

BLACK STRATHCONA HERITAGE WALKING TOUR

Beatty Lane: (alley between Beatty and Cambie) ran from the Cambie Street Grounds (now the parking lot across from the Beatty St Drill Hall) and the old Vancouver City Hospital. A small cluster of black people lived/worked there in the early 20th century, several of them played important or interesting roles in local history. One such person was George Paris: heavyweight boxing champion of Western Canada and Canada's first professional Jazz musician at the turn of the 20th century. Paris eventually went back to his career as an athletic trainer, teaching the Vancouver Police force how to fight. Paris also ran the Vancouver Athletic Club situated there.

25 Abbot St: Hiram Thomas Scurry ran his barbershop in Gastown, which his son took on after his death. He was also Barbara Howard's grandfather. Scurry was a pioneer Vancouverite, arriving just before the city was incorporated.

534 Cambie St: After Hiram passed, Martha Scurry made her residence a boarding house. Before settling into his idyllic cabin on English Bay, Joe Fortes lived here and considered the Scurry family his own.

According to the biographical data taken from sources listed, Seraphim (Joe) Fortes, who was born in Barbados, came to Vancouver in 1885. He worked as a porter, bartender, and later as an unofficial swimming instructor and lifeguard at English Bay. He was eventually officially made a special constable by the City of Vancouver. There have been frequent reports and accounts of the many lives he saved from drowning. Testimonials to his popularity and the reminiscences of those taught to swim by Joe when they were young, have been numerous. In 1910, the citizens of Vancouver presented him with a text thanking him for his services; a gold watch and a sum of money. When he died in 1922, the city gave him a large public funeral. Several years after his death, a children's drinking fountain was erected in memory of Joe Fortes.

109 E Hasting St: The Railway Porters Club (now The Smilin' Buddha Cabaret). One of Hiram and Martha's sons, Elijah "Lige", was one of the best players on Vancouver's lacrosse team. Known for being exceptionally fast and aggressive on the field, Lige was so good and the competition so fierce in BC's three-team lacrosse league that the Victoria and New Westminster teams colluded to implement a "colour bar" that ended his lacrosse career. Lige's next pursuit was to open the Railway Porters' Club. As the occupation of sleeping car porter was one of the few open to black men, Lige saw the need for a place where porters could socialize and rest during stopovers in Vancouver, and black people in town generally needed a social hub to call their own. Unfortunately for Scurry, police raided the club in 1904 on the grounds that black prostitutes were frequent visitors. Police found no evidence, but Scurry was nevertheless convicted of selling liquor without a license.

"Mrs. Sullivan's House": At the NW corner of Gore Avenue and Oppenheimer (E. Cordova) is this house. Josephine actually lived there with her son Arthur's family. Josephine was one of the earliest black residents in the Lower Mainland. Arthur established a general store when the city was still called Granville in 1882.

The Sullivan's Hall: Appeared on Cordova (half way between Abbott and Carrall). This hall, established by Josephine and her family, was used for various musical performances, community union meetings and other civic and entertainment purposes. It was even briefly used as a courthouse with the infamous Judge Begbie presiding.

Water Street: Accounts suggest that the Sullivans settled here, with First Methodist services being held in the family kitchen, Josephine is known for having established the first church of the African Methodist Church.

403 E Hastings St: George Paris was also a pioneer of Jazz music in Canada. At some point, Paris also took up drumming, and was recruited to put together a jazz band for the Patricia Café. When the cabaret opened on 7 October 1917, Paris's band was followed by the Empress Jazz Orchestra.

280 Keefer St: This is where the Mother Prior restaurant was, where people like Al Cobbs, Vancouver's first black police auxiliary officer worked.

1166 Main Street: (at Thornton Park) Marker of Change monument. On December 6, 1989, 14 young women at Montréal's Ecole Polytechnique were systematically hunted down and shot to death in what became known as the Montréal Massacre. With the aim to create "something loving, something permanent" for all women murdered by men, a band of Vancouver feminists set out to create Canada's first national monument to name and remember the 14 engineering students, killed solely because they were female. Over 6,000 individual donors contributed to the monument before it was completed.

522 E Georgia St: Robert Tait, 32, a drug addict, police informant and pimp from Detroit lived in a rundown apartment over the grocery store at this location with his girlfriend Frankie Russell. Russell, 28, had numerous arrests for prostitution, theft and drug possession. At one point she worked out of Marie Gomez's House of all Nations, a high-profile brothel on Alexander Street. She later became notorious in the press as the "white girl of the underworld."

After months in unpaid rent, the landlord decided to evict them. When he entered the kitchen he was greeted by Tait brandishing a shotgun. He said "leave or I'll blow your brains out." The Landlord left and called police. What ensued was a violent shoot-out, which killed and injured several police officers, including the popular Vancouver Police Chief Malcolm McLennan. Caught in the line of fire was also George Robb, 9, who was walking from his house to buy candy at the nearby store. Four hours after police first entered the building they went back inside and found that Tait had also shot and killed himself.

