



**BHAI MEWA SINGH.** Although a murderer in the eyes of the Canadian legal system, he was a martyr to the Indian cause for shooting immigration officer William C. Hopkins in the Vancouver courthouse on 14 October 1914. Singh was convicted in the same courthouse at 7:45 AM on 30 October 1914 and was executed by hanging on 11 January 1915 in Burnaby.

Diwan Society Gurdwara Sahib on West 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. He murdered Bhai Bhag Singh, President of the Society, along with Battan Singh and Bela Singh. He was charged with murder, but Hopkins agreed to appear as a witness at his trial, and the East Indian community knew that his testimony at the trial would likely result in Bela Singh being acquitted.

Amongst the local Sikhs a few spoke up against this injustice, one of them was Bhai Mewa Singh a religious-minded Sikh, a reciter of the Guru Granth Sahib who came from the village of Lopoke in Amritsar, India. On 21 October 1914 Bhai Mewa Singh shot Hopkins repeatedly on the steps of the Vancouver courthouse with two revolvers because he believed Hopkins was a spy who had made up much of his testimony at the trial for Bela Singh.

Mewa Singh made this statement in court: “My religion does not teach me to bear hatred to anyone, no matter what class, creed or religion he belongs to. I had no hatred for Hopkins. I heard that he was oppressing my poor people very much. On finding this to be a fact, I, being a staunch Sikh, could no longer bear to see the wrong done both to my countrymen and the Dominion of Canada. This is what led me to take Mr. Hopkins’s life and sacrifice my own, and I, in performing the duty of a true Sikh and remembering the name of God, will proceed towards the scaffold with the same amount of pleasure as a hungry babe does towards its mother. I shall gladly have the rope put around my neck thinking it to be a rosary of God’s name. I am sure God will take me into his blissful arms.”

Singh was hanged on 11 January 1915 at the Oakalla Prison Farm in Burnaby. He was the first and only Sikh to be executed in Canada. Leading up to execution of Shaheed Bhai Mewa Singh were many different acts of injustice and harsh discrimination against the Sikhs.

On 13 April 1919 British soldiers fired on a crowd of 20,000 unarmed Indians at Bhai Mewa Singh’s place of birth at Amritsar during a religious holiday. The confrontation at a holy temple turned out to be a passive resistance that resulted in the death of many Sikhs. It was the beginning of the end for British colonization in India. At the end of the Second World War Mahatma Gandhi asked the British to leave his country. He explained that the British military in India stood at 100,000 men and that the population of India stood at 350,000,000. The British did the math and decided that it might be in their best interests to leave India. King George VI gave India its independence on 15 August 1947. The sun had set.



Aerial view of Vancouver’s Lost Lagoon & Coal Harbour, circa 1935.

## Vancouver Millionaires

THE VANCOUVER MILLIONAIRES franchise had its origins in Renfrew, Ontario, in 1909 with a team then known as the Creamery Kings of the National Hockey Association. Ambrose O’Brien, son of railway builder and mining magnate Michael J. O’Brien, owned the club that was soon renamed the Renfrew Millionaires after players Frederick W. “Cyclone” Taylor and brothers Lester and Frank Patrick began demanding salaries of \$5,200 and \$3,500 to “skate up” to play. Because of the senior O’Brien, Renfrew became the home of the NHA.

Prior to their introduction of hockey to Vancouver, the Patrick family owned and operated the Patrick Lumber Company in the Creston Valley near Nelson, with 100 men working in the mill and another 100 in the woods. Joseph Patrick, the father of the

- 1 Deadman’s Island
- 2 Ballantyne Pier
- 3 CPR Piers B & C
- 4 CPR Pier A
- 5 Marine Building
- 6 Oil Tanks
- 7 Brooks Iowa Lumber Co.
- 8 Denman Arena
- 9 Stanley Park Armoury

two hockey players, became disenchanted with lumbering when 9 million board feet of logs broke from their booms during an early spring thaw and floated down the Slocan River into the United States. The father and sons acted immediately and travelled south into the State of Washington to alert authorities and attempt to salvage the timber. The Americans responded as if the logs were the spoils of war, resulting in an ugly Canadian versus American confrontation that ended with the Canadians coming home empty-handed.

