

Street Names of Vancouver

Elizabeth Walker

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BY G.P.V. AKRIGG

Emeritus, University of British Columbia

For years Elizabeth Walker worked in the Special Collections Division of the Vancouver Public Library. Her duties there included responding to enquiries, many of which concerned the origin of various Vancouver street names. Gradually she built up a fund of relevant information. Then came retirement, and research into street-name history became her full-time occupation. A curtain-raiser to publication of her findings was a brief article on Kitsilano street names, co-authored with Peggy Imredy. Now comes the final achievement, Elizabeth Walker's own *Street Names of Vancouver*, a monumental work covering the entire City of Vancouver, with its 773 current street names (to which Walker has added another 400 no longer in use).

The person who played the greatest role in naming Vancouver's streets was Lachlan Alexander Hamilton (1852-1944), the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) surveyor who, in two short years, made detailed plans for much of the CPR's new terminus. Water Street, Cordova Street, and Hastings Street he laid out to lead in to Granville Street, which ended at the new CPR station. For the West End he took names off an Admiralty chart. For Fairview he took the names of trees, supplying his draftsman with such names as Alder, Birch, and Cedar but apparently forgetting to tell him that they were to

be applied in alphabetical order. The result has been that generations of newcomers to Vancouver have had to torture themselves trying to remember which streets come after which, that Spruce Street comes before Oak, which comes before Laurel, Willow, Heather, and Ash.

For years Walker was a familiar sight as she travelled around Vancouver with a bag filled with index cards and other scholarly impedimenta, possibly en route to the Land Registry Office in New Westminster or the City Surveyor's Office in Vancouver, the Vancouver City Archives, or those of the University of British Columbia. City directories and lists of deaths became her common fare. Ever more deeply she became versed in "dedicated" roads (those on city property) and the more romantic names that real-estate developers used to entice purchasers to their new subdivisions. (The developers of Ashleigh Heights, wanting names "with a soft elegant sound - associated with history in a sophisticated manner," named streets after Brahms, Handel, Strauss, and Vivaldi, while Imperial Ventures Limited chose Spyglass Place and Wheelhouse Square for their False Creek development.)

Delving deep into council minutes or files of municipal or personal correspondence, Ms. Walker sought information about street names long

since superseded, rescinded, or applied to other thoroughfares. In so doing she has created a major research instrument for those interested in the minutiae of Vancouver history. Thus if one had a letter written in 1909 by one's grandfather from an address on "Clifford Street," which simply does not exist on today's maps of Vancouver, all one needs to do is to turn to Walker (24):

CLIFFORD STREET (DL 301). Now East 14th Avenue between Main and Prince Edward Streets. Shown on Plan 187 (1885), the owner, H.V. Edmonds, named it after his daughter, Mary Gifford Edmonds, who married C.M. Marpole. It was entered in the Land Registry Office as Clifford rather than Gifford. When DL 301 was absorbed by Vancouver in 1911, it became part of East 14th Avenue.

It will readily be seen, with entries as precise and detailed as this, that *Street Names of Vancouver* will prove invaluable to local historians.

Of course, even Walker's sleuthing skills and industry have not been able to determine the origins of all Vancouver's street names. The field remains open for those who want to tackle Adera Street or Avery Avenue.

Walker, as she clearly indicates, has not been without helpers in her enormous project. Noel Petes, Vancouver's city surveyor, and his staff have helped her to locate needed documents, while Bruce Macdonald has, among other things, prepared the useful maps included in this book.

In a book covering a field as extensive as this one, a few slips are more or less inevitable. Walker's book is generally clear of errors. However, in the next edition the editor should give the correct title of the noble lord who is remembered for Granville Street. He was Earl Granville, not "the Earl of Granville." The present reviewer occasionally had to read closely to determine whether a particular name is current or not. It would help if, in the next edition, names that are only of historical interest were printed in a distinctive font, such as Gothic or Old English.

It remains only to congratulate Elizabeth Walker on having carried through her project to such a successful conclusion. *Street Names of Vancouver* is not only an authoritative reference work to be ordered by public and school libraries, but one that anybody who is interested Vancouver history will want for his/her shelf of Vancouver books.