

**Victoria Johnson**



## Pioneer Land Surveyors in British Columbia

Pioneer surveyors were high calibre gentlemen who carried out surveys to allow for the development of the province. They did not have the benefit of modern technology, but they were of a versatile nature, and understood the exact art and science of the task before them.

The pioneers provided the framework for the cadastral fabric still used today. Our history goes back to 1778 when Captain James Cook located Resolution Cove on the world map. From this period to 1890, the Land Surveyors Group consisted of 141 members. From 1891 to 1905, the Provincial Land Surveyors (85) methodically continued to survey the province. Considering the magnitude of the task at hand, many captivating stories can be told.

There were few trails back then, and supplies had to be carried in by men or pack horses. In survey parties, it was usually necessary to live off the land. Pioneers often spoke of grizzlies and black bears, but declared that mosquitoes and black flies proved to be the worst enemy of men in the woods.

Joseph Despard Pemberton has been acknowledged by some as the “Father of Professional Surveying” in British Columbia. He was appointed Colonial Surveyor for the Colony of Vancouver Island in 1851. When the two colonies united in 1866, J. W. Trutch became the first Surveyor General of the Colony of

British Columbia. Prior to entering public service, one of Trutch’s accomplishments was the construction of the suspension bridge across the Fraser River between Spuzzum and Chapman’s Bar. The span was 268 feet with a vertical clearance of 90 feet, and a load capacity of three tons. This project was successfully completed in less than three months.

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The challenging terrain caused difficulties in both the surveying and construction of the transcontinental railway from Canada through to the Pacific Coast. The last spike was driven on November 7, 1885, and the first passenger train arrived on the E&N [Esquimalt & Northern] Railway in Victoria in March 1888.

The first President of the Corporation of BC Land Surveyors was Ernest Bolton Hermon, BCLS. A great deal of Mr. Hermon’s practice consisted of rights of way and town site surveys for

the CPR between Revelstoke and Vancouver. His son, James William Hermon, BCLS, became President of the Corporation in 1949. His son, James E. (Hamish) Hermon, carried the honour of being a fourth-generation land surveyor.

By including the family on expeditions and day-to-day activities, fathers shared the professions with their sons at a young, impressionable age. To date, the Corporation has record of 24 fathers and sons commissioned as BC Land Surveyors.

Every area of BC has been explored and documented by a surveyor. From remote mining claims to site surveys in Downtown Vancouver, British Columbians have reaped the benefits of land surveyors’ hard work. Although small in number, they are big on honesty, strong in history, and proud to be professional land surveyors. Their cumulative contribution to the development of British Columbia is beyond measure. ▲

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