up planks and feel the salt wind blowing,  
To hear the cables fret and creak and the riggings stir and sigh  
Shipmate, oh my shipmate! in those days gone by...*

*As I went down by Hastings Mill I saw a ship there lying,  
About her masts and yards, the little clouds of sunset flying;  
And half I took her for the ghost of one I used to know...  
"Shipmate, oh, my shipmate!" many years ago, So many years ago.*

—By the time Cicely Fox Smith, a Vancouver Island typist, nautical poet and late Victorian adventurer, began to reminisce about Hastings Mill in her book of poems *Sailor Town*, published in New York in 1914, the romance of the tall ship days were numbered. Although tall ships would continue to load lumber for at least another two decades in the port of Vancouver, the glory days had long since waned.

EARLIEST KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF HASTINGS MILL SETTLEMENT AND GRANVILLE POST OFFICE, CIRCA 1872. The barque on its side is the Dutch barque *Cornelis* of Amsterdam. It was towed back to the mill and beached after being stranded in August 1871 at the entrance to the Howe Sound, as it was laden with lumber and bound for Valparaiso, Chile. Right behind the barque (next to the cookhouse with the copula) is the mill store and post office. It can be found today on Point Grey at the foot of Alma, as the Old Hastings Mill Store Museum. To the far right, on top of the hill, with the white roof, is mill manager Captain James A. Raymur's cottage. The building to its left is Vancouver's first school, the Hastings Sawmill School.

## When the world was young

*by Jacqui Underwood*

THE CLAMOUR AND STEAM OF HASTINGS MILL, its roaring burner and tall-masted ships at the pier, dominated Vancouver's harbour for more than half a century, from the late 1860s to the mid-1920s. Only a few years before it shut down, the Hastings Sawmill was still the largest exporter of lumber in Western Canada. But waterfront real estate had proved to be too valuable. The operation was slated for dismantling to make way for port development. All but forgotten in the "march to progress" was the pivotal role the mill had played as the city's founding industry. It had turned a colonial backwater of primeval forest and native villages into a centre of commerce and magnet for immigration. Because of the mill, Vancouver was born and a door on the Burrard Inlet was opened to the world.



AN AMBITIOUS DREAMER. Captain Edward Stamp built the first sawmill on the south shore of Burrard Inlet in 1865. Commonly called Stamp's Mill, it was owned by the British Columbia and Vancouver Island Spar, Lumber and Sawmill Company, of which Stamp was the manager. In the late 1860s, Stamp's mill and Moody's mill on the North Shore put Burrard Inlet and British Columbia lumber on the world map. Five years later Stamp's Mill would be renamed Hastings Saw Mill, under new ownership, with an embittered Stamp moving on to other enterprises.

## Captain Stamp's Mill

It began with trees. Big trees. The tallest, straightest timbers in the world stood on what is now Point Grey, waiting to be harvested. In 1858, thousands of rough and unruly Americans invaded the Hudson's Bay precinct of British Columbia in a mad scramble for gold on the Fraser. A British colony was quickly proclaimed to keep order. Caught up in the heady dreams of making a fortune in the new world was Captain Edward Stamp of England's merchant navy. His "El Dorado" was lumber and his first enterprise in the region had taken place the year before: gathering spars in the Puget Sound. He returned to run a store in Victoria, then built a sawmill at Port Alberni, but its mountainous location caused its demise. Still, he couldn't keep his mind off those spars. By 1865, his ambition of being a lumber king, had gelled on the Burrard Inlet, on the west coast of the new colony of British Columbia—"The last great frontier."

It wasn't total wilderness. Vast tracts of land had been registered for the Crown, and the Royal Engineers had blazed trails from the mainland's capital of New Westminster, mapping out reserves and lots. Oblate missionaries visited the First Nations settlements around the Inlet, while the discovery of coal briefly attracted the first white settlers to a bay on the south shore, the newly named Coal Harbour. On the north shore, in 1862 the first lumbermen had built a water-powered mill, but it was foundering. Stamp made his move. His venture on the inlet included plans for the construction of a sawmill near the Squamish village of Whoi-Whoi on what later became Stanley Park, with Beaver Lake as the intended water supply for the mill's steam-run equipment. There were complications. The property overlapped an adjacent naval reserve, the rip tides of the Narrows could only spell disaster, and all the while the resident natives watched askance. Vancouver's unlikely "founding father" moved up inlet.

For the new mill site, Stamp chose a prominent point on the south shore of the Burrard Inlet, halfway between the two narrows, just east of a maple-lined sandy cove that was "perfect for canoes." The cove was next to Coal Harbour, part of the town reserve allotted by the Royal Engineers. But the adjacent land chosen for the mill site was "old government reserve," and it would be freed up for Stamp's taking.

