

When, in 1859, the Royal Engineers, in command of Colonel Moody, came to British Columbia, they brought with them a collection of books, partly donated, partly subscribed for by the officers and men, valued at £500. The selection was made by Bulwer Lytton, the novelist, at that time Colonial Secretary, and in the list of persons who gave volumes were the Queen, whose gift included a handsome copy of the Prince Consort's speeches, bound in vellum and bearing Her Majesty's autograph. (This book was fortunately saved.) Lady Franklin, widow of the intrepid Sir John, and the Duke of Westminster, were also donors.

The corps formed "The Camp" at what is now Sapperton (still affectionately known to old residents of New Westminster by its first designation), and, before very long, the Royal Engineers' Club was built by the men, who fitted up with proper pride a room for the library. During the winter months, theatrical performances were given, a stage being one of the attractions of the Club House. The scenery was the work of Corporal White.

On the disbandment of the corps, in 1863, the men handed their library over to the City of Westminster, on the one condition that, for all time the men of the corps should have access to the books free of all charge. The volumes were removed to the frame building in which for a brief time the only coins minted in British Columbia had been struck. Fortunate was it that the removal was made; for, in the year following (1864), the Royal Engineers' Club was destroyed by fire.

The Public Library, for many years, appears to have been kept alive by public spirited persons who were willing to manage matters and see that the place was properly looked after. Of these, the late Rev. Mr. Jamieson, Messrs. Clute, J. C. Brown, Keary, Major, and Captain Peele were the leading spirits. From time to time, Indian curios, and specimens of minerals brought to the city by ad-

venturous hunters and prospectors, were left with the management, who had them placed in glass cases ranged round the room. A charge of fifty cents a month was made to those who used the library, and this paid or helped to pay the janitor of the building.

In the early eighties, when Mr. Morley Roberts was living in the city, the books still formed a good collection. Neglect had not yet spoiled the pioneer library, as this extract from "The Western Avernus" shows: "Then I went through the bookshelves, with the librarian showing me a light, and I saw enough to make me promise to be a subscriber, at the moderate terms of 50 cents or 2s. 1d. a month. I brought up the money next evening, and took home Buckle's History of Civilization, a book I had never read through before. There were 2,000 volumes in the library, and, during the time I stayed in New Westminster, I devoured most of those that were worth reading, for there was a vast amount of engineering and military matter."

The picture drawn in this chapter comes back vividly to those who spent their leisure around the big box stove, in the days when Henry Hughes had charge, or, later, when Colonel McGregor, with much effort, delivered himself of short paragraphs telling of social and other equally thrilling events which formed the staple news of the days before British Columbia's awakening.

In 1886, the Federal Government gave the city 56 feet frontage on Columbia street, for the purpose of a free library "for ever." An extra ten feet was added to this, the year following. In 1890, began the building of the three storey brick and stone Public Library, which, with its contents, was burned on September 10th last. This structure was on the site of the old frame building, and the contents had to be removed, of course, prior to the clearing of the site and subsequent erection of the new library. When completed, in 1891, a fine appearance was made. The ground floor was