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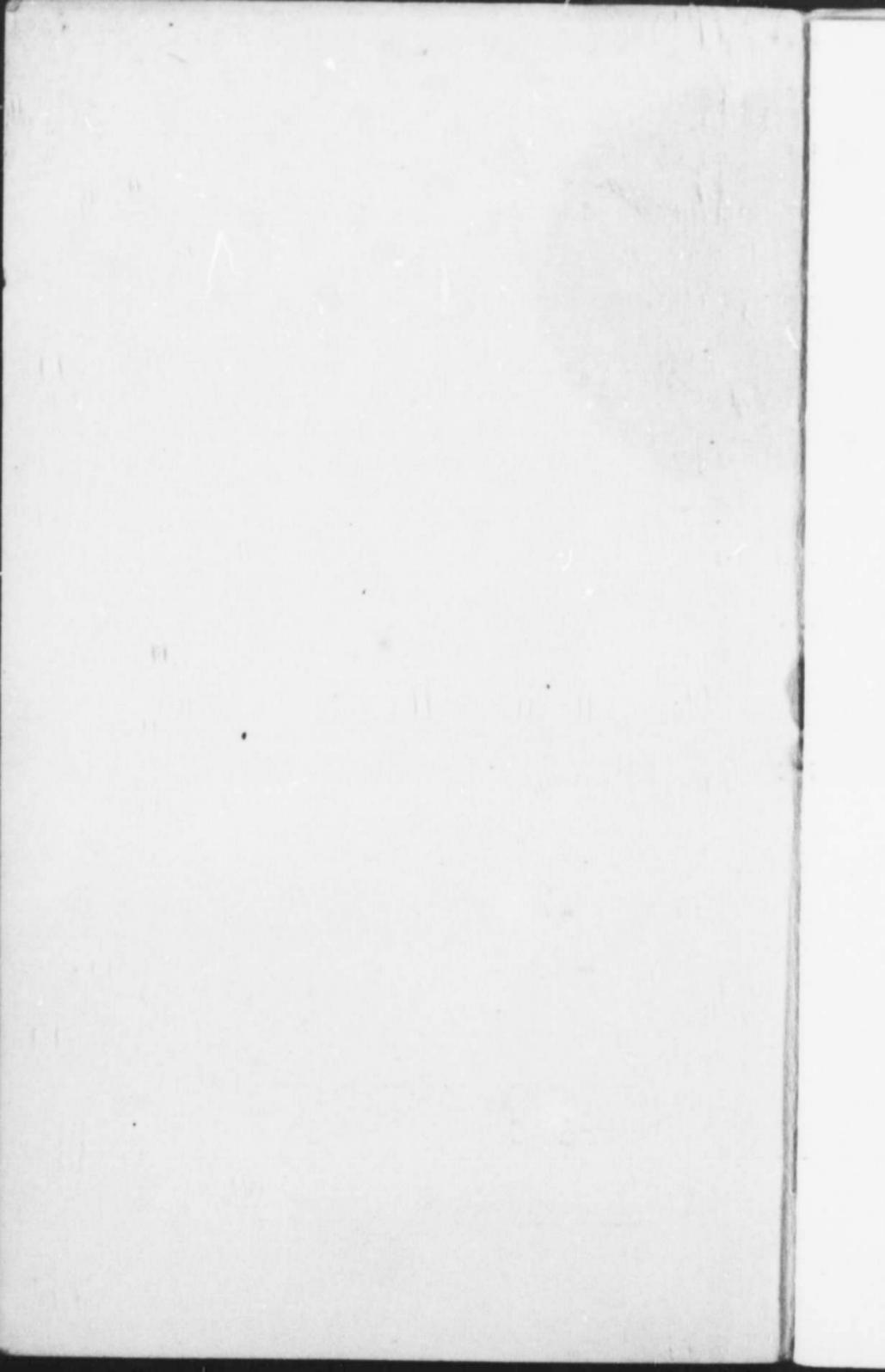
HISTORY
of the
BASTION



BY MARK BATE, ESQ. J. P.

ISSUED BY

POST No. 3, NATIVE SONS OF B. C.
NANAIMO, B. C.