In 1911 Joseph Patrick sold the family's profitable lumber company and moved out west to capitalize on an exploding hockey scene. Not long after moving to the coast, the Patrick father-and-sons team erected arenas with the first artificial ice in Canada in Vancouver and Victoria. The 10,500-seat rink in Vancouver, located near the north end of Denman Street, was the largest in the world. The Victoria rink, seating 3,500, cost \$110,000, but the Vancouver rink, capable of seating 10,500, cost close to \$210,000. The Patrick clan then proceeded to "buy" up the Renfrew Millionaires and change the name to the Vancouver Millionaires. The Patricks were called Canada's Royal Hockey Family. The start-up costs to bring hockey to the west coast wiped out the family's entire fortune before the puck was dropped at the first game.

Fred W. "Cyclone" Taylor was the Wayne Gretzky of the early part of the nineteenth century, and his exploits on the ice were legendary. When Frederick Stanley, known as Lord Stanley of Preston and name-giver to Stanley Park, bought a small silver bowl in 1893, he could never have imaged in his wildest dreams that the "cup" would help forge eastern and western Canada in the sport of hockey. The NHL took charge of the Stanley Cup in 1910. The Vancouver Millionaires amazed Canadians when they won the Stanley Cup in 1915.

The Denman Arena was Vancouver's athletic showplace until it burned to the ground on 20 August 1936, and for some time the flames threatened the entire West End of Vancouver. The damage was pegged at \$600,000.

In 1958 Fred "Cyclone" Taylor visited Russia as the Canadian ambassador for hockey and was amused to see his old Renfrew Millionaire portrait hanging in the rotunda of Moscow's Lenin's Palace of Sport among a gallery of Soviet hockey players. Russian President Leonid I. Brezhnev and his assistant, Alexei Breznikov, affectionately called the Blues Brothers, showed the hockey legend his own portrait.

Fourteen years later, in 1970, Fred returned to Moscow to see for himself the progress of the Soviet players. Unfortunately the Cold War between Canada and Russia prevailed and there was some mistrust of the hockey legend that had served as an immigration officer both in Canada and England during his 42 years of service.

The Pacific Coliseum, built at the Pacific National Exhibition grounds in 1968, eventually replaced the Denman arena. The Westin Bayshore Hotel today sits on the site of the Denman arena.

In 1978, Taylor, aged 92, and Giani Kartar Singh, age 97, the only known survivors of the tragic *Komagata Maru* incident in 1914, enjoyed a cordial visit at Taylor's residence. The two men talked to each other through an interpreter. As second-in-command of the immigration office, Taylor's job had been to prevent boats from assisting the immigrants ashore and to grant temporary permits for those requiring medical attention. Once Taylor and his men were repulsed by a barrage of bunker coal when they tried to board the *Komagata Maru* from the tug *Sea Lion*. "I remember the incident well. About 24 of us [immigration officers and police] went out in a launch to board the *Komagata Maru* and somebody—I believe it was from our boat—fired a shot and immediately we were bombarded with large chunks of coal from the deck above us. We were nearly killed. Everyone rushed to the one side of the launch and it almost capsized before we got out of there." It was 19 July 1914, and the tug was carrying provisions for the ship's outward voyage. Taylor failed to mention to the newspaper reporter that the East Indian immigrants aboard the *Komagata Maru* emptied their chamber pots as well as coal onto the immigration officers and police. Eleven officers were injured. This bit of trivia is mentioned in his memoirs *Cyclone Taylor: A Hockey Legend*, by Eric Whitehead.

Taylor died a year later at the age of 93.

Frederick Wellington Taylor, known as "The Cyclone," was one of the original Vancouver Millionaires that won the coveted National Hockey League's Stanley Cup trophy in 1915. A talented crowd pleaser, he played for the Vancouver team for seven years.

Taylor, an immigration officer, played a prominent role in the *Komagata Maru* fiasco that same year—and years later, as Canada's ambassador for hockey, visited Russia at the height of the Cold War for the purpose of thawing relationships between the two countries.

Patrick Lester's skate from when he played with the Renfrew Creamery Kings, circa 1909.