His British Columbia and Vancouver Island Spar, Lumber and Sawmill Company had been injected with 100,000 pounds British capital. Among the company directors were the notorious meddling Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Colonel Richard Clement Moody, and his former private secretary Robert Burnaby. Stamp acquired 243 acres of government reserve land for a \$1.00 an acre. The former merchant seaman began to clear land and build.

Although Stamp was just the front man backed by Moody and his British investors, the mill operations were soon dubbed Stamp's Mill.

The new mill property extended along Burrard Inlet from today's Carrall Street to Heatley Avenue, south to the northern shore of False Creek, which in those days went all the way to today's Clark Drive. The camp itself was set close to the edge of the ancient forest on the inlet. To the east, in KumKumlay, there were a First Nations longhouse and cedar homes along the shore, a ready workforce for the mill. Water would be carried by flume from the streams that flowed from Trout Lake, for the mill's steam-powered machinery. Construction also began in Victoria, on the steamer *Isabel*, a 146-foot-long side-wheeler, the first tug to be owned by any sawmill on the mainland. Its engine and the state-of-the-art mill equipment were due to arrive from Scotland by the end of the year.

The First Nations traditional hunting grounds became Stamp's kingdom. Logs would be gleaned from 15,000 acres of virgin wilderness, between Burrard Inlet and the mighty Fraser, from the tip of Point Grey to modern-day Cambie Street. Unlike the hills of the Alberni operation, the land was low-lying, making the plentiful logs easy to cut and skid to the sea or directly to the mill. Stamp's company received a 21-year timber lease.

That summer he enlisted the skills of the legendary Jeremiah Rogers, known in British Columbia as the "greatest woodsman of them all." Originally from New Brunswick, the big popular man had worked with Stamp since his Alberni days and took on the job of harvesting those giant spars from the forests of Point Grey, from his base at his self-named Jerry's Cove (Jericho) on English Bay. The first load of 251 magnificent spars were shipped aboard the *Aquila* to Cork, Ireland. The reputation of BC lumber was established and Stamp's Mill was on the map.



THE GREATEST WOODSMAN OF THEM ALL. Jeremiah Rogers was a respected and innovative logger who is credited as the first to use a steam-driven tractor to haul logs out of the bush. His finely selected spars at Point Grey brought Stamp world attention. Later, after a falling out, Rogers became a free timber agent, competing with the Captain. The district of Jericho is named for his logging camp at Jerry's Cove, modern-day Jericho Beach.



Edward Davis Heatley took a hands-off approach to his ownership of the Hastings Sawmill Company, while his partner, George Campbell, was closer to the action, operating out of Victoria. Heatley, who maintained an address in San Francisco where their partnership, Dickson, De Wolf and Company was based, speculated in Vancouver real estate leading up to the first city election, in which he was represented as an 1886 Vancouver city voter. As the affluent owners of Hastings Mill from 1870-1889, Heatley and Campbell are both remembered in street names near the old mill site.

Across the water on the North Shore, altered, improved and under new ownership, the Burrard Inlet Mills re-opened. American Sewell Moody would create in Moodyville the perfect template for a mill town, keeping his men dry and working sober, complete with religious services on site. Unlike Moody, Stamp made no effort to improve the living conditions of his workers, or for that matter, interfere with them at all. The first south shore mill settlement grew up hodge-podge, with deserters from sailing ships and busted refugees from the gold mines left to their own devices. Also a large part of the workforce were the Burrard Inlet Squamish and Kanakas (Hawaiians who had worked with the Hudson's Bay Company), all settling where they would, creating little gardens with chickens and pigs, in a completely original West Coast lifestyle that was not at all temperate. It was soon to be complemented by a rowdy Gastown, once Stamp's Mill operations got underway.

Stamp had bigger fish to fry. After his aborted effort at Stanley Park he was eager to get the mill going at the new site, especially now that the North Shore was back in business. One can imagine his dismay when the barque *Kent*, direct from Glasgow, unloaded the new mill machinery at Stamp's wharf in December of 1865, and it was discovered in the New Year that an essential piece of equipment was lacking. It happened again with the next shipment. Although he sued and won damages from the shipper (the inlet's first lawsuit), valuable time had been lost. The mill did not begin operation until June 1867.

Nevertheless, Stamp's first year of mill business was the biggest Burrard Inlet had ever seen—4,101,000 feet of lumber, 100,000 shingles and 2000 spars on 14 vessels, far outstripping his rival Moody. 1867 saw a record four deep-water vessels in Burrard Inlet at the same time, and the *Isabel* proved her worth in quick dispatching of pioneer cargo. Another shipment of spars brought more praise. "Jeremiah Rogers, the cutter" and "Stamp, the shipper," became known for the fine quality of their spars, "probably the best ever shipped from any part of the world." By 1868, the inlet was a very busy place, with Moody building a second mill to keep up with demand. Burrard Inlet lumber had won its place on the global market.