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HE "BASTION," one of the an-
tique sights that visitors cannot
overlook, one of the very few land-



marks, and the most prominent
remaining, at Nanaimo, of the period
when the Hudson's Bay Company held
Manorial Rights over the whole of Van-
couver Island, was erected in 1853—con-
pleted in June of that year, flagpole
raised, and the "H. B. C." flag then un-
furled to the breeze. It was built by Leon
Labine and Jean Baptiste Fortier, who,
with assistants, had been employed upon
similar structures at Fort Victoria and
Fort Rupert. Labine and Fortier were
French-Canadians, both splendid axemen.
They got out the material for nearly all
the hewn log buildings at Colville Town,
as Nanaimo, soon after being settled by
the whites, was called.

At the date the Bastion was finished,
there were, as the make-up of Colville
Town, four dwelling houses 26x15 feet,
and three 30x20, habitable, and filling
pieces raised for three more 30x20. These,
with a little clearance of the forest, were
the first preparation for the permanent
abode of a new population of men and
women, who, upon arrival in this far-off
section of the wild west, were confronted
with difficulties and dangers hardly real-
ized by those who did not share them.
The purpose of the "Fort," as it was
designated by the Hudson's Bay Com-

pany, was, no doubt, to protect the whites from the dreaded violence of the Indians—to over-awe the natives, as we say, who, in those days were "Lords of all they surveyed,"—were inclined to be rebellious, and looked upon the white settlers as invaders of their prescriptive territorial rights. Previous to 1852 the whole of the Nanaimo country had only its aboriginal inhabitants, many of whom were impudent plunderers, yet stealthy foes, and as showing the hostile character they manifested, it may be stated that a short period after the date mentioned, they killed a white man at Cowichan while he was quietly pursuing his farm labor. For that treacherous act of murder, a Nanaimo Indian and a Cowichan Indian, who were guilty of the crime, were hung at Gallows Point, Protection Island, off Nanaimo Harbor. Mr. J. W. McKay was then the officer in charge of Nanaimo.

The original position of the Bastion was on the corner opposite, and to the westward of where it now stands, which is higher ground by many feet—in fact the highest point thereabout, commanding the entrance to Commercial Inlet where the first coal mine was opened. It had only a low stone foundation—not the high basement of rock which now supports it. It was removed to its present station, on the low side of the street, in 1891 for the reason that the owner of the lot, which in

part was covered by the Bastion, desired to use the ground, or said he did, but which, however, has not yet been utilized.

As soon as the question of removal arose, the old residents, without exception, evinced a warm desire for the preservation of their familiar sentinel block house, and through the efforts mainly of the late Chief Constable Stewart, backed by all whose support he sought, the building is



BOATING SCENE—DEPARTURE BAY

still intact. Framed of strong squared timber, most substantially put together, it will be seen, withstood the force of the elements for close upon 56 years—a notable instance of how well Labine and his men did their work.

Two 6-pound carronades were the armament of the "fort," and there were in

the arsenal cases of grapeshot and canister ready for any call to arms.

The principal use of the guns, say up to 1859, was the firing of salutes. Always on the occasion of an official visit of His Excellency the Governor, which occurred two or three times in the year, he was received with a salvo of 17 guns. Once in a while a few shots were fired across the harbor into the woods on Protection Island, so that the Indians might note the damaging effects—see the havoc made among the trees. But there were emergencies when the 6-pounders were employed, if not in actual warfare, for the benevolent purpose of preventing bloodshed. Captain Charles Edward Stuart, who succeeded Mr. J. W. McKay as the "Officer in charge of the Nanaimo Establishment," has an entry in his journal under date of August 7th, 1855, reading:

"9:30 a.m.—Observed four or five large canoes passing outside Newcastle Island, apparently hastening by paddling and sailing, to their homes. 10 a.m.—A Nanaimo canoe started off in pursuit, followed soon after by others, as the Indians were reported to be 'Hydas,' and seeing the Nanaimo's were hostile towards them, fired a cannon to warn them from our territory, as a collision between the parties would no doubt have materially interfered with the business and tranquility of the place. The reason assigned by the Nanaimos for

pursuing the supposed Hydas, was a report which had been circulated that several of the tribe had been killed while obtaining provisions near the Rapids. 1:30 p.m.—The Nanaimos returned, having succeeded in capturing one canoe, containing four men, two women, and two children, without firing a shot."