Granville & Davie Sts: (at the corner) A Scottish recipient of the Victoria Cross, McBeath and his wife moved to Canada after the war, where he eventually joined the Vancouver Police Department. On October 9, 1922, while walking the beat on Granville and Davie Streets with his partner, Detective R. Quirk, McBeath stopped and arrested a man named Fred Deal, a black sleeping car porter, for impaired driving. Passed out drunk in the seat beside him was Marjorie Earl, the owner of both the car and the police revolver Deal was packing. She was a white woman and well-known to the police because she ran a brothel out of her Granville Street apartment. While escorting the prisoner to the nearest call-box,

the man allegedly pulled a handgun from his pocket and shot both officers. McBeath's partner survived, but McBeath died almost instantly. He was 23 years old.

Fred Deal was arrested later that day and was subsequently sentenced to death. The sentence was reduced to life imprisonment on appeal because Deal had been beaten while in custody. The congregation of the Fountain Chapel mobilized to ensure that the likelihood Deal was racially targeted by police was accounted for in the verdict.

Deal served only 21 years before being released and deported to his native Jacksonville, Florida, where he died a few years later.

804 Main St: (behind Hogan's Alley) was the Pullman Porters Club. Pullman porters were men hired to work on the railroads as porters on sleeping cars. Starting shortly after the American Civil War, George Pullman sought out former slaves to work on his sleeper cars. Their job was to carry passenger's baggage, shine shoes, set up and maintain the sleeping berths, and serve passengers. After Lige Scurry's Railway Porters' Club was shut down, subsequent versions operated on Pender, Granville, Water, and this one in "Hogan's Alley."

475 Powell St.: Country Club Café, a popular eatery located here was run by Leona and Sylvester Risby, parents of Thelma, Chic and Leonard Gibson. At these eateries taxi drivers, sugar refinery workers, longshoremen, railroad porters and loggers rubbed shoulders with reporters, politicians, police, baseball players and visiting celebrities – all walks of life and different backgrounds.

New Orleans Club: (Corner of Main St and East Georgia).

343 E Hastings: The Harlem Nocturne was Vancouver's only black nightclub on Hastings Street, co-owned by showgirl Marcella "Choo Choo" Williams and her husband, trombonist and band leader Ernie King. The Nocturne offered burlesque acts including "Lottie the Body" and performers such as Ike Turner; it drew locals, American sailors in port and even regulars from Seattle.

544 Main St.: (at Keefer) Was the New Delhi Cabaret - Another popular place for dancing and music in Vancouver's historic entertainment scene. It was a live music venue that focused mostly on R&B and was in operation from 1956 to 1973, run by Leo Bagry. They had a house band and also had feature bands and novelty acts. Durius Maxwell played there as a novelty act as a teenager. Tommy Chong's (as in "Cheech and Chong") band "The Shades" played there frequently in 1959-1960. They had burlesque dancers. Marcella "Choo Choo" Williams started her 12-year dancing career at the New Delhi Cabaret.

823 Jackson St: African Methodist Episcopal Church (Fountain Chapel) was located here from 1918 until 1985 and was co-founded by Nora Hendrix in order to serve Vancouver's black community. Prior to the establishment of the Fountain Chapel, black Christians held services in rented halls around town, and eventually a small group decided they should have a permanent church of their own. They set out to raise funds for the project and arranged for the AME to match the amount raised locally. Once financing was secured, they purchased the building on Jackson Avenue that was built in 1910 and had served as a Lutheran church for German and Scandinavian immigrants.

Hogan's Alley: According to the city's first archivist, Major Matthews, the name originally referred to Park Lane. That's the alley just east of Main Street and included what's now Station Street before it was severed by the viaducts. By the 1920s, the East End had become the undisputed geographic centre of the city's black community, particularly after the Fountain Chapel, opened.

The name Hogan's Alley is likely a reference to the 1890s newspaper comic strip featuring the Yellow Kid in a wild, largely Irish slum area in New York City. It was also a nickname for a campsite on the beach at English Bay, where families spent summer months in the 1890s. Invoking the name Hogan's Alley implies campers were "slumming it."

796 Main St: Vie's Chicken & Steak House was around from 1950 until 1976. Run by Vie and Bob Moore, Vie was from a pioneering B.C. family who were descendants of free blacks from California. Bob was from Alabama and never lost his accent. Vie was famous for never burning a steak or forgetting an order, even as she talked with customers about sports, politics and horse racing. Nora Hendrix, notably, was the cook there.

Many hungry entertainers who performed in nightclubs such as The Cave and Isy's showed up at Vie's after their show. They included Louis Armstrong, Lena Horne, Cab Calloway, Mitzi Gaynor, and Sammy Davis Jr.

827 E. Georgia: Zenora "Nora" Rose and Ross Hendrix traveled to Vancouver looking for work after their vaudeville review was stranded in Seattle. They settled at this address and lived there from 1938 until 1952. Jimi Hendrix often lived with his grandparents, even attending Grade 1 at Sir William Dawson Annex. Nora was a pillar of the black community in Vancouver, co-founding the Fountain Chapel Church and showing off her own musical talents by leading the church's choir.

Militant Mothers of Reymur: At Keefer and Campbell Streets there stood railway tracks blocking clear passage for the children of the Reymur Housing Project (now Stamps Place) to get to their school, Admiral Seymour Elementary. It was common for children to roll under cars or jump over couplings – one child reportedly having had his feet crushed in the late 1960s. The mothers asked for an overpass to be built for safe crossing and their pleas went ignored. Having had enough, 25 mothers, many of whom were single from the Housing Project, staged a protest by standing on the tracks and blocking the trains. It took several stand-ins as well as a court case until the overpass was built.