In the woods, three new towns were being born: Moodyville on the North Shore, New Brighton (the "resort spot" at "the end of the road" from New Westminster) and Stamp's Mill, known colloquially

as "Gastown," for the neighbouring bars that had sprung up next to mill property. With six logging camps taking out spars and logs and some smaller establishments specializing in shingles and ship's knees, there was employment for 300 men. Everybody was making money.

But not Stamp. By 1869, the company was broke, so Stamp returned to England to plead his case, to buy some time. But it was too late. He had a falling out with his investors, and the vast assets of the mill went on the auction block in Victoria. Much to Stamp's chagrin they were sold, for "a mere fraction of the value," to George Campbell of London, England, and Edward Davis Heatley of San Francisco under the name Dickson, De Wolf and Company. Even the *Isabel* was practically given away in Stamp's eyes. Ever the builder, Stamp, would die a few years and lawsuits later, still in the game, expanding another BC industry, salmon canning.

Although he would not live to see it, the visionary sawmill on Burrard Inlet that Stamp started would reign as Vancouver's first and longest lasting industry into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, paralleling the history of the developing world of the day. It began its life producing enormous amounts of spars supplying the globe's mercantile ships with the tallest, straightest masts the world had ever seen. From the 1860s on its timbers would build whole towns in South America, baronial homes in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand and the imperial palaces of China. And in the Pacific: California, Hawaii and Japan. Eventually production would culminate with the world's first high-end semi-prefabricated homes.

But even more than the industry Stamp founded, his legacy would be the settlement that grew up around it. It began the day of that first cut on June 17, 1867, with the ship *Siam* waiting at Stamp's Wharf to be loaded for shipment to Australia. That was the day an entrepreneur of a different ilk, another unlikely city founding father, the talkative John "Gassy Jack" Deighton showed up at the western edge of mill property "with a whiskey keg, two chairs, and a yellow dog" and began to service thirsty mill workers. It is said he actually enlisted their help to build the Globe Saloon "in 24 hours" in the maple grove that skirted the sandy cove known by the local Squamish as Luck Lucky. It was the beginning of Vancouver's story – a city that began as a bar on the edge of Stamp's Mill.

TOOLS OF THE WOODS. Great heavy wooden oxen yoke and iron oxen shoes used in early logging in Vancouver, on display at the Old Hastings Mill Store Museum, circa late 1800s.





LOGGING DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER, 1882.

A team of 14 oxen hauls a "turn" of three, maybe more, of five-foot in diameter by 60-foot-long logs, down a skid road near the north foot of Thurlow Street, to not far from where the Marine Building now stands. The huge logs, most of which were cedar, some Douglas fir, would be hauled to the water's edge on Burrard inlet and after the tide came up towed by boat to Hastings Mill.



THE DIRTY WORK OF LOGGING, CIRCA 1890.

This photo of ten oxen hauling a turn of seven sixty-foot logs (five feet in diameter) over a skid road appears in two archival collections with two different captions. One description suggests it is a crew on Point Grey. The other places the scene at Charleson's camp near what is today Oak Street and Broadway. Donald Brims, a contractor hired by the CPR, had taken a contract in 1889 to log the forest covering the north slope of False Creek's Fairview District from the water's edge to what would later become Broadway. Whatever the locale, it was dirty work. A bull puncher with his nail-studded, four-foot-long stick called a goad, stands in the rear. The seated man on the left was the skid greaser, often called the "pig man" because he stunk like rancid dogfish. He was paid the lowest wages for keeping ahead of the oxen

and placing fish oil on the skids so that the logs would pass over them more easily. The tin bucket with handles placed in front of him contained fish oil. He used the maul to pound iron spikes or "dogs" into the end of each log for hauling. The man in the white shirt sits beside a Boker screw jack that was used for lifting the heavy and cumbersome logs. Notice the front of the huge logs have been sniped so that the butt ends would not catch on the cross skids that were placed wide enough apart for horse or oxen to step in between and over. The highest paid workers in logging were teamsters, the men whose expertise it was to coax the oxen to act in unison dragging the huge logs across the greased skids to the tidewater. Ordinary mill hands were the lowest paid, earning half the wages or less than that of fellers and teamsters.



Oil painting of Hastings Mill at sunset, just following a shower of rain, by celebrated marine artist John M. Horton. "Old salts" pause on the wet boardwalk to swap stories, while various lumber ships lie at the dock or anchor in the stream. Vancouver's largest and oldest mill was located in the area now covered by the Centerm Container Terminal. The original mill office can still be found at the site at the foot of Dunlevy (named after Peter C. Dunlevy) and is run by the Anglican Church as a refuge for visiting sailors.