The following day the Nanaimos released the prisoners, finding they were not Hydas, but "Kites-Kews," and that none



FISHING--NANAIMO RIVER

of their own tribe were missing. They kept twenty blankets—perhaps as the cost of the expedition.

Again in the summer of 1858, when through the warnings and good offices of the Hudson's Bay Company, who gave the painted chiefs of both tribes to understand that there must not be any more war-whoops within range of the forts, the Na-

naimos and Hydas had become reconciled, the guns had to be "manned." Mr. George Baker, one of the pioneers who arrived by the Princess Royal in November, 1854, had a saucy little dog called "Lucy." The Hydas in large numbers were strolling around town and one of several who passed Baker's door was snapped by Lucy. He who was bitten picked up a rock, hurled it at the dog and killed her. Mr. Baker was at Nanaimo River at the time gathering hay for his cattle.

On his return, after being informed by Mrs. Baker of the dog tragedy, he went in quick time to the Hyda encampment with the intention of chastising the Indian offender, but he came away without carrying out his purpose. The Indians surrounded him in a menacing attitude and would not allow the guilty one to be molested. He reported the circumstances to Captain Stuart, who sent a force to make an arrest. For this move the whole camp was prepared—armed with guns, knives, iron bolts and bludgeons they showed fight, and would not permit the man who was sought to be taken. A threat was made to fire on them from the Bastion, the guns were manned, and a few charges of grapeshot were sent near the spot where the Indians were encamped, to show what they might expect if the man wanted was not surrendered. The shot

fore up things generally, and very soon after the Indian required was taken to Captain Stuart, who, as magistrate, ordered that he be flogged with the cat-o'-nine-tails, which was done, over one of the guns, by George Mills, the mess stew-



AUTO ROADS
NEAR
NANAIMO

ard. So ended what might have been a serious matter had the Indians done otherwise than submit.

For some 15 years the first floor of the Bastion was used as the colonial jail. It

had two cells, which were lighted and ventilated by an aperture cut through the timber, and which had in days gone by contained prisoners charged with the highest crime. Doors, locks, and bars were about as strong as they could be made. The place within and without was always clean, a very liberal supply of lime (which in the early days was made from shells), being kept on hand for white-washing, at which occupation, and at proper seasons, prisoners were well exercised. In the years that the Bastion did service as a place of confinement, there were three official jailors, Wm. Weston, Edwin Gough and Wm. Stewart. The first named had little to do, for in his time the punishment of native offenders was summary, and often when deserved, severe—"exemplary," as Captain Stuart would term a whipping across a gun. Weston was a strange sort of chap. He wore his trousers short in the leg—*inches* above his boots. He had a springy-swingy walk, and being very lean and somewhat lanky, his appearance was odd enough. The governor (late Sir James Douglas) paid one of his periodical visits in the summer of 1857, and received the customary salute of 17 guns. He had walked to the Bastion hill, and was standing chatting with officers of the H. B. Co., when Weston, with his pants as usual, very much shrunk up, came along, made his obeisance and stood

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agape. Giving him a faint smile, and keenly eyeing his legs, the Governor said:
“Why, Weston, how you have grown!”

The late Chief Stewart cared for the Bastion as for the apple of his eye. For nearly forty years he gave attention to it



A PLEASANT DRIVEWAY

—saw that the flag floated from its pole on all fitting occasions, and looked after any repairs needed. To him more than to anybody else the credit is due for preventing the old Fort from falling into decay.

It is owned and occupied at present by Nanaimo Post No. 3, Native Sons of British Columbia. The first floor, whereon the cells were built, has been transformed into a pleasant meeting place, in which, with a piano to enliven and brighten the proceedings, members of the Post may at regular gatherings, pass the happy hours away.

Among the objects of the Native Sons, as a society, are: Mutual benefit, mutual improvement, social intercourse, to perpetuate in the minds of all native sons the memory of the pioneers, to unite all worthy sons of British Columbia in one harmonious body, to improve the conditions of its members by encouragement in business and otherwise.

To these worthy sons of worthy sires the continued preservation of the old-time block house may be safely left. It seems most fitting it should be entrusted to their keeping. As long as it can be made to hang together they, from the closely cherished memories they will feel surrounding it, can be depended upon to see to its complete maintenance as the most ancient landmark of Nanaimo